

Capital Letters: On the Reproduction of

War in the ELA Classroom

By Brian Hartt

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Written under the direction of

Barbara Foley

And approved by

Barbara Foley

Janet Larson

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“War is the Health of the State.”

-Randolph Bourne

“Schools serve the same function as prisons and mental institutions –

To define, classify, control, and regulate people.”

-Michel Foucault

I. Mediations: An Introduction to Capitalism, War, and the Pedagogical Frame

“The conditions that determine the production of the book

Also determine the forms of its communication.”

-Pierre Macherey

I. Introduction

“That was the one in the jungle, right?” a student replied upon my questioning the class about background knowledge on the Vietnam War. In disbelief, I stared into a sea of blank faces. My students’ response seems evidence of Tim O’Brien’s indictment, “In the colleges and high schools I sometimes visit, the mention of My Lai brings on null stares, a sort of puzzlement, disbelief mixed with utter ignorance” (“Vietnam in Me”). As I pressured students to rack their brains for information, what I received was the regurgitation of United States myths: we had to stop the communists, there was a civil war, we could have won if it were not for the hippies, Ho Chi Minh was a Soviet stoolie, etc. Shocked, I went to the *In the Lake of the Woods* unit. Under “Suggested Activities,” I saw the phrase, “My Lai Massacre Background Activity” (Bernards BOE). That was it, the extent of the “teachable” knowledge I was to provide students. I searched around other districts’ curricula, countless “how to teach” texts, and critical pedagogy articles to no avail. I only found more of the same or worse: contextless summer reading or thematic units without background information.

After looking only at *In the Lake of the Woods*, I expanded my search for all United States War literature. It seemed to me that Vietnam, as an extremely controversial war, would be the only war not properly addressed; certainly, World War I and II would be taught effectively. I examined curricula across the country, with a rural, urban, and

suburban set of schools from each section of the country: Mid-Atlantic, New England, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, Pacific Northwest, Far West, and Central South. I discovered the most commonly taught United States war texts: *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut and *Night* by Elie Wiesel for World War II and *The Things They Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien for Vietnam. Yet, in high school curricula, historical approaches seemed few are far between. Indeed, most schools seem to focus on formalist elements or characteristics of aesthetic movements. War, in the United States English class, exists in representation only. There is something afoot in the way we teach war literature in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom.

The manner in which we teach United States war literature acts to reproduce the material and ideological conditions under which perpetual war is allowed to continue unfettered. As Louis Althusser suggests, “one Ideological State Apparatus certainly has the dominant role,” and in late capitalism, that is the school (251). Teaching war literature engages not only with “the reproduction of the relations of production” as Althusser asserts, but also with the forces of production (250). Schools provide the necessary control and training of the proletariat to perpetuate war. The training includes skilled laborers and developers – those able to develop new weapons of war and new, more efficient, forces of production. The interpretive framework set up by schools, which I shall call “the pedagogical frame,” reinforces the relations between literature, State Ideology, and history – students are interpellated as capitalist subjects. Interpellation, according to Althusser, is the process by which State Apparatuses or institutions control and create the subjectivity of individuals. Individuals become subjects by the hailing of State Apparatuses. The pedagogical frame conceals and often strengthens the mediations

from material reality. By “mediations,” I mean the successive abstractions between what “really” happened and how we interpret it. The historical frame of the author mediates the event; the historical frame in which it is read mediates the text; the historical frame is also mediated by the context in which a text is interpreted. This example is simplified, but the point remains clear – the pedagogical frame removes these mediations from view and presents the text as a single, immutable document. In doing so, the pedagogical frame reproduces the social relations and ideologies that encourage war.

This project will examine the methods in which the pedagogical frame acts to reproduce the relations of production through the teaching of United States war literature. I will analyze representative texts from World War II and the Vietnam War: *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Holocaust literature, and *The Things They Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods*. The rest of this introduction will set forth and examine three key theses: 1) war is a complex of related capitalistic tendencies that both expose and conceal internal contradictions; 2) there has been a complex relationship between perpetual war capitalism and the United States education system from 1900 to present day; 3) the pedagogical frame reproduces forces and relations of production through ideology.

II. War and Capitalism

Following Marx, Althusser claims that a mode of production is the unity between “the productive forces and the relations of production” (Althusser 20). Indeed, for a mode of production to exist, it must reproduce “the productive forces” of “the *means of production*” and “the existing relations of production” (48). The reproduction of these factors is “merely the condition for the continuing existence of *production*. This means

that *it is in production, and in production alone, not in reproduction*, that *exploitation* is carried out, the material condition” of the existence of capitalism (127). As such, “capitalists are always producing surpluses in the form of profit. They are then forced by competition to recapitalize and reinvest a part of that surplus in expansion. This requires that new profitable outlets be found” (Harvey 2010 26). Without profitable outlets, the flow of capital is interrupted or slowed down, and financial crises erupt. According to Bertell Ollman, “capitalism’s fate, in other words, is sealed by its own problems, problems that are internal manifestations of what it is and how it works... leading to periodic crises” (16). These crises, however, “serve to rationalize the irrationalities of capitalism. They typically lead to reconfigurations, new models of development, new spheres of investment and new forms of class power” (Harvey 2010 11). War both exposes the internal contradictions that lead to crises, while also providing counteracting factors. In this way, capitalism makes war ideologically neutral or necessary.

Marx describes several counteracting factors to crises. Of these factors, four are relevant to the current argument: more intense exploitation of labor, reproduction of conditions allowing for the exchange of labor below its value, relative surplus population, and foreign trade. These factors work to mitigate crises. In her book, *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein notes that during an economic crisis, the capitalist system can expand through “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events” (6). Klein argues that “disaster capitalism” is a predominantly modern, neoliberal function. It seems, however, that the expansion of capitalism during economic crises is not a “new” development – expansion is an intrinsic function of the capitalist mode of production.

Indeed, the capitalist cannot simply go out and raise exploitation while lowering wages – the counteracting factors must be wrapped in ideology.

For Althusser, ideology is “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (256)¹. State Ideology, for Althusser, takes four forms: Nationalism, Humanism, Liberalism, and Economism (139). War can be a useful ideological tool, rife with counteracting factors. As such, “world” wars are not merely predicated upon advanced capitalism, but *a direct function of it*. In fact, “as a stimulus to accelerate industrialization or to extend the capitalist market, arms expenditure and war played a considerable role in the acceleration or extension of the capitalist market” (Mandel 1999 275). This growth-stimulus circuit creates a growing contradiction between the transformation of surplus value into capital and the ability to realize it. Indeed, “the enormous increase in the gross national product, together with the intensification of competition between capitalist societies in the last few decades, has led to the state taking on a larger and more direct role in the realization of value” (Ollman 99). War, led by the State, is a function of the expansion of capitalism. At the same time, however, it can expose the contradictions inherent within capitalism. As Ollman suggests, “a lot of effort of bourgeois ideology goes into denying, hiding, or otherwise distorting contradictions” (17). War, as a function of capitalism, gets special ideological treatment.

Wars allow for an ideologically legitimated raid on the worldwide proletariat. Indeed, war is a convenient vehicle for enacting more exploitation for lower wages, increasing the surplus population, and increasing foreign trade. When citizens are called

¹ For further explications and definitions of “ideology,” see *Ideology: An Introduction* by Terry Eagleton.

to work for “nationalism” or for “liberty”, they are distanced from the material conditions of their own exploitation – the State Ideologies create a social imaginary allowing for both the increase of exploitation and the lowering of wages. Most soldiers come from poverty-stricken areas: “soldiers are recruited with the promise of escaping poverty and acquiring job skills. In this way, they become instruments of the economy and begin in a neo-liberal fashion to calculate their chances at success rather than ask whether the war is just or justified” (Butler XV). War also increases State spending. As Miroslav Nincic and Thomas Cusak suggest, United States “economic growth has, between 1948 and 1976, been positively associated with increases in defense spending” (106). Indeed, as a counteracting factor, “military expenditures are a useful way of acting on aggregate demand and hence of pursuing stabilization policies” (107). As such, war can also increase the surplus population, as demonstrated by the Baby Boomer generation. This burst in population helps to balance out value and population. War has the ability to end many lives, but also to create them. Though this is not always the case, it was for United States after World War II. When soldiers returned home, the war had helped pull the nation out of the Great Depression, allowing soldiers to start families and get jobs. The post-war period also saw women entering the workforce, creating a new market for labor – a market that was and still is exploited. So while countless people die during war, it is also true that after war conditions are ripe for family building and population growth.

War also increases foreign trade. This is not only true of the arms market, but for global imperialism – markets open because foreign powers take them by force. Marx notes that “whereas the expansion of foreign trade was the basis of capitalist production in its infancy, it becomes the specific product of the capitalist mode of production as this

progresses, through the inner necessity of this mode of production and its need for an ever extended market” (Marx 344). War opens foreign trade, supporting other capitalist States through imperial exploitation: “The privileged country receives more labour in exchange for less, even though this difference, the excess, is pocketed by a particular class” (345). All these mitigating factors exist alongside war, along with its nationalist ideologies. In the United States, these ideologies have historically been contingent on nationalism, liberalism, and conservatism. However, war as a counteracting factor for the tendency of the rate of profit to fall has a more popular name – the military-industrial complex.

Contrary to many leftist historical views – like those of Zinn, Mandel, Turse, and Hobsbawm – the United States military-industrial complex (MIC) has its historical basis after the Civil War Reconstruction, not World War II. World War I is especially important because it gave the MIC the potential to invade every aspect of life. It is essential, then, to understand the historical development of the MIC from the Civil War through World War I; without this context, the MIC and its place in United States culture cannot be fully understood. While World War II is the most obvious example of war pulling capitalism back from economic crisis, the westward imperial expansion after Civil War Reconstruction marked the first sustained growth of US military expenditure during peacetime. Indeed, as Ben Baack and Edward Ray note, until the early 1900s, “the history of the American military had been one of build-up during the war followed by a demobilization after the war ended” (370). Between 1880 and 1905, the share of federal budget spent on the military doubled (370). This occurred after the passage of the Naval Appropriation Bill of 1883, which “set the foundation for an institutional structure that...

encouraged the interaction of business, naval, and political groups” (371). Indeed, President Chester Arthur argued, “nothing was more vital to defense than a strong navy” (371). This same rhetoric of national defense and pride would become the norm for increases in military expenditure and global military involvement. In fact, during the late 1800s, US naval involvement in international affairs grew with international trade, suppressing rebellions in Central and South America and bombing Alexandria (372). As the Long Depression of 1873-1896 dragged on, new imperialism and new military spending increased, mitigating the decline in GNP. Military expenditure is linked to a growth in GNP: “a 1% annual increase in GNP per capita in the United States is associated with a \$2.5 billion increase in military spending” (Nincic and Cusack 106). This embryonic form of the MIC preceded Eisenhower’s farewell address by nearly 80 years, but set forth the structure upon which the MIC would grow. As such, military expenditure became intimately linked to the protection of imperial interests abroad, a trend that would continue into World War I.

World War I was clearly an imperialist war. Indeed, as Howard Zinn claims, “the advanced capitalist countries of Europe were fighting over boundaries, colonies, spheres of influence; they were competing for Alsace-Lorraine, the Balkans, Africa, the Middle East” (Zinn 2015 359). The Panic of 1907 took hold of the United States, lasting from 1907 to 1914, ending as Great War began. The war in Europe provided a counteracting factor for the crisis. Even before the US was officially involved in the war, the imperialist nature of the conflict was clear around the world. In 1915, approximately one year after the war began, W.E.B. Du Bois published an article in the *Atlantic* titled “The African Roots of War,” detailing the international, capitalistic state competition for capital. As Du

Bois writes, “with the waning of the possibility of the Big Fortune, gathered by starvation wage and boundless exploitation of one’s weaker and poorer fellows at home, arose more significantly the dream of exploitation abroad” (709). This exploitation abroad is, of course, the development of the age of imperialism – exploitation of raw materials, new workers, and international trade – that developed into state competition. Du Bois puts this eloquently: “The present world war is, then, the result of jealousies engendered by the recent rise of armed national associations of labor and capital whose aim is the exploitation of the wealth of the world” (711). Indeed, without much reductionism or bias, one can call World War I an imperialist war

In 1915, Woodrow Wilson “lifted the ban on private bank loans to the Allies,” allowing banks to “begin lending money in such great amounts as to make both great profit and tie United States finance closely to the interest of a British victory” (Zinn 2015 363). Wilson could then, in the 1916 election, run on the platform of restoring the US economy since 1914 while simultaneously keeping the US out of the war. Indeed, the “benefits of trade induced the United States to avoid conflict with its major trading partners during World War I. However, it also led the United States to issue threats and ultimately go to war to protect this source of national income” (Fordham 279). Wilson’s strong stance against German U-Boat blockades was, arguably, based mostly in economic reasons. Despite Washington Times headlines like, “America Faces Gravest Peril of War As Result Of Germany’s Blockade” (Welliver) or Washington Herald headlines such as, “Toll of Lusitania Victims Laid to German Murder Lust,” (Temple). German submarine activity only accounted for 236 American deaths (Fordham 278). Even though Americans generally wanted to avoid war, the anti-German propaganda made it easy to turn the tide

into a patriotic fervor by 1917. The United States' involvement was based upon the accumulation of capital.

When Woodrow Wilson lifted the ban on private bank loans to European Allies, and companies like JP Morgan, a major banking firm by 1900, “could now begin lending money in such great amounts as both make great profit and tie American finance closely to the interest of a British victory” (Zinn 2015 363). If that were not enough, the sinking of the Lusitania in early 1915 tied the United States to the war ideologically. Though the ship was actually carrying “1,248 cases of 3-inch shells, 4,927 boxes of cartridges (1,000 rounds in each box) and 2,000 more cases of small-arms ammunition,” the British and US governments falsified the ship's manifests to suggest that the cross-Atlantic ship was only carrying innocent passengers (362). As US involvement began by 1917, World War I aided in creating a time of relative prosperity between 1914 and 1918. However, this prosperity was short lived, as the Post-World War I recession began in 1919 and lasted until 1921. The demobilization of the military and the relative loss of military expenditure contributed to this recession – a key distinction discovered by politicians and capitalists after World War II.

Though the recovery from this recession as dubbed the “Roaring 20s,” wealth “was concentrated at the top. While from 1922 to 1929 real wages in manufacturing went up per capita 1.4 percent a year, the holders of common stocks gained 16.4 percent a year... One-tenth of 1 percent of families at the top received as much income as 42 percent of families at the bottom” (Zinn 2015 382). This iteration of disparity culminated in the stock market crash of 1929 and the beginning of the Great Depression – a key economic crisis in United States history. Though the New Deal in 1933 may have

ameliorated some effects of the Great Depression, it also did little deal with the actual issue of the rate of falling profit: “The Roosevelt reforms went far beyond previous legislation. They had to meet two pressing needs: to reorganize capitalism in such a way to overcome the crisis and stabilize the system; also, to head off the alarming growth of spontaneous rebellion in the early years of the Roosevelt administration” (392). The threat to State power and State Ideology by the economic crisis – and the resulting rise in United States Communism and strikes – led directly into World War II.

Despite World War II being considered a “people’s war” against fascism by the public and historians, the United States’ entrance into the war was an economic decision, wrapped in nationalist ideology. In fact, the US had known about Hitler’s attempted genocide, but “had done little about Hitler’s policies of persecution” (Zinn 2015 409). While Americans were suffering under the Great Depression, Roosevelt adopted a neutral policy, focusing instead on maintaining foreign trade with South America and China. The United States kept an Open Door Policy in China and a Closed Door Policy in Latin America. These trade policies did little to pull the country out of the Great Depression, and by 1941, Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Act, pouring US military spending into the Allied Powers, linking their success in war to US economic recovery, just as Wilson did in World War I. However, it was not until the attempted Japanese invasion of China that the United States’ imperial interests were truly threatened. Immediately following this attempt, The United State imposed strict economic sanctions on Japan: an embargo on iron and oil (410). Though the attack on Pearl Harbor was presented as a “sudden, shocking, and immoral act,” it was the US whose embargos pushed Japan to attack (410).

As the war destabilized Europe, United States' capitalism spread both domestically and internationally. Rationing, austerity measures, and exploitation reigned under the ideological complex of war. Over "25 million workers gave up their pay envelope regularly for war bonds" (Zinn 2015 407). Similarly, capitalists and US diplomats worked to take advantage of the destabilized Europe: "United States business would penetrate areas that up to this time had been dominated by England" (413). This penetration of former British-controlled zones of influence was particularly true of the involvement in the Middle East, an economic move that would ensure a permanent war economy for the US in the future. Similarly, as the war in the Pacific ended, the USSR threatened US imperial interests in the East – especially Japan and China. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped "Fat Boy" on Hiroshima, Japan. Sixteen hours later, President Truman called for Japan's unconditional surrender, which would solidify US power in the Pacific theatre. When Japan did not consent, Truman ordered the dropping of "Little Man" on Nagasaki. Six days later, Truman got his wish – Japan surrendered, unconditionally. On his decision to use nuclear force, President Truman stated:

Having found the bomb we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans. (Truman Library)

Indeed, the US high command "was worried lest an invasion of the Japanese homeland result in heavy losses" (Mandel 2011 147). Dropping the bombs seemed a necessity to win the war and protect American lives. However, Japan had already desired surrender after American Air Raids decimated Tokyo. General MacArthur believed that continued air raids would win the war decisively, without invasion forces. In reality, the bombs

“played no role, as was trumpeted at the time, in reducing US casualties” (148). Indeed, the bomb had “no other purpose than a potential show of strength” meant to intimidate the USSR and allow for US/Western imperialism in the Pacific (148).

At the close of World War II, the US entered into what Walter J. Oakes called a “permanent war economy”. Indeed, Charles E. Wilson, president of General Electric, suggested a continued alliance between business and military (Zinn 2015 425). After World War II pulled the US out of depression, it became clear that “the traditional methods (consisting essentially of trying to restore the *status quo ante bellum* as rapidly as possible)” would not be followed (Oakes 12). In 1943, Senate Bill 1582 passed. It claimed to assure a ready supply of military materials, in case of “emergency”. Indeed, there seemed no “more powerful stimulus than the increasingly repeated question: ‘If we can employ everyone in wartime, why can’t we do it in peacetime?’” (12). And so, the US set forth to achieve a “Permanent War Economy through annual war expenditures of from \$10-20 billion” (12). From 1949-1976, the US adopted an economic policy of military Keynesianism. Alex Mintz and Alexander Hicks show a clear connection between spending on military research and development and increased economic production (416). This increase in production sends surplus value to the top, but for politicians and CEOs, “military spending, which is clearly under their control, appears to promote economic conditions favorable to the political fortunes” (Ninic and Cusack 106). Similarly, military spending for R & D is highly expandable into the private sphere and military goods have short life spans before becoming obsolete (112).

Vietnam, a wildly unpopular war, was sustained for economic reasons. It protected US imperial interests while similarly maintaining a permanent war economy.

Capitalist interests in rubber, cotton, rice, and other products drew both France and the US into Vietnam. The war also provided pretext for the US to extract debt from Japan and establish a military and economic presence in Asia. As disquiet about the war grew, “Nixon’s policy was ‘Vietnamization’ – the Saigon government, with Vietnamese ground troops, using US money and air power, would carry on the war” (Zinn 2015 484). This hands-off method would become the go-to mode of capitalist reproduction in the future. The numerous proxy wars during the Cold War provided ideologically safe wars that maintained the US economy. Slowly, capitalists began to realize direct US involvement was actually not needed in a global economy; rather, the support of warring factions through military spending could produce similar effects. When the Cold War ended in 1991, the Middle East had been destabilized enough to ensure a constant state of war and warring factions to for the capitalist to support. Today’s “humanized” drone warfare further alienates citizens from the realities of war. The expansion of R & D in private military contractors is testament to the privatization of war.

Since the 1980s, increasing privatization and neoliberal agendas have expanded US imperial interests across the world. A constant state of war, whether it be “on” a country or “against” terror is essential to the production and reproduction of capital, even today. David Harvey notes that “what the US evidently sought to impose by main force on Iraq was a state apparatus whose fundamental mission was to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation” (Harvey 2007 7). From the Civil War to the War on Terror, war has been a useful complex of State Ideology and counteracting tendencies, allowing the capitalist mode of production to reproduce the means and relations of production.

War is, as Randolph Bourne suggests, the health of the state. As I have suggested, war is a complex composed of capitalism-stabilizing tendencies, wrapped in State Ideology. The question becomes precisely *how* something as heinous as war can become palatable, even supported, by the American public. The answer lies in the ideology that surrounds the counteracting tendencies; it lies in Ideological State Apparatuses. Since as early as 1917, education and the ideologies that perpetuate war have been in a complex relationship. After examining the material conditions and aims of war, it is imperative to analyze the relationship between pedagogy, capital, and war. Indeed, without historicizing this relationship, we cannot obtain a firm grasp upon the workings of the scholastic ISA, or the pedagogical frame, today.

III. War, Capitalism, and Pedagogy

We can say with certainty that humanism is not an *intrinsically* linked to capital. It has, I would argue, become a part of capitalist State ideology to advance economic interests, but the taking of life, especially for profit, is universally considered “wrong”. So, how can the State justify the wanton murder of human beings around the world for profit? As an ISA, the school must yield but one result – “the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation” (Althusser 250). Bowles and Gintis picked up Althusser’s work, called the school “an institution which serves to perpetuate the social relationships of economic life” – the relations of production (11). Students must be interpellated by the school; they must become capitalist subjects. Indeed, the “reproduction of social relations of production depends on the reproduction of consciousness” (127). Student-subjects must be reproduced again and again, generation by generation, in order for the mode of production to remain.

The mode of production is reproduced only when “the social relations of production are reproduced in part through the harmony between the needs which the social system generates and the means at its disposal for satisfying these needs” (Bowles and Gintis 127). In the case of advanced capitalist America, war produces both perceived needs and a means to meet them as a complex of counteracting tendencies and ideological tools. As capitalism progresses, the greater the risk of crisis; the greater the risk of crisis, the greater the need for counteracting tendencies; the great the need for counteracting tendencies, the greater the need for material conditions to be ideologized. Historically, the relationship between war and education has grown over the course of American history, since the Smith-Hughes Act 1917.

Just one year before the US entered World War I, Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act, or “The Act to Promote Vocational Education.” This act was meant to distribute funds to states and schools that created approved curricula for vocational education – specifically agriculture and industry (*An Act to Promote*). While obviously preparing students into a “smooth integration” into the working class, it also assured the maintenance of power in the hands of the capitalists (Bowles and Gintis 11). The act stipulates that three “citizens” will be part of the Federal Board for Vocational Education and “one of said three citizens shall be a representative of the manufacturing and commercial interests, one a representative of the agricultural interests, and one a representative of labor” (*An Act to Promote*). The citizens on the board in 1919 were James Munroe, Calvin MacIntosh, and Arthur Holder, respectively: an MIT professor, a former agent of the Department of Agriculture, and a low level member of the American Federation of Labor. Despite having a member of the AFL on board, Holder was known

for being able to “secure the hearty cooperation of organized labor” (*Vocational Summary* 194). The act came at a particularly conspicuous time – one year before the US entry to World War I. As the *Act to Promote Vocational Education* clearly states:

During the war the emphasis in vocational schools was placed upon assisting in every way possible the national program for victory. In trade and industrial schools, as above stated, emphasis was put upon - short intensive courses of training for Army occupations; in agricultural education emphasis was put upon securing an increased production; in home economics education emphasis was placed upon the conservation of foods, household economy, and satisfactory substitutions for foods, as well as savings in expenditures for clothing.

War economy became both the primary motivator and beneficiary of the Smith-Hughes Act. Despite Susan Zeiger’s claim that “support for military training from inside the schools was concentrated in the field of physical education,” the Smith Hughes Act supported the war in agriculture, economics, and training (150). This law, using the same rhetoric of international competitiveness found in every educational act afterward, set the precedent for the State’s influence on school curricula – holding funds hostage until schools complied with ideological demands deemed “adequate” by boards of capitalists and “experts”.

Between 1917 and 1958, few acts were passed on education reform. More time and effort were spent producing “educational and propaganda materials intended to mobilize state and local agencies, as well as private individuals, to spend their own funds to implement” civil defense programs (Brown 70). While few of these materials were curricular in nature, they set the stage for the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958. The launch of Sputnik in 1957 gave lawmakers the ideological symbol they needed to push forth an ideological agenda necessary to a permanent war economy. The act provided funds for math and science programs. Indeed, “by financing specific

activities rather than unrestricted expenditures, the 1958 law was a categorical program like the Smith-Hughes act” (Lee 39). However, by funding specific activities, the scholastic ISA was forced to interpellate students under specific ideological guidelines. The NDEA was designed to distribute funds for enhanced math and science programs, in order to create a more “secure” nation. The act aimed to “create an adequate national resource of well trained and intellectually enlightened young men and women” in the face of the Cold War (Flemming 134).

Supporters of the NDEA exploited Sputnik and the Cold War “to simultaneously blame and energize the education system in the name of national defense” (Lee 40). Detractors were rare, as the act was met with “enthusiastic reception” (Flemming 137). The act would “shape the allowable scope of federal involvement in education” for years to come (Lee 40). The NDEA was the first educational act to directly influence the curricula of public schools, focusing on skills exploitable during wartime. Yet, it was “not a new idea to propose educational responses to international rivalries. The Smith-Hughes Acts did this in the context of World War I” (42). Lyndon Johnson would use the same ideological reasoning seven years later.

In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. While not directly related to war, it is the direct ancestor of No Child Left Behind, Goals 2000, the Improving America’s Schools act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. Indeed, the ESEA may not have been passed directly because of war like the NDEA, but it served a distinctly ideological purpose. The ESEA passed only a few years about the 1960 recession began. This recession, arguably, did not end until the later years of Richard Nixon in the 1970s and 80s. The act distributed funds to “low income” schools, based on

the schools' plans for improvement. These plans had to be approved by the federal government in order for funds to be distributed. However, under the act "poverty was operationalized as an extremely broad category, thereby distributing Title I funds to every state and congressional district, virtually every county, and the vast majority of the nation's school districts" (Lee 64). Even wealthy districts ended up receiving a sizeable chunk of funding. The ideology dispersed by the scholastic ISA became tied to federal funds, standardizing the means and ends of schools. Jimmy Carter's creation of the Department of Education in 1979 saw to the distribution and allocation of the ESEA's funds. The federal government could now determine *what* schools taught and *how* they taught it. What is best for the State, as the previous section argued, is often war.

Since the passage of the ESEA, most educational acts have been revisions or reauthorizations of the original act. Despite Reagan's attempts to privatize and defund public schools, *A Nation at Risk*, or *ANAR*, a report he commissioned, determined that the federal government might be able to remedy "the deficiencies identified in the report" (Lee 129). These "deficiencies" were essential in "reproducing the conditions that underlie" the position of the dominant class (Ollman 97). The report itself laid the groundwork for Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, by invoking the rhetoric of national competitiveness in the economy and the military. The report goes as far as to say that without significant remediation, schools could not provide "the sophisticated training essential in much of the modern military" (*ANAR*). The report also used distinctly militaristic vocabulary to signal the supposed mediocrity of US schools: "we have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, *unilateral* educational *disarmament*" (*ANAR* – emphasis added). The *ANAR* report symbolized the emerging

trope of failing schools, so often cited by neoliberal entities. Indeed, the report would open up the public sphere to a raid by private education companies, schools, and think tanks in the 1990s and 2000s. As Janice Peck reminds us, *ANAR* started the “trope of broken schools” and the “attack on public education” (588). *ANAR* was a signal in the shift towards Daniel Bell’s “post-industrial” society. The report “invoked national panics about declining standards of education in the United States that were evidenced by alleged declines in standardized test scores and concerns that other countries were threatening the economic and military dominance of the United States” (Brass 119). We have now a cycle of privatization: public schools are highly regulated through regulations designed by private interest, failure to meet these regulations results in defunding – on the other side, we have increasing funding for private schools, which are largely unregulated by the State, but created by private, neoliberal interests. As poor schools become unable to meet regulations and receive less funding, students are given the “choice” to move to charter or private schools. These schools attract the “best” students, further creating disparity between schools and further deepening the hole of public schools. Thus began the great defunding of US education, while simultaneously creating a wildly regulated environment.

A key contradiction in neoliberal economics is the defunding of social programs under the “tropes of freedom, choice and equality,” while concurrently limiting the lived existence of these same tropes (Peck 587). “Choice” and “equality” are present only in appearance, given the highly restricted set of options in both public and private schools. Goals 2000 and NCLB are symbols of this contradiction – the “standards-based reform movement”. By 2001, economic and military competition had become the ideological

lynchpin in education reform policies. NCLB reauthorized the ESEA with several key revisions: mandatory curricular state standards, high-stakes testing, teacher accountability, and funding for private education (Lee161). The adoption of mandatory, skills-based standards and standardized teacher accountability systems have turned English teachers into:

‘managers’ of learning and behavior who structure environments, demonstrations and linear sequences of instruction to transmit ‘content’ and reinforce the overt behaviours and terminal performances that constitute the knowledge and skills that external agencies have named learning, achievement and excellence. (Brass 122)

However, these reforms go far beyond a return to the “banking” model of education that Paolo Freire famously critiqued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These standards and systems are meant to *interpellate* a specific kind of neoliberal subject – one that is seemingly apolitical, but is, in fact, rooted directly in the neoliberal ideologies, like liberalism and nationalism, that perpetuate the advance of the capitalist system through war. Indeed, by:

[t]argeting public schooling as a site in which to accumulate profit, neoliberal reformers also rely on standardized forms of education to secure the reproduction of the social order. Standards-based reforms seek to interpellate students as social beings who identify with neoliberal ideology, producing subjectivities of youth in schools through the degrading rituals and performances of standardized curricula and high-stakes standardized tests. (Slater and Griggs 438)

Through NCLB, the most well-known “standardized curricula” and “high-stakes standardized tests” were passed – the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC Test. Developed by the National Governor’s Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, the CCSS these standards are supposedly “skills-based”.

The *Benchmarking for Success* report, released by the NGA and the CCSSO claims as much: “Technological, economic, and political trends have increased demand for higher *skills* while heightening competition for quality jobs” (9 – emphasis added). The “skills” that the CCSS highlight are quite obviously skills needed to perpetuate neoliberalism. Even more telling is the money-trail following the standards. Pearson Publishing contributed huge funds to the development of the standards, and now maintains a near monopolistic hold on any materials using the standards. As Slater and Griggs claim, the CCSS “interpellate students as social beings who identify with neoliberal ideology,” but the skills are wrapped in neoliberal ideology (438). Their interpellative methods are far more insidious than Freire’s banking model. The skills *are* ideology – they are an imaginary relationship between students and reality. The skills produce the illusion of the shared construction of knowledge. Contemporary neoliberal ideology has adopted the very practices designed to undo it.

IV. The Pedagogical Frame

This pedagogical context is where we find ourselves today. The school has, as Althusser predicted, become the dominant ISA in a neoliberal capitalist society. It is key to the neoliberal project that war be perpetuated by this ISA. Indeed, the radical capabilities of the ELA classroom, of literature, have been curtailed by the expansion of capitalism into the public sector. Literature can be “disconcerting, it can even be subversive” (Ohmann 63). Yet, as Richard Ohmann rightly suggests in *English in America*, as English teachers, “our function is extremely valuable: namely, to ensure the harmlessness of all culture; to make it serve and preserve the status quo” (63). This is *not* to say that individual teachers in individual classrooms do not have the capability of

aiding in the creating of critical class consciousness; however, this study is not one of individual teachers, but of the system in which they find themselves. As such, we must examine precisely *how* the teaching of war literature interpellates students as neoliberal subjects.

A key component of the interpellative methods of the scholastic ISA is what I shall call the *pedagogical frame*. The pedagogical frame is composed of the dominant interpretive mechanics within a given socio-historical moment in schools. While this project focuses on the function of the pedagogical frame in the ELA classroom, the frame is present in *every* subject, influencing the interpretation of texts. I use the term “text” in Derrida’s sense of the term, meaning that there is no outside-text, nothing that is not an interpretable construct. History, culture, science, literature, art, and reality are all texts at the mercy of the pedagogical frame. Indeed, education is increasingly atomized, as Ollman suggests (10). However, the pedagogical frame exists in every subject. Math and Science frame aspects of R & D as important; History and Social Studies frame top-down history as essential. A text always has a present and a past – the historical moment from which it arose. The hermeneutical “problem of the present is a historical problem” (Lukacs 157). Every text contains multiple levels of mediation for historical materiality. We may consider the historical conditions the text depicts, the historical conditions under which the text was composed, the historically effected consciousness of the reader, and the social framework through which the reader reads. Contemporary neoliberal, bourgeois thought must necessarily be “unhistorical and antihistorical” in character in order to prevent critical class consciousness and perpetuate neoliberal capitalism (157).

The pedagogical frame is the primary mode of interpretation – and interpellation – perpetuated in schools. A frame, as Erving Goffman suggests, is a method of carving up and making meaning from material reality. Frames are “schemata of interpretation” (21). Primary frameworks of a particular social group “constitute a central element of its culture” (27). This can be taken in two ways: 1) the school as the central ISA and structuring element of American life, and 2) the ideology that is central to American capitalism. This ideology’s primary function is to reproduce the forces and relations of production essential to reproducing capitalism as a whole. This may mean neutralizing radical literature, passing on State values like liberalism, developing “critical thinking” to prepare workers for the service sector, justifying inhuman actions made on behalf of capitalism, or reproducing aesthetic values that perpetuate consumerism or State ideology. The reproduction of aesthetic value is the reproduction of the conditions under which bourgeois hermeneutics and values remain dominant. The education system, according to Pierre Bourdieu, “fulfils a culturally legitimizing function by reproducing, via the delimitation of what deserves to be conserved, transmitted and acquired” (291). The pedagogical frame, via the selection of works available to teachers, reproduces these values. The choice of texts taught is essential to the efficacy of the pedagogical frame in reproducing the conditions under which war can continue.

The pedagogical frame operates by way of fabrications, “the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more other will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on... a falsification of some part of the world” (83). In the pedagogical frame, these fabrications are largely produced through abstraction. Abstraction is necessary to properly examine a text within its various

levels of mediation, “how we abstract literature, where we draw the boundaries, determines what works or parts of each work will be studied [and] with what methods” (Ollman 25). However, within the dominant pedagogical frame, these abstractions are actually “particularly ill-fitting mental constructs” (26). By improperly using the process of abstraction, “the basic unit of ideology”, a text can be made into an ideological tool of capitalism, a fabrication (26). Capitalist ideology is based on the purposeful misapplication of abstractions of generality and vantage point (70). As such, the pedagogical frame fabricates a perception of reality that is, by its very nature, fictitious or partial in its historical context. This fabrication is based upon the concealment of the various mediations involved in literature and teaching literature.

Since a student-subject is cut off from his or her own history, it is necessary the scholastic ISA present a new one – it must maintain the imaginary relation between the individual and his or her reality. Reality is, in this way, reified: “man in capitalist society confronts reality ‘made’ by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself” (Lukacs 135). This reification is “the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society” (197). As such, the goal of the pedagogical frame in the ELA classroom is to present meaning *as if* the student constructs it. Under this aegis, the pedagogical frame deploys two main methods of ideological reproduction: dehistoricization and rehistoricization.

Dehistoricization is the process of removing a text from its historical context – of making it *ahistorical*. Curricula today demand that literature, especially war literature, be apolitical. The new CCSS focus on “close reading” completes this very move. None of the CCSS relate to history in any way, focusing instead on New Critical methods of

interpretation. Indeed, to insist, “history be left to the history teachers” is to perpetuate dehistoricization. Dehistoricizing literature is typically an act of the misapplication of abstractions of generality. The pedagogical frame demands students focus on *only* the text or its aesthetic characteristics, thereby abstracting the text out of its historical context – it is *too* specific. Dehistoricization can also be accomplished by over-generalizing, looking for themes and morals about the human condition. However, a text can also be dehistoricized simply by ignoring all historical or transhistorical issues. This aspect of the pedagogical frame is typically employed by poor school districts. Students simply identify characteristics without question. It prepares them for low-level work. Without history, “war” becomes “war” in the abstract sense and in doing so, war is simply “bad” because people die. This turns texts into blank slates upon which neoliberal ideologies of nationalism, perverse humanism, technowar, and liberalism.

Rehistoricization is the presentation of an exaggerated or false historical context. While not necessarily an outright *lie* about history, rehistoricization is the cherry picking, overstatement, or understatement of historical reality. Rehistoricization is often a misapplication of abstractions of vantage point. Indeed, a vantage point “sets up a perspective that colors everything which falls into it, establishing order, hierarchy, and priorities, distributing values, meanings, and degrees of relevance” (68). More often than not, the vantage point taken in teaching historical context is that of the dominant class – a focus on cultural events as disconnected from their material causes. Rehistoricization can also be accomplished by a focus on *only* the historical context of the reader. While important, this context can only be understood through other contexts, other levels of mediation. Most districts employ rehistoricization to some extent, because it gives the

appearance of “cross-curricular” studies, liberalism, humanism, and nationalism.

Rehistoricization can deflect awareness of capitalist tendencies in war by focusing on or over-determining only one aspect of a war.

The process of dehistoricization-into-rehistoricization is what I will call the co-historical circuit. The co-historical circuit begins with dehistoricization – the text is removed from its historical context through a focus on the text. The historical context is then *replaced* with a new one – one that is abstracted by vantage point. The text then appears to be “complete” and can be examined again in detail. Here I offer a relevant example; keep in mind the example is, unfortunately, as simplistic as it is real: Modernist literature is taught through the characteristics of modernism – it is dehistoricized. Then, the “historical” context is taught – Modernism was created by a sense of meaninglessness and chaos after World War I. The text can then be reread for this meaninglessness in relation to the human condition and how characters interact. The text moves from abstractions of specificity, to vantage point, to generality. This, of course, is merely a vague example. These abstractions can change order or intensity, but the co-historical circuit of dehistoricization to rehistoricization – and sometimes back again – remains the same. This aspect of the pedagogical frame is most commonly found in upper-class schools. It requires “critical” thinking and creativity, crucial for the preparation of workers in the service sector. It also most readily reproduces the illusion of “radical” thought.

The pedagogical frame operates in all subjects, but this project focuses on the ELA classroom. The pedagogical frame operates by misusing abstraction to create

fabrications crucial to the reproduction of capitalist ideology. As such, the pedagogical frame and the school reproduce the forces, relations, and *mode* of production.

V. Scope and Sequence

In the following chapters, I will examine the impact of the pedagogical frame on the teaching of war literature. War literature seems particularly relevant given our current political climate, and the potential of war to both expand and hinder capitalism. Indeed, capitalism as a world system and capitalism as it takes shape in a given imperialist nation are different, but related. Through war, capitalism in one nation can be expanded, in another hindered, depending on the context. Within the overall world system, the maintenance of the relations of production is essential to the unfettering of capitalism. These relations are reproduced through ISAs. In the case of this project, I will be focusing on the ways in which the educational ISA deploys the pedagogical frame within capitalist America. Any text can be examined through its interaction with the pedagogical frame, but war literature is almost universally taught, and taught in the same ways. Each chapter will follow a similar framework. I will examine the historical conditions from which each text emerges and how the contradictions at play in those conditions are similarly at play in the text. I will then analyze how the pedagogical frame affects the student-subject in his or her own historical context. This will entail a detailed examination of curricular materials as well. This project examines *generalities* in the educational system, not hard and fast laws. It is worth noting again that I am examining the education system, *not* individual agents within the system. Teachers can, as I will discuss in the final chapter, struggle against this system from within.

Chapter Two will examine the representation of World War II in the ELA classroom. Key to the neoliberal project is the rehistoricization of World War II. While this chapter will primarily examine *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Holocaust Literature, it will open with an analysis of text selection. Indeed, World War II is almost entirely represented by Holocaust literature, *rehistoricizing* the historical context of the war. In doing this, schools shift the primacy of the economy of World War II to the side in order to advance nationalistic ideologies of “America-as-Savior”. This move also allows for the adoption of humanitarian tendencies into the neoliberal project. As for *Slaughterhouse-Five*, curricula dehistoricize it by ignoring the economic reason for the firebombing of Dresden. Indeed, Winston Churchill suggested Dresden be bombed in order to cut off the economic legs of the German army and to decrease morale (Zinn 2011 156). Schools shift focus to the science fiction and postmodern aspects of the plot: time travel, metafiction, and alien involvement. Secondly, the pedagogical frame adopts the anti-war sentiment of the novel, instead considering war a necessity, a just war, the causalities of which were essential to humanity. The famous refrain, “so it goes” becomes one of resigned solipsism.

The Things they Carried and *In the Lake of the Woods* represent the Vietnam War. Schools have almost unanimously selected Tim O’Brien as the voice of the Vietnam War. This, of course, reproduces certain aesthetic values of postmodernism. This is particularly true of the dehistoricization of *The Things They Carried*. These postmodern characteristics and values, however, are linked to resignation: the end of truth, solipsism, and irony-as-weapon. Indeed, these values supplant any critical consciousness about Vietnam *could* have inspired – the book becomes clean, safe, and helpful to the

reproduction of war. The pedagogical frame treats *In the Lake of the Woods* similarly. In districts nationwide, the book is evenly divided between dehistoricization and rehistoricization. When dehistoricized, the book is treated the same way *The Things They Carried* is. When rehistoricized, curricula focus on the My Lai Massacre as an isolated incident. Yet, as Nick Turse has effectively argued in *Kill Anything that Moves*, My Lai was not only *not* an isolated incident, but also indicative of an American campaign of massacre and war crimes. In doing so, war becomes either sterilized or humanized by the prospect of contemporary technowar.

The final chapter will put forth several concrete approaches that teachers can take to foster critical class consciousness in their students, based on personal experiences. I provide a list of texts for students and teachers, alongside a brief explanation of their value. I also have several suggested activities that teachers can use to develop awareness amongst their students regarding literature, war, and capital. Finally, I will argue for the urgency of this project in light of current developments in war and pedagogy.

II. Crusades: Teaching Representations of the “Good War” in Holocaust Literature and *Slaughterhouse-Five*

“For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.
But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear
the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants,
agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

-Romans 13:4

I. Introduction

The *Mahabharata* first offered the concept of “just” war, long before Augustine and Aquinas. In the *Mahabharata*, five brothers discuss whether the suffering involved in war can be justified before the Kuruksetra War. In their discussion, they establish various criteria for what may be called a “just war,” including just conduct and just cause. Despite the passage of nearly 2500 years, the basic idea still stands, however; the causes, means, and ends must be “just.” The term is largely subjective. Generally, what is “just” is that which produces the least amount of suffering. Therefore, a “just” war is one that is started in order to prevent greater suffering and conducted in the most humane way possible. According to the great American myth, World War II was a “just” war – the good war. In his essay, “Just and Unjust War,” Howard Zinn recounts his own ideological turnaround: “I had learned to hate war. But this war was different. It was not for profit or empire. It was a people’s war, a war against the unspeakable brutality of fascism” (Zinn 2011 134). Indeed, “by certain evidence, it was the most popular war the United States had ever fought. Never had a greater proportion of the country participated in war: 18 million served in the armed forces, 10 million overseas; 25 million workers

gave of their pay envelope regularly for war bonds” (Zinn 2015 407). After the openly imperialist design of World War I, the brutality of trench warfare, and the US’ excuse to get involved, World War II seemed black and white. This was a war against Hitler, Mussolini, Japan, and the evils of fascism. Even the American Communist Party called it a “‘people’s war’ against fascism” (407).

Despite all the seemingly obvious justifications for World War II, it did little beyond installing permanent late capitalist ideologies, forces, and relations. As Ernest Mandel claims:

the Second World War indeed solved nothing, i.e. removed none of the basic causes of the intensifying crisis of survival of human civilization and humankind itself. Hitler has disappeared, but the tide of destructiveness and barbarism kept rising... for the underlying cause of destructiveness remains. It is the expansionist dynamic of competition, capital accumulation and imperialism increasingly turned against itself (Mandel 2011 171).

World War II enabled the continued expansion of capitalism and its evolution into its later stages. A key characteristic of late capitalism, according to Mandel, is the “rise of Department III or of the permanent arms production” – the permanent war economy. Walter J. Oakes, author of “Toward a Permanent War Economy?” in *Politics*, warned of and Charles Wilson of GM pined for (Mandel 1999 285). Indeed, “since the end of the 30’s the production of weapons has played a significant role in the imperialist economy” (274). This also resulted in a greater concentration of wealth. Of the over \$1 billion the US government spent on the war, \$400 million went to only ten companies (Zinn 2015 417). With an evolution in the mode of production – increased Fordism, Taylorism, and an increasingly globalized economy – came a shift in ideology. The “frames of war,” to use Judith Butler’s term, permanently shifted – they were naturalized.

This naturalization of war frames evolved over the course of the Cold War; certain ideologies evolved to justify US imperialism and demonize radicals at home, allowing the expansion of the capitalist global market worldwide. The overall function of these ideologies was to make communism “inhuman,” through the conflation of fascism with communism. Communism posed a threat to the expansion of capitalism. After World War II, “the belligerent countries, with the exception of the U.S.A., were a field of ruins inhabited by what seemed to Americans hungry, desperate, and probably radicalized peoples, only too ready to listen to the appeal of social revolution” (Hobsbawm 230). On top of that, there was an “upsurge all over the world of colonial peoples demanding independence” (Zinn 2015 429). The rise in anti-capitalist sentiment created “economic policies incompatible with the international system of free enterprise, free trade and investment,” in the US and the slowly recovering European countries, most notably Britain and France (Hobsbawm 231). The Truman Doctrine provided a clear statement to the world that communism had to be contained at all costs. In 1948, President Truman signed the Marshall Plan. Though the plan was meant to help European peoples recover from the destruction of World War II, the ideological background of the plan was obvious – it framed the US as “savior” and capitalism as the source of reconstructive power. Economically, “giving economic aid to certain countries, was creating a network of American corporate control over the globe, and building its political influence over the countries it aided” (Zinn 2015 438). Europe racked up monetary and political debt to the US. Around the world, the US engaged in economic, military, and ideological assaults meant to prevent the expansion of communism and ensure the protection of capitalism. In short, communism posed a threat to the

reproduction of capitalism. The means and forces of production were under attack from radicals around the globe.

The Cold War was primarily about the demonization and destruction of communist policies, and about the protection of capitalist assets. The US had to allow “the free flow of the dollar beyond its borders if the dollar was to function as the global reserve currency. The hegemony of the dollar began in 1944 with the Bretton Woods Agreement – just before the end of World War II. This system existed under the umbrella protection of US military power. Only the Soviet Union and the Cold War placed limits on its global reach” (Harvey 2007 10). Communists and communist sympathizers had to be placed with the frame of war, to be made inhuman, in order to justify their murder by US military forces. This was the case in Korea, Vietnam, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Iran. Over the course of the Cold War, the US engaged in clandestine operations in these countries to dismantle leftist governments and extend US interests like United Fruit. The Korean War, from 1950 to 1953, was the first official military attempt at the containment of communism and the expansion of capitalism. Indeed, South Korea worked doubly: “South Korea’s position as a frontline state in the Cold War initially gave it US protection for its developmentalism” (118). US involvement in Korea also firmly established US capitalism in Asia while the Marshall Plan established it in Europe. The Japanese economy recovered faster given the influx of US funding, “building up Japan as the industrial base for the Korean War” (Hobsbawm 276). The Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine created a geographic pincer movement in Eurasia, “containing” communism and reproducing capitalism. Ideologically, “the Korean War mobilized liberal opinion behind the war and the President. It created the kind of coalition that was

needed to sustain a policy of intervention abroad, militarization of the economy at home” (Zinn 2015 428). The war “justified” the demonization of North Korea and communism while perpetuating a permanent war economy.

The framing of communists as inhuman was just as strong at home. ISAs since the end of World War II have been in full force. In the postwar decades, the US spent a great amount of resources “to create a national consensus” across party lines in favor of Cold War policies and rabid anti-communism (Zinn 2015 427). This “consensus” was supported by many ISAs, including the House Un-American Activities Committee and COINTELPRO from 1938 until well into the 1970s. Any person found criticizing capitalism was quickly arrested. It created a sense of paranoia across the country – communism and criticism became feared, became outside the mainstream. Truman’s “Executive Order 9835” created “a program to search out any ‘infiltration of disloyal persons’” in the US (429). Citizens sympathizing with communism became enemies, became Other, became inhuman. Cold War ideology was essential in the justification of imperialism. This ideology came under attack by the 1960s and 1970s, but by the time of Ronald Reagan’s election in 1981, it had become naturalized alongside the frames of war. Today, “the fact that the US no longer needs to defend against the threat of communism means that it no longer has to worry unduly if neoliberal restructurings spark massive unemployment or social unrest in this place or that” (Harvey 2007 118). The demonization of communism is inextricably intertwined with both the rise of neoliberalism and the conflation of fascism and communism. World War II gave birth to widespread liberalism and support against fascism, both of which were adopted into neoliberalism as a means to protect capitalist interests around the globe.

World War II, in order to be considered “the good war,” altered American ideological frames – altered what makes a life a life. The firebombing of Dresden, Hamburg, and other German towns, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki became “just” in the great American myth. Germans became inhuman monsters and the Japanese became “subhuman” according to *Time* magazine. The rather oxymoronic “antifascist racism” beneath these claims is that in order to be antifascist, one had to hate fascists, and that all Germans and Japanese were fascist. These ideologies necessitated the prolongation of war and war economy to “keep democracy safe.” In fact, one of John F. Kennedy’s first acts as President was to increase military spending by \$9 billion in 1960 (Zinn 2015 437). After the war, “US bourgeois leadership had to craft a post-war strategy, the first task being restabilization of capitalism in Western Europe, Japan, and at home. It allocated itself the role of world gendarme of capitalism” (Mandel 2011 168). These modified and naturalized frames were later used to justify the intervention in Vietnam, the Cold War hunt for communists, and the continued exploitation of the Middle East. I use passive voice, “were later used” purposefully – the frames are not “used” by any person, but naturalized by ISAs as functions of the State. The school, as the dominant ISA of our time according to Althusser, perpetuates and naturalizes these frames, allowing for the continued expansion of late capitalism.

Teaching literature of World War II is more about teaching its representation than the war itself. The representation of World War II as a “just” war against Nazism, against fascism, against Japan, and for the Jews of Europe is essential to the reproduction of war frames and, therefore, to the current mode of production. In schools today, World War II is taught as a just war through the selection of novels and how they are to be taught.

There are two key elements to this representation: 1) a sympathetic identification with the Holocaust and 2) a dehistoricization of World War II literature through postmodern aesthetics. In this section, I will examine how teaching Holocaust literature reproduces war frames and how teaching Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* through its postmodern elements effectively removes its anti-war and anti-capital potential. I will demonstrate how World War II is represented, and then examine how the literature can be effectively *rehistoricized* and the pedagogical frame called into question.

II. Representing the Holocaust

Though not “war literature” in the strict sense, Holocaust literature is an essential component of the American representation of World War II. Education about the Holocaust began in the late 1970s when survivors and organizations began “to give significant leadership to such Holocaust education enterprises as the United States Holocaust Museum... with the passing of time, it became apparent that the story had to be told” (Littell 126). The English publication of Elie Wiesel's *Night* in 1960 brought critical attention to the Holocaust. It would soon be canonized in the field of cultural production in schools nationwide. Alongside *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the three texts make up the primary canonical texts in Holocaust literature – as far as American schools are concerned. Representing World War II through the Holocaust makes it a “just” war; America entered it to save innocent lives. This rehistoricizes America's response to German aggression in the thirties. Indeed, the US’ “just” war, in reality, is not just at all, as “the United States had done little about Hitler's policies of persecution. Indeed, it had joined England and France in appeasing Hitler throughout the thirties” (Zinn 2015 409). Even after Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, the

US only put an embargo on munitions, but continued oil trade with Italy, allowing Spain and Germany to continue giving aid to Mussolini (409). It was not until Germany and Japan threatened US interests that the US got involved.

Examining US curricula of *Night* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* reveals three key means of dehistoricizing the Holocaust in order to rehistoricize America's role in World War II: 1) Rhetorical and stylistic analysis, 2) Sympathetic recognition, 3) Historical context. These three methods are linked, and difficult to isolate from each other. Often, a stylistic analysis is followed by sympathetic recognition, or a rhetorical analysis is part of a biased historical context. However, these methods end up with the same goal: reproducing the myth of the “just” war.

Night, Elie Wiesel's memoir of his time in several concentration camps, is taught in nearly every school nationwide, either as a unit, part of a unit, or summer reading. The modes of teaching are more about restricting where and how students get information, rather than outright disinformation. Each district teaches differently, often according to the socio-economic status of its population. However, there is very little differentiation in the methods deployed by the pedagogical frame. War literature is taught as part of a national project, but with different focuses according to the local population – war is dehistoricized or rehistoricized using similar methods but different focuses. In essence, the pedagogical frame always functions the same way – to de/rehistoricize – but it is deployed differently. In St. Albertville School District, *Night* is taught through two essential questions: “How does literature communicate the results of a historical event? How are themes present in nonfiction writing?” (St. Albertville BOE). St. Albertville, of course, contains both stylistic analysis and vague historical information. The summative

assessment for the unit in a research paper uses the films, “Elie Wiesel Goes Home,” “Oprah: Interview with Elie Wiesel,” and “Schindler’s List” as sources, along with two student-discovered sources (St. Albertville BOE). The EngageNY curriculum asks for students to “examine Elie Wiesel’s Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, ‘Hope, Despair and Memory,’ as a springboard for potential research topics. Using evidence-based analysis to explore topics that support multiple positions and perspectives, students generate a written evidence-based perspective” (EngageNY). The suggested research topics all revolve around general articles – provided to students – about “preventing” or “learning” from genocide.

At Wagner Community School, the unit begins with the essential questions “Of what value is freedom? What personal freedoms are we willing to defend? What sacrifices have our military service personnel made in the name of freedom? What can history teach about human nature?” (Wagner BOE). Rather interestingly, Wagner is located in a particularly conservative area of South Dakota with many veterans from the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The question of “military service in the name of freedom” has little to do with *Night* and everything to do with the representation of World War II. The unit at Wagner asks students to look at the memoir and connect it to sources such as the local “VFW group,” essays from “Voice of Democracy,” and “community members who have served in foreign wars” (Wagner BOE). *Night* includes US forces only in the final few pages. Indeed, the so-called *Night* unit here is about World War II myth, not the Holocaust. Cumberland School District engages in a very similar unit, but also requires students to watch “Hotel Rwanda” and compare it to *Night* and the experiences of

veterans. The conflation and reduction of historical events in this curriculum is part of the co-historical circuit, driven in part by Cold War ideologies.

Sympathetic connection in *Night* is encouraged through its genre. In both the Massachusetts Department of Education and Bernards Township Board of Education, *Night* is used as a mentor text for students to write personal memoirs later. The driving questions for the *Night* unit in Massachusetts put this “personal narrative” to the foreground, while pushing the Holocaust to the background: “Does my culture define my identity? What impact does culture have on one’s identity and actions? What happens when there is a clash between cultural values and principles?” (MADoE). Indeed, the focus on personal identity and personal narrative demands that *Night* and the events in it be connected to the events in the lives of young American children. The summative assessment is a “narrative essay on an imagined experience related to the works of literature explored during this unit” (MADoE). Students use *Night* as a mentor text to write their own memoir or personal story.

The Diary of Anne Frank, whether in its original form or script form, is similarly taught, but with even more of a focus on personal experience and sympathetic connections to the Holocaust. Haddonfield asks students to read the text, using it to answer questions like, “What life skills did victims use to cope with the adversity? How can we use the historical literature to help us cope with our own troubles? How have lessons from our past mistakes affected the way we now deal with conflicts?” (Haddonfield BOE). The treatment of surviving the Holocaust as “life skills” needs no real analysis to understand how the unit minimizes atrocity in the name of “empathy.” The district seems to want Anne Frank to offer a story of redemption during the

Holocaust; the world has learned from its mistakes and we can learn from Holocaust survivors how to live our own lives. Moreau openly demands students to “learn extensively about Anne Frank and her legacy – To critically think about identity – To empathize and relate to Anne Frank – To understand the importance of writing in people’s lives” (Moreau BOE). The personal nature of the diary format, along with the fact that Frank was around the same age as the students, allows for an easier identification. Shockingly, in North Carolina:

the teacher should give the students the opportunity to practice a “quiet and still” activity where they sit absolutely still in the classroom for at least 15 minutes. During this time, they must adhere to the rules as set forth by Mr. Frank during his instructions to the group in Act 1, Scene 2. The teacher should monitor this activity to ensure that the students follow his directions. At the end of this time, the teacher should assign the students an additional time at home where they will strive to make themselves absolutely still and unnoticeable. When this activity is complete, the students are to use their journals to reflect on their feelings and reactions to this activity. These entries can be shared in class the next day. (NCDoE)

This activity is obviously meant to simulate Frank’s experience, allowing students to “empathize” with her and her story. However, this attempt can, as Mary Juzwick suggests, foster “inappropriate identification with Anne and her world” (289). Indeed, students are encouraged here, as in *Night*, to project their “current preoccupations” and world onto the text (289). This false identification or empathy undermines the very proposed purpose of teaching Holocaust literature – to prevent another genocide. Yet, if students believe they know what genocide is like given a short, in class activity, the Holocaust is minimized, falsified, disrespected, and ultimately dehistoricized.

Anne’s experience is also deployed as representative of other genocides. For example, North Dakota has students read the diary, respond in personal journals, then

read short articles about Rwanda and Darfur in order to compare the three (NDDoE). The pre-packaged College Board curriculum for *The Diary of Anne Frank* requires that students “do a compare/contrast with North Korea and Holocaust Germany” after reading the text (College Board). This comparison may have some similarities – political prisoners, prison camps – but the political implications of the comparison are clear: demonize North Korea through comparisons to the Holocaust. Though the connection between anti-communism and racism is important, it is outside the purview of this project. *The Diary of Anne Frank* has little to do with prison camps in its descriptions. College Board, the “non-profit” corporation responsible for giving college accreditation, developing the SATs, AP classes, and Common Core aligned curricula is funded primarily through state and federal subsidies. Again, little analysis is necessary to understand how the Holocaust has been taken out of historical context for the current capitalist state’s political gain. Having thoroughly examined the curricular trends in Holocaust literature, we may now more carefully analyze how it dehistoricizes and rehistoricizes World War II for political gain of the capitalist state.

Holocaust literature provides an extremely difficult problem for teachers, especially given its role in the American representation of World War II. As Mary Juzwik eloquently reminds us:

On the one hand, we want students to relate personally to texts, to identify with characters, to make the works live anew today. In short, we want to encourage meaningful transaction. Yet, with material grounded deeply in disturbing periods in history, most would agree that it seems shallow at best and ethically irresponsible to encourage *just* transaction. (285)

As much as one can demand historicization and respect for the event, one must remember that the readers are children in school, often reluctant readers at best. Keeping the text

“alive” is of primary importance before any meaningful analysis can be undertaken. With Holocaust literature, however, “there is simply no connection between our ordinary suffering and their unprecedented agony” (Langer 1998 22). It seems that schools that focus on sympathetic connection ignore the fact that “full empathy will always elude us” (Rosenfeld 70). US curricula are, as Lawrence Langer suggests, complicit in “the national habit of reshaping European nightmares to strengthen the American dream” (Langer 2006 117). In regards to Anne Frank and, I would argue, *Night*, Langer notes the effort to force students to “construe the reality of an event before we have experienced it, to confirm an agenda in advance in order to discourage us from raising disturbing questions that might subvert the tranquility of our response” (21). Indeed, the curricula examined do little to examine Hitler’s rise, America’s willful ignorance of his acts, or the historical specificity of the Holocaust. Even the selection of books is essential to this project. Using Anne Frank as a representation of the Holocaust offers “universal appeal to younger readers, and offers “concrete support for the welcome notion that in the midst of chaos, even the chaos of mass murder, the human imagination... can remain untainted” (19). Yet, one “cannot look for a kernel of redemption in the Holocaust experience” without a certain level of disrespect to the experience of the atrocity (Rosenfeld 68). The search for themes and messages beyond the simple, unintelligible horror of the Holocaust, as many schools attempt to do, creates a false universality, that all genocides are the same. This mentality is corroborated by the comparative studies of Rwanda and Darfur making their way into school curricula. However, comparison further dehistoricizes both the Holocaust and other genocides by implying their sameness – it

avoids a confrontation with the causes, methods, and effects of genocides and their material underpinnings.

The questions remain: what does rehistoricizing the Holocaust do to representations of World War II, and what does that representation do for ideology today? It is no mistake that the Holocaust is the only genocide to receive widespread critical attention in high school and middle school curricula. It is, arguably, the only genocide the United States had a helping hand in ending. Indeed, more often than not, the US sits by while genocides happen, funds the oppressor, funds the oppressed, or participates in the genocide. The concealment of the Native American genocide is part of the “just war” myth – the lives of natives are unintelligible because they never existed to whites in the first place. By reframing the Holocaust in such a way as to make German life unintelligible – a non-life – and make Jewish lives of the utmost imperative, Butler’s “war frame” can be extended to the present. Of course, the Nazis committed crimes beyond the limits of language to convey, but hundreds of thousands of German citizens were murdered by air raids – a fact to which we will return shortly. By framing World War II through the Holocaust as schools do, the requirements of what constitutes a “life” can be reproduced as political. An inhuman act on behalf of one segment of a population can negate the “life-hood” of the entire population. The Holocaust made the entire German population from 1930-1945 into non-people that could be burned alive through “strategic” bombing.

Secondarily, by teaching the war with this particular frame, the pedagogical frame can reinforce the “Islam vs. West” binary so crucial to contemporary American ideology. Although the connection between racism and capitalism is essential, it is outside the

purview of this project. However, the “Islam vs. West” binary is worth mentioning. The binary, as part of the pedagogical frame, comes directly from the Cold War, where indigenous people around the world stood up against capitalism. The Islam vs. The West oppositional model also reinforces pro-Israel sentiment in the wake of such massacres as Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and 2009, and Pillar of Defense in 2012. The Palestinian-Islamic “other” is considered outside the frame of a “life” and can therefore not be killed, only eliminated. The two Intifadas and various smaller revolutionary acts constitute Palestinians as non-human; one inhuman act turns an entire population into “non-lives” and validates its extermination. In Israel, one of the US’ key allies in the Middle East, the war frame constituted by the pedagogical frame of World War II is crucial to the reproduction of global capitalism and imperialism in the Middle East.

Holocaust literature is literature *of* the Second World War, but not *war* literature. It is, however, essential within the pedagogical frame in representing World War II. Taught as the primary representative literature of World War II, Holocaust literature is, in Langer’s words, *abused* for American political gain. This abuse is part of the reproduction of capitalism – it allows for the negation of life for economic gain. The frames of war are reproduced in the pedagogical frame, making certain lives unintelligible. The lives of those who protest against capitalism and Western imperialism are expendable, and snuffing them out *justified*. Any ideology, country, or life that gets in the way of the reproduction of capitalism is reframed. Indeed, World War II and its representations are essential to the project of capital.

III. *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Lauded by many as one of the greatest novels of its time, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is arguably the most frequently taught war novel of the Second World War. Published in 1969, the novel was written before the hegemony of postmodern cultural production. Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* is also of note, but taught significantly less – probably due to its greater length. Other World War II novels, like *Gravity's Rainbow*, are taught only in excerpt or in college. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is noted for its irony, dark humor, and anti-war message. It is considered, along with *Johnny Got His Gun*, to be one of the greatest anti-war novels of all time. Yet, this anti-war message is not actually what schools teach. Even when they do, it is a surface-level message: war is bad. Desire for a simple, universal “theme” or “moral” cuts out the historical context of the war, its causes, its effects, and its lasting effect on ideology. Before identifying the anti-capitalist strands in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, we must examine how schools frame the novel as a representation of World War II.

In most schools, the pedagogical frame dehistoricizes *Slaughterhouse-Five* through a focus on aesthetics – in this case, on postmodernism. There are two main methods of dehistoricization in regards to *Slaughterhouse-Five*: Postmodern Aesthetics and Reader-Response Theory paired with New Criticism. Though clearly different schools of thought, Reader-Response and New Criticism hold many important similarities, which are highlighted when deployed in the pedagogical frame. Both Reader-Response and New Criticism focus on the interaction between reader and text, rather than reader, text, and world. Similarly, both eschew historical context in favor of a focus on the text itself. Both methods yield the same result – a novel free of historical context and focused on a heroic version of war.

Schools that use a reader-response approach to teaching Vonnegut are, rather paradoxically, the more “progressive,” and wealthier, districts. These districts allow for student choice, student centered classrooms, and exploratory learning. The “benefits” include greater student engagement, greater student freedom, teaching independence, and removing – as much as possible – the top-down power structure of education. However, this approach also tends to dehistoricize literature by encouraging a personal interaction with the text, rather than a critical interaction with the text and field of production from which it came. Kings School District uses the following essential questions to guide Vonnegut’s novel, “What elements of literature help to define and to support the underlying theme of the work? How do style, tone, and structure provide the backbone to a work? What places do the historical period and corresponding social values take in a work?” (Kings BOE). Though history is mentioned in these questions, a closer look at the content to be taught reveals a lack of historical focus or information. The only content is “themes/meaning, tone/attitude, universality, literary merit, diction, syntax” (Kings BOE). The terms “universality” and “literary merit” are intriguing here, implying that merit comes from the representation of universal experience. Of course, a look at Barbara Herrnstein-Smith reverses this claim, asserting that “universals” are socially and politically reproduced through dehistoricization: “we make texts timeless by suppressing their temporality” (50). The skills in this unit are similar to the content: devoid of “historical” analysis. The skills ask students to discover the theme of a work and how it is conveyed through literary devices. This type of criticism provides the illusion of freedom on behalf of students to explore the text personally, but it restricts them by disallowing any real, historical analysis or connection. Colchester School district focuses even further

on the “message” of a work with only two essential questions: “What is the author’s message? How does the text connect to you and the real world?” (Colchester BOE). Indeed, the term “real world” can mean many things, but given the lack of content in the curriculum, it seems to be a misnomer.

The other method of dehistoricization – a focus on postmodernism – is more complex. Bernards Township School District is rather exemplary of this method. In one unit, students must:

Recognize the emergence of dynamic views represented in literary texts by first- and second-generation Americans. Explain how the Beat Generation challenged traditional forms and subjects in literature. Identify multiple postmodernist approaches to critical analyses of literature. Note the influence that postmodernism has had on the “common reader.” (Bernards BOE)

However, the content is lacking in the requirements needed to fulfill proposed goals.

Students need only learn “Beatniks; the Beat Generation, Minimalism, Nonlinear narratives, Parody, Pastiche, Postmodernism” (Bernards BOE). While there can certainly be historical context to these terms, they are approached in a more symptomatic manner. For the purposes of this discussion, “symptomatic” means the identification of Fredric Jameson’s symptoms of postmodernism. In capitalism, everything that is difficult to confront, like history and contradiction, is repressed. The things that are repressed do not disappear, but emerge as “symptoms,” like parody, pastiche, schizophrenia, and depthlessness². The material reality that popularized “pastiche,” and made “nonlinear narratives” identifiable as having literary merit is ignored. Though Fredric Jameson’s identification of postmodern elements and symptoms is certainly useful, it has become

² For further information about literary elements and repression, see *The Political Unconscious* by Fredric Jameson.

another tool of the pedagogical frame. At best, schools focus on superstructural development; at worst, words like “pastiche,” “parody,” and “deconstruction” become literary devices to be located, not understood. When discussing postmodern literature, many schools are on the side of a symptomatic approach to the postmodern, based on Fredric Jameson’s proposed characteristics in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”. The pedagogical frame dehistoricizes the symptoms Jameson identifies. Symptoms become tools for what I have been calling the co-historical circuit. Schools use Jameson’s symptoms of postmodernism as an endgame – just scavenger hunt pieces for students to find. Symptoms are taken *as* truth, not the *repression* of truth. Upper class districts like Bernards and Montgomery often use this method to give the appearance of a deeper education. It is a purely symptomatic mode of reading. At Ridge High School, throughout the year, students must identify elements of postmodernism, like “Nonlinear narratives, Parody, Pastiche,” but are never taught what they mean – only what they look like (Bernards BOE). This phrasing pops up in several units – *In the Lake of the Woods*, *The Things They Carried*, *Zoo Story*, and a “World Literature” unit (Bernards BOE). Yet, and I imagine Jameson would agree, knowing how to find pastiche is very different from knowing why it exists.

The Tucson Unified School district takes an extremely interesting approach to *Slaughterhouse-Five*, combining New Criticism, Postmodern aesthetics, and rehistoricization to *fully* remove the novel from its context. The “Enduring Understandings” of the unit are twofold: “Literature and informational texts provide us with varying types of justice and what justice can mean to us. Different types of texts can teach us about the facets of justice and who determines that justice has been met”

(Tuscan BOE). Indeed, the questions, “What happens when law and justice are not the same? Why is justice fair? *Do all cultures value justice?*” seems wildly loaded (Tuscan BOE – emphasis added). Do the questions refer to the treatment of Billy by the Tralfamadorians? Of Billy by Lazzaro? Of the POWs by the Germans? Or, perhaps, of the American treatment of the citizens of Hamburg or Dresden? The curriculum is unclear, but the concept of “justice” has little to do with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and everything to do the representation of World War II that the pedagogical frame constructs. World War II *must* be construed as the “good” war, the “just” war. Questions of justice in regards to that representation leave little room for critical interrogation of the US’ role in the war. Imperialism in Asia, a permanent war economy, and the justification of exploitation for “patriotic” purposes are all completely concealed.

The US State’s interest in war was, despite claims of a “people’s war,” primarily economic. Indeed, World War II amplified the US’ imperialistic tendencies, drawing the accumulation of raw materials and capital from China and the Middle East. The moral pretext of United States involvement “was the Japanese attack on the American Naval base at Pearl Harbor” (Zinn 2015 410). The attack, in the great “good war” myth, was unjustified – we had not attacked Japan. However, after Japan’s attempted takeover of China, the US had put a “total embargo on scrap iron, a total embargo on oil in the summer of 1941” (410). Japan’s desire for Chinese markets drove the US to the embargos. These embargoes, by the time of Pearl Harbor, had totally depleted Japan’s ability to produce arms: “reproduction had contracted to the point where functioning machinery was converted into scrap metal for arms production” (Mandel 2011 53). Japan had little choice but to attack the United States in order to maintain access to basic needs,

like rice, rubber, and tin (50). Pearl Harbor was, and continues to be, “presented to the American public as a sudden, shocking immoral act” (Zinn 2015 410). Its “immorality” allowed for the deployment of the “war frame,” enforcing the racism that made Japanese citizens at home and abroad inhuman. In 1943, *Time* magazine declared that Japanese citizens were “not even human” (Hopkins 470). The deployment of that frame allowed the US to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and to continue its unimpeded conquest of Asia.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the focus is not on the atomic bomb, nor on America’s entrance into the war. In fact, Billy’s entrance into the war is never fully explained; it is unclear whether he volunteers, is drafted, or cares about the war at all. Given this ambiguity, the pedagogical frame can easily suggest that Billy desired to go to war. Generally speaking, the frame does not – it simply naturalizes his place, just as Harrison Starr does in the beginning of the novel: “What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that too” (Vonnegut 3). War and Billy’s place in it simply *are*. Second, at the end of the novel, Lily Rumfoord reads Truman’s announcement about the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The phrasing is important: “The Japanese began this war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many-fold” (185). The Rumfoords are, for the most part, negatively portrayed characters. Lily’s reading of the announcement should convey the absurdity of the destruction. Rumfoord himself sees destruction as a necessity when speaking of Dresden: “‘It *had* to be done,’ Rumfoord told Billy” (198). Public opinion about the destruction of urban centers began negatively, but slowly evolved into widespread support (Hopkins 452).

Slaughterhouse-Five's depiction of the Dresden firebombing is the centerpiece of the novel. It is not until the final pages that readers are subjected to descriptions of the bombing and its aftermath. Yet, the importance is clear – the crux of Billy's "unsticking" from time is Dresden. When the fictionalized Vonnegut is outlining *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he uses colored lines to represent various characters' lifelines, but "the destruction of Dresden was represented by a vertical band of orange, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out the other side" (Vonnegut 5). Time, for Billy and Vonnegut, is contingent on either being before or after Dresden. According to Martin Gilbert, on February 13, 245 British bombers struck Dresden, followed three and a half hours later by 529 more (640). Less than twelve hours later, American bombers struck, followed by a second wave of American bombers less than thirty-six hours later (641). The combination of "high explosive and incendiary bombs had its intended effect, splintering buildings into kindling that was readily ignited by hundreds of thousands of fire-starters falling to the earth below" (Biddle 412). The fire was so intense, survivors could not put them out for several days. Allied POWs were brought in to dig out bodies – amongst them were the real Kurt Vonnegut, the fictionalized Kurt Vonnegut, and Billy Pilgrim.

Dresden was, to be certain, a murderous act on behalf of the Allied Forces. Indeed, Britain had first discovered that "industrial production," and therefore German resistance, "was belayed longest not by bombing the factories themselves, but by disrupting necessary city services and dislocating industrial workers" (Hopkins 460). In fact, Dresden was "no different than other Anglo-American air attacks carried out at the same time period during World War II," and was actually less destructive than the

firebombing of Hamburg and Tokyo (Biddle 414). Yet, somehow, “the Dresden raid has eclipsed other, more destructive raids of the Second World War” (415). Rather ironically, it was *Slaughterhouse-Five* that “helped to raise the profile of the raid in the United States” (415). Dresden came to erase all other destructive raids, much as My Lai came to erase all American war crimes in Vietnam. By selecting a novel that only details one destructive raid, the scholastic ISA can frame that raid as a single American “mistake” – or, rather, a synecdoche, a single necessarily brutal action on behalf of the US. The pedagogical frame depicts Dresden as a horrible act of war, *not* a horrible act of the bourgeois American military on the German proletariat. Vonnegut details this attack on the proletariat. The guards, who are old men and young boys, just outside of “working age,” were “all being killed with their families” during the raid; the “girls that Billy had seen naked were all being killed, too” (Vonnegut 177). It is the workers who are killed by the Dresden bombing, not the Nazi high command. The pedagogical frame is able to remove *Slaughterhouse-Five* from its anti-capitalist theme for an “anti-war” theme – two very different things. The frame takes Vonnegut’s view of death – “so it goes” – as nihilistic and universal, when, in fact, his view is deeply rooted in the nature of capitalism. The dehistoricization is also felt when considering the postmodern elements of the novel.

Postwar economic development from 1945 to the mid-1970s brought with it great prosperity to the US. The country was raised out of Depression, and into a new, post-industrial society over the course of several decades. Daniel Bell notes five distinct post-industrial elements: 1) the change from industrial production to service, 2) the rise of the professional class, 3) the centrality of theoretical knowledge for development, 4) the

dominance of technology in production, 5) the creation of intellectual technology (Bell 14). Since the rise of Fordism in 1914, capitalism has, as David Harvey claims, begun to shift towards flexible accumulation (124). With this shift from early to late capitalism, there has been a shift in the means of production – the proletariat in the US is both white and blue collared. The products of each worker become even more obscure to him or her; a service is a non-tangible product. The dispersal labor across and increasingly globalized market further alienates the worker from his or her product. This rapid globalization – and imperialization – began in 1947 with the establishment of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, now the World Trade Organization (Clark and Philippatos 170). Each job is more specified, each product ever more elusive, and each worker placed in greater competition against other workers to sell his or her labor.

Fewer and fewer workers were needed as mechanization and mass production increased and the shift to service progressed, thereby increasing the competition between workers – more workers existed for fewer jobs. As a result, there came a new level of disposability for workers and products that became evident in the 1960s (Harvey 1991 286). Vonnegut playfully contextualizes this period for the reader and his characters when Billy's mother visits him in the hospital: "Like so many Americans, she was trying to construct a life that made sense from things she found in gift shops" (Vonnegut 39). As such, the shift from Fordism/Taylorism to late global capitalism changed the material conditions of workers – from modernism to postmodernism. While the two are useful periodizing concepts, David Harvey asserts that "there is much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and the movement called postmodernism. It seems more sensible to me to see the latter as a particular kind of crisis

within the former” – an advance of modernism’s vanguard, or an evolution, rather than an outright epistemological break (116). Postmodernism is simply an amplification of modernist ideology, just as neoliberalism is an amplification of globalism. With the change in the material base comes the change in the ideological superstructure. Capitalism and its ideologies can be divided into periods, but these are merely tools, not hard and fast changes in material and ideological production. This is a point to which we will return in the next chapter.

Postmodernism’s link with late capitalism seems clear – postmodern culture is consistently removed from the means of production. Jameson provides several clear features of postmodernism: pastiche, parody, irony, depthlessness, and schizophrenia. These features are all directly related to the “link between postmodernism and the transition from Fordism to more flexible modes of capital accumulation via mediations of spatial and temporal experiences” (Harvey 1991 202). Though Jameson and Harvey may argue differently, *Slaughterhouse-Five* was written at a time before the hegemony of postmodern cultural production – in essence, it was written in the opening stages of late capitalism. Though the postmodern is a superstructural creation of the changing material base, the early stages of postmodernism had some radical potential to them. For the purpose of this discussion, postmodernism refers to a set of stylistic elements, while postmodernity refers to a cultural movement, which covers the temporal span from approximately 1955 to present day within the “Neoliberal Era”. Postmodernism, as a style, had critical potential until the age of postmodernity. When the style was avant-garde, it could critique capitalism, but as capitalism advanced into late capitalism,

postmodernity as a time period defanged the style³. By the time Terry Eagleton wrote *The Illusions of Postmodernism* in 1996, capitalism had spread over the globe – the USSR had fallen and any utopian visions of communism had fallen with it for the time being. Indeed, in 1969, Vonnegut – rather bravely – gives communism a positive connotation: “We asked him what it was like to live under Communism, and he said it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard and because there wasn’t much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education” (Vonnegut 2). Vonnegut risked backlash from the anticommunist sentiment of the early Cold War by humanizing a communist. The American ideology of the Cold War was based on demonizing communism abroad and at home. Vonnegut’s comment here questions the “truth” that communism was evil and ineffective.

Slaughterhouse-Five has many of distinctive features of postmodern literature, especially the questioning of “truth”. Look to nearly any scholarly article on the novel and you are sure to find mention of Fredric Jameson, Jean Francois Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard. And rightfully so. Postmodernism is fully formulated Modernism – the lack of “truth” developing from the interrogation of truth. The meta-fictional author describes the creation of the book, and questions the very nature of truth; the book famously opens, “all this happened, more or less” (Vonnegut 1). Later on, when Trout is speaking with Maggie, she ponders, ““Do you think you might put *us* in a book sometime?” (172). The characters walk the line between fact and fiction, drawing on the memoir elements of

³ For further discussion on the postmodern, postmodernism, and postmodernity, see *The Illusions of Postmodernism* by Terry Eagleton, *The Postmodern Condition* by David Harvey, and *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* by Fredric Jameson.

Vonnegut's time in World War II. Vonnegut inserts himself into the narrative in the prison camp: "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book" (125). Eagleton rightly explains, "one vein of postmodernism views history as a matter of constant mutability, exhilaratingly multiple and open-ended, a set of conjunctures or discontinuities which only some theoretical violence could hammer into the unity of a single narrative" (46). The pedagogical frame easily dehistoricizes postmodern works because they eschew linear history. The novel is written in short, nearly unrelated anecdotes, or "the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore" (Vonnegut Title Page). It denies a straightforward narrative, in favor of discontinuous anecdotes, based on the science fiction plot device of time travel. However, when these plot devices – schizophrenia, discontinuity, and metafiction – are removed from the context of their historical, material reality, any and all radical potential is lost. This removal is what the pedagogical frame does to *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Students look for devices, not for what they reveal. Yet, the novel's use of irony is undeniably related to the idea of capital – irony used to have critical bite when it was of part of the avant-garde, but this was curtailed by the development of late capitalism. The coming of postmodernity as part of late capitalism pacified postmodernism.

Slaughterhouse-Five uses dramatic irony to reveal the horrors of vampire capital. Each commodity has an entire army of labor inside it – the crystallization of capital. Vonnegut's famous refrain, "so it goes," is not the nihilistic universal the pedagogical frame makes it out to be, but rather an echo of the labor within each commodity. At various points in the novel, this fact is revealed to the reader without the characters' knowledge – or the reverse. Paul Lazzaro collects precious gems from "dead people in

the cellars of Dresden” (Vonnegut 6). His “payment” for the labor of digging up bodies after the raid on Dresden comes directly from the workers who lived there; his wage comes from the wages of those before him. The fictionalized Vonnegut is told about “how the Germans had made soap and candles out of the fat of dead Jews,” but he already knows (10). Yet, given that in 1969 Holocaust education had not yet begun in the US, the original readers may not have known this fact, but the characters do. Human beings turned directly into commodities. In response to his time in war, Vonnegut tells his sons “not to work for companies which make massacre machinery” (19). The problem, however, is that they cannot know. Given the increasing specification of labor and the shift from industry to service, his sons may not be able to tell if they make war machines or not. When Billy gets to the prison camp, the Americans were given overcoats “taken from prisoners who were dead” (81). Billy’s, however, is the only coat to come from an average citizen (82). The reader is shown the direct relation between the commodity and the dead labor behind it. In this case, the term “dead labor” should be taken quite literally. Similarly, Billy’s dog tag at the camp was made by “a slave laborer in Poland... he was dead now” (91). Billy does not know that a slave laborer made his dog tag, nor does he know the laborer is dead. When the curriculum asks students to look for irony, they find irony, but not the historical context that can make it ironic.

IV. Conclusion

Slaughterhouse-Five is a brilliant anti-war novel. With proper historicization, its radical nature can be uncovered, renewed, or created. Yet, the curricula deny this historicization, because to do so would implicate the United States in imperialism and murder. Instead, the novel is taught in such a way as to simply say, “War is bad,” but

there is nothing to be done about it. The novel is dehistoricized to fit the good war representation of World War II. Holocaust literature is rehistoricized to fit that representation. Both end up with the same result – the perpetuation of war frames, which benefit capitalist interests today.

Teachers have several methods of breaking the pedagogical frame, all involving deeper historicization. First, the students must critique representations of World War II. Upon closer examination of the historical context, World War II is not a “good” war, but, perhaps, a just one in some cases. Students may not come to these same conclusions, but they must question the difference between a good war and a just war, and which one the United States fought. Indeed, “the best education requires constant scrutiny of accepted ideas, to ensure that what we believe is really worthy of our belief” (Langer 1998 196). Excerpts from *People’s History* are excellent tools for most reading levels, while also fulfilling the “nonfiction” requirement of the CCSS.

Second, Holocaust literature *must not* be taught through false sympathy. In *Preempting the Holocaust*, Lawrence Langer describes using survivor testimonies frequently, often in conjunction with texts like *Night*. By examining these texts for how language fails in the face of atrocity, one can both read critically and acknowledge that full empathy is not possible. That said, teaching Holocaust literature must be countered with a historical context of America’s own crimes in World War II. In a unit of *Night* or of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a viable option would be to include excerpts from the other text excerpts of *Slaughterhouse-Five* with *Night* and vice versa – as well as Holocaust testimonies. The point again is to make students question the “good war” myth while still engaging in critical reading.

Study Questions:

1. In what ways do *Slaughterhouse-Five* question the “truth” of the just war?
2. How does Vonnegut treat the means, forces, and relations of production in his work?
3. Is Vonnegut’s use of irony an effective means of critiquing capitalist ideology?
4. How does the way *Slaughterhouse-Five* is taught allow war to continue today?
5. In what ways has art been changed by the Holocaust? What is the place of art after World War II?
6. To what other events can the Holocaust be adequately compared? Can it be?
7. How can we teach the Holocaust without dehumanizing Germans?
8. Was World War II just, or is the term “just” loaded?

III. He Could See It: Postmodernism in Teaching Vietnam War Literature

“Irony's gone from liberating to enslaving.”

-David Foster Wallace

I. Introduction

In his book, *Warring Fictions*, Jim Neilson argues that in *The Things They Carried*, the most commonly taught Vietnam War text, Tim O'Brien is faced with a paradox. The author is set between “a painful need to write truth set against a realization that there is no unmediated access to truth” (Neilson 194). O'Brien chooses to emphasize “the process of story making” rather than any sort of historical truth (194). In doing so, O'Brien's aesthetic choices undo any attempt to reveal truth: “To speak of the surreality and unreality of Vietnam is to mystify the war by confusing its perceptual experience with its material fact” (195). Given stories like “How to Tell a True War Story” and “Notes,” it is logical to maintain that O'Brien “fails to define renewal and reinvention in any but the most general, abstract terms. He has no apparent political strategy or economic policy or ideology in mind, and his repeated mention of ‘self’ suggests the individualist,” or solipsistic, “ethos that grounds his postmodern rhetoric” (199).

However, Michael Tavel Clarke provides a dissenting opinion. His article “‘I Feel Close to Myself’” suggests that, contrary to Neilson's claims of solipsism, O'Brien's metafictional techniques highlight the solipsistic attitude of Vietnam revisionism – Vietnam was an “American” war that greatly harmed the US, while ignoring Vietnam. Indeed, Clarke maintains that metafiction can reveal “how powerful, familiar cultural metanarratives make it difficult for individuals to give original or countercultural

meanings to experiences in their own lives” (133). Clarke’s argument hinges on the historical moment of the book’s publication, 1990, since *The Things They Carried* deals with the dominant Vietnam Revisionist narratives, which began in the late 1970s: “by late 1978, ‘Vietnam revisionism began to emerge’” (Dionisopoulos and Goldzwig 63). Yet, the two interpretations miss the simple point that “the literary work must be studied in a double perspective: in relation to history, and in relation to an ideological version of that history” (Macherey 129). Neilson demands the book be historically criticized, while Clarke demands an ideological interpretation.

What is at stake in this differing set of opinions is the efficacy of postmodernism as a revolutionary or critical aesthetic: in short, whether or not postmodernism can effectively criticize late capitalism. In 1969, when *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published, postmodernism may have still had some critical bite as an aesthetic. Indeed, *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published at the height of the anti-war movement in the US. The novel, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, is critical of US involvement in both World War II and the Vietnam War. Readers were undoubtedly aware of the needless loss of life in Vietnam and the horrors of the Holocaust in World War II; as such, *Slaughterhouse-Five*’s satirical nihilism *can* be read as satirical and critical. However, insofar as the Vietnam War was “a catalyst for discontent,” capitalist entities like corporations, business, and the state came under attack. Yet, “by capturing ideals of individual freedom and turning them against interventionist and regulatory practices of the state, capitalist class interests could hope to protect and even restore their position. Neoliberalism was well suited to this task” (Harvey 2007 42).

Since 1970, neoliberalism has become “hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on the ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3). “Neoliberalism,” though not a mode of discourse itself, has become increasingly difficult to separate from late capitalism. As such, neoliberalism should be considered synonymous with late capitalism, both in ideology and material production. It is a ruling class strategy of capital accumulation that has evolved in complexity and power since the 1950s. Its current hegemonic position can be traced historically through the evolution of capitalism. Just as modernism and postmodernism are periodizing concepts, I believe neoliberalism is not just a function of late capitalism, but a synonym for it. Indeed, as Harvey also notes in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, the rise of neoliberalism syncs perfectly with the advance of flexible accumulation. According to Harvey, flexible accumulation “rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption” (Harvey 1991 147). This flexibility is contingent upon the deregulatory practices of neoliberalism. Today, “the structure of this global financial system is now so complicated that it surpasses most people’s understanding” (161). Fredric Jameson appears to agree, albeit through a more superstructural lens: “aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods... at ever greater rates of turnover” (5).

America’s support of free trade is “hardly to be believed, since the government interfered with trade when this did not serve the ‘national interest,’ which was a euphemism for corporate interest” (Zinn 2015 658). As deregulation increases, so does

the flexibility of accumulation; interpreting material reality becomes more and more difficult. The ability to distinguish reality from myth becomes problematic when the commodities within reality are increasingly obscured. The ideologies that maintain the relations of production become more complex, making an amplified version of Lukacs' reification.

This does not mean, however, that the political economy cannot be interpreted – it merely becomes more difficult to isolate material reality from its corresponding ideology. The number and level of mediations from reality to interpretation grow. Jameson, to some extent, falls into the trap of mediating ideology from material reality, addressing the symptoms of postmodern ideology rather than its material causes. In any case, postmodernism is a function of late capitalist ideology – either a reaction against it or a tool of it, in the case of postmodernity. Neoliberalism, postmodernism, and late capitalism are superstructure and base of the same historical moment – they are linked. Though scholars still debate the various definitions, for the purposes of this project, late capitalism is a period within the capitalist mode of production, based in material reality. Neoliberalism is a given form of late capitalism, which gives rise to a distinctive cluster of ideologies. Postmodernism is the mode of cultural production rising from late capitalism and adopted by neoliberalism, turning *postmodernism* into *postmodernity*⁴. Neoliberalism, as Harvey suggests, coopted many characteristics of 1960s radicalism – individualism, “freedom,” and the rejection of the State. If Jameson is correct in his assertion that “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and

⁴ For further information about the connections between capitalism, postmodernism, and neoliberalism, see *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and *The Postmodern Condition* by David Harvey.

superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world,” then the narratives and ideology must serve the function of maintaining that domination (Jameson 5). Postmodern aesthetics and theory, especially, view history as “a matter of constant mutability... a set of conjunctures or discontinuities which only some theoretical violence could hammer into the unity of a single narrative” (Eagleton 46). This is, I would argue, exactly what has ended up happening, not only with theoretical, but also with physical violence, both of which are concealed by ideologically saturated narratives. History is mutilated and its remains concealed by such narratives. The historical moments most often deformed are those of great violence. Foucault maintains that power is only powerful if it conceals itself, and, indeed, “the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (Jameson 5). To recall *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it was effective because the readership was aware of the underside of culture, the horrors of Vietnam. The text was published *before* neoliberalism became the hegemonic economic discourse, but *after* the transition to late capitalism. It used postmodern aesthetics in a critical, radical manner.

It is my contention that the efficacy of postmodernism is contingent upon a certain level of dramatic irony – the reader knows something the characters do not, or the characters know something the audience does not. In a text, there are certain cultural narratives and scripts at play. However, if the reader is unaware of these narratives or is unaware of the fact that they are *narratives* at all, then the satirical, parodic, *ironic*, and critical nature of the postmodern text is lost. This is true of all irony; *A Modest Proposal* is only meaningful if the reader is aware it is irony. However, the stakes of this awareness are raised significantly when the awareness is contingent on history. If a text is

removed from its historical context, any ideologies it was meant to critique are allowed to continue, unfettered. To borrow vocabulary from contemporary ELA, every act of reading involves an interaction between the text, the reader, and the world. Ideally, this interaction can be classified as a transaction – each element exchanges something with the other two. Linking this to the vocabulary of this project, a full textual transaction would involve the reader historicizing the text, historicizing his or her interpretation of the text, and historicizing his or her place in the current social totality. This type of transaction would be a full knowledge of a text, its cultural scripts, and their histories. However, as the material reality becomes increasingly mediated, separated from our lived experiences and perceptions, this type of transaction becomes more and more rare.

Postmodernism seeks to expose the rarity of this transaction. By highlighting the “impossibility” of truth, postmodernism can expose how myths have invaded reality. However, if the reader is unaware of the gap between reality and myth, postmodernism loses its ability to be critical. This is precisely the goal of the pedagogical frame and its symptomatic readings – to conceal the possibility of truth. In horror movies, the audience knows the monster will kill the unsuspecting victim. The audience knows that the monster signifies danger. If the audience is unaware of that signification, they are unable to understand the overall situation in which the victim finds him or herself.

Slaughterhouse-Five was effective postmodernism because the readers were aware of the difference between the realities of war and the myths of war – it was published at the height of the anti-Vietnam movement. They knew something the characters seemed not to. After the rise of Ronald Reagan and the assertion of neoliberalism’s hegemony, the separation between myth and reality began to grow invisible. The gap between myth and

reality grows as myth is presented as the only way to understand reality – that one can only know pieces and never the totality. The pedagogical frame is, of course, partly to blame for this. It dehistoricizes literature, rehistoricizes world events, and presents myth as the only plausible way to interpret reality. Because postmodernism's radicality is based on dramatic irony, it becomes easy to use to enforce ruling class ideologies. The dramatic irony is erased – we cannot be surprised by what we cannot see. The irony now, of course, is that we are unaware of the irony that ensnares us. I shall argue that this same basic operation is true of Vietnam War literature in the classroom. The pedagogical frame delegitimizes, erases, and conceals the narratives that give *The Things They Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods* radical potential.

In upper class districts, *The Things They Carried* is dehistoricized through postmodern characteristics, and then rehistoricized with revisionist narratives. This creates the illusion of “critical thinking,” preparing these students for the demands of a globalized workplace. In lower class districts, this process of historicization typically stops at the identification of postmodern elements. Contradictions, in both cases, are explained away as postmodern ambivalence – the unknowability of the real. In the case of *In the Lake of the Woods*, PTSD supplants contradictions. In both cases, postmodern ideology and PTSD replace real contradictions and real material reality. Postmodern irony foregrounds the de/rehistoricization process, but without proper knowledge, this irony becomes pointless and loses its radical nature.

II. *The Things They Carried*

In one of the pre-packaged, Common Core Curricula adopted by numerous school districts across the US, like the upper class Bernards Township, *The Things They Carried* is included in a unit which promises several lofty goals, which, though previously quoted, are worth restating here:

Explore the nature of African American literature during the Civil Rights movement following World War II. Recognize the emergence of dynamic views represented in literary texts by first- and second-generation Americans. Explain how the Beat Generation challenged traditional forms and subjects in literature. Identify multiple postmodernist approaches to critical analyses of literature. Note the influence that postmodernism has had on the “common reader” (Bernards BOE).

The unit appears to stress the radical nature of American culture after World War II and to the present. After World War II, the 1960s and 70s had many movements for economic and social equality. Indeed, “never in American history had more movements for change been concentrated in so short a span of years” (Zinn 2015 539). However, to look further into the Common Core Curriculum is to find yet another example of the pedagogical frame replacing radicalism with centrism. Alongside a focus on “dynamic views,” “Civil Rights,” and “critical analyses,” the curriculum “emphasizes how a changing political landscape, exemplified in the words of leaders such as John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, shaped the world in which we live” (Bernards BOE). The implied association is wildly contradictory. Kennedy, upon taking office in 1961, continued the imperialist practices “of Truman and Eisenhower in Southeast Asia” (Zinn 2015 473). Reagan, to whom we will return later, was a central agent in the rise of neoliberalism. The two figures are nearly as far away from cultural dynamism and criticism as one can get. Yet, this one curriculum is indicative of how the pedagogical frame dehistoricizes *The Things They Carried* with two functions – focusing on postmodern aesthetics and

reducing the war into an historical abstraction. Rather interestingly, the pedagogical frame focusing on postmodernism is adopted by wealthy and impoverished schools alike. Poverty stricken schools are often forced to adopt prepackaged curricula, while wealthy schools can claim they are asking students to complete college level work using postmodern theorists.

As discussed with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a focus on aesthetic choices dehistoricizes the text and its content. In the case of Vietnam War literature, reviewers, critics, and schools have “paid scant attention to its political urgency, focusing instead upon its structural complexity and linguistic inventiveness” (Neilson 33). With the focus on identifying postmodern elements – usually taken from Jameson like parody and pastiche – the pedagogical frame turns the analysis of text into a scavenger hunt (Bernards BOE). The pedagogical frame also gives primacy and power to these elements. Neilson points out that critics have “repeatedly asserted the unknowability of Vietnam and have argued that Vietnam War texts should have a literary aesthetic that matches the war itself” (134). It is from this vantage that Neilson takes issue with O’Brien: “this stress on the epistemological problematic of history has tended to occlude historical knowledge and to place emphasis on literature for its own sake” (196). Neilson holds nothing but contempt for postmodernism and O’Brien’s deployment of it. To be sure, O’Brien is not radical. He uses a hegemonic mode of cultural production – postmodernism. Without an intense amount of historicization, his writing does little to criticize capitalism.

However, O’Brien himself has openly rejected such postmodern interpretations of his work. He said in 1984, even before the publication of *The Things They Carried* that, “Vietnam wasn’t an unreal experience, it wasn’t absurd. It was a cold-blooded, calculated

war” (quoted from Franklin 2001 35). While I agree with Neilson that O’Brien’s postmodernism is not particularly radical, I think Neilson fails to take into account the historical moment of the text, and the importance of denial and revisionism. Indeed, for O’Brien, “denial is an excruciatingly personal part of the Vietnam War” (Franklin 2001 35). When placed in the context of its publication in 1990, *The Things They Carried* becomes a critical of Vietnam revisionism and American imperialism through the postmodern aesthetics Neilson condemns. The efficacy of these aesthetics, however, is greatly reduced by the pedagogical frame because that frame occludes the narratives necessary for understanding. The pedagogical frame is based not on denial of American misdoing in Vietnam, but on outright erasure of the Vietnam War.

Vietnam Revisionism is the key to understanding the postmodern aesthetics of *The Things They Carried*. The pedagogical frame today is based on “as series of fantasies originally constructed from 1954 through the 1970s and the elaborated and embellished during the 1980s and 1990s” (Franklin 2001 27). These fantasies, which Franklin identifies, allowed the United States to invade Lebanon in 1982, Grenada in 1983, Iran in 1987, Panama in 1989, and, eventually, Iraq in 1990. The dominant interpretation of Vietnam *during* Vietnam had been driven out of dominance and into the realm of “radical” thought. By the time of the Reagan presidency, the same imperialistic tendencies that involved the US in Vietnam were neoliberal “common sense.” As George Dionisopoulos and Steven Goldzwig remind us, the Reagan administration looked to “sever past negative associations that suggested current policies in Central America could lead us into ‘another Vietnam’” (70). *The Things They Carried* is very much concerned with these constructed fantasies and the erasure of “Vietnam” in American culture.

The pedagogical frame conceals this erasure, despite O'Brien's preoccupation with memory, forgetting, and fantasy. Both the reader and O'Brien's awareness of revisionism is essential to the critical nature of O'Brien's work. However, nowhere in any curriculum are the official US interventions during the 1980s mentioned in relation to *The Things They Carried*, nor are the clandestine CIA operations in Cuba or Chile mentioned (Zinn 2015 554). This does not even bring into account the bombing of Laos and Cambodia under Nixon. Even under the "democratic" Carter, the US continued to support "regimes that engaged in imprisonment of dissenters, torture, and mass murder: in the Philippines, in Iran, in Nicaragua, and in Indonesia" (567). Diem is never mentioned, alluded to, or spoken of. Global US support to these "allies" included trade and exploitation. In fact, teaching *The Things They Carried* generally involves only postmodern elements or Vietnam fantasies at best. The pedagogical frame deploys the co-historical circuit. *The Things They Carried* is removed from its historical context through lack of content and a focus on aesthetics, only to be rehistoricized with Vietnam fantasies and myths. The pedagogical frame exploits the dramatic irony in the text – the soldiers know the cold, calculated horrors of war but we do not – in order to de/rehistoricize. Yet, a close look at "Speaking of Courage," "Style," "On the Rainy River," and "How to Tell a True War Story," reveal a concern with the reemergence of US imperial tendencies.

In "On the Rainy River," O'Brien attempts to remind readers of the "uncertain" reasons for the war. In the opening of the story, he suggests, "Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons. I saw no unity of purpose, no consensus on matters of philosophy or history or law. The very facts were shrouded in uncertainty" (O'Brien 2009 39). He proceeds to list several of the key American fantasies about the Vietnam War:

Was Ho Chi Min a communist stooge? Was this part of the “domino” theory? Was it a civil war? Was Tonkin a real justification? And so on. However, the fact that O’Brien phrases these myths as questions is crucial. The interplay between truth and fantasy is most apparent here – the reader is presented with precisely the truth and precisely the fantasy used to conceal that truth in the form of a question. A reader aware of Vietnam Revisionism knows the answer to these “questions,” while a reader who does not is still confronted with *questions*, not answers.

The pedagogical frame tends to leave these as questions, as part of the “unknowability” of truth in postmodernism. Indeed, O’Brien appears to agree when he states, “knowledge, of course, is always imperfect, *but it seemed to me that when a nation goes to war it must have reasonable confidence in the justice and imperative of its cause*” (O’Brien 2009 39 – emphasis added). The text proposes a postmodern answer, imperfect knowledge, only to reverse that answer with a historically based one. The “uncertain” causes fed to the public for Vietnam and later wars are either: a) uncertain and therefore unjustified, or b) certain but without any link to “justice.” The next line, however, is perfect material for the pedagogical frame to reduce war to an abstract function: “Once people are dead, you can’t make them undead” (39). Middle and lower class districts like Windsor Public Schools use *Things They Carried* to simply say “war is bad” by having students read several war narratives – many of them examined in this project – and then write a journal as a soldier to examine how writing can “help heal trauma” (Windsor BOE). More commonly, districts use standalone excerpts of the text and other war texts to compare war experiences in relation to trauma. However, besides reducing war to a single experience of trauma, the pedagogical frame often reduces *all* traumatic

experiences to one – like the removal of Native Americans to trench soldiers in World War I (Worth County DOE). The same passage in the text has the ability to both historicize and dehistoricize, depending on how the pedagogical frame is deployed. Should the text be historicized with the Vietnamese narrative – the invasion of the US, the use of Diem as a dictator, the massacre of innocents – the passage has a very different meaning. The pedagogical frame, however, excludes this information, focusing instead on the traumatic experiences of *American* soldiers.

It goes without saying that US entrance into Vietnam was less about “a war to stop the communists, plain and simple,” than about protecting US markets in Asia and the rubber production capabilities of Vietnam (O’Brien 2009 43). The same market protection interests were at play in the US invasion of Central America in the 1980s. Rather than an Open Door Policy as in China, the US wanted to employ a Closed Door Policy, allowing the US to maintain hegemonic market dominance over the exploitation of labor and raw materials in Central and South America. As Zinn states, “revolutions in Nicaragua or Cuba or El Salvador or Chile were threats to United Fruit, Anaconda Copper, International Telephone and Telegraph, and others” (Zinn 2015 593). Throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, it was the “classical imperial situation, where the places with natural wealth became victims of more powerful nations” (569).

During the Cold War, this imperialism was cloaked in ideology. The United States claimed that it had to stop the threat of communism. Reagan’s attack on the Sandinistas was justified by calling it a “‘Communist’ threat, but even more important, a challenge to the long US control over governments in Central America” (585). A communist “threat” meant the closure of markets, which meant that the US could no

longer exploit the people and resources of the country. However, the lack of public outcry or knowledge of these causes, especially today, are evident in O'Brien's near allegorical condemnation of "the double line of defense of the American Establishment. The first defense is to deny the truth" (Zinn 2015 586). Indeed, motives and details were kept from the public, both through clandestine CIA operations – like the Iran-Contra Affair and most actions in Nicaragua – and the blacking out of media outlets. As Franklin suggests, after the Vietnam War, the US military denied media access, and "journalists were forced to depend on military briefings, where they were often fed deliberately falsified information" (Franklin 2001 22). This contributed to the mediation of truth from reality – there was an ever-greater chasm growing. Indeed, photographers were banned from the invasions of Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989 (18). During the Gulf War in 1990, Dick Cheney "refused to allow journalists to accompany them" (22). The Establishment had learned from Vietnam that allowing the public to see the war would lead to protest.

In "On the Rainy River," O'Brien condemns these practices in an almost allegorical manner. After he receives his draft notice, he turns on the people in his town:

They didn't know Bao Dai from the man in the moon. They *didn't know history*. They didn't know the first thing about Diem's tyranny, or the nature of Vietnamese nationalism, or the long colonialism of the French – this was all too damned complicated, it required some reading... (43– emphasis added)

O'Brien is engaging in a critique of laziness of looking at historical reality. This critique entails both the context of the Vietnam War and the historical moments afterwards. The pedagogical frame erases Diem and how the "United States moved quickly to prevent

unification and to establish South Vietnam as an American sphere” by setting up Diem as president (Zinn 2015 472). Diem, a staunch Catholic amongst a majority of Buddhists, swiftly “replaced locally selected provincial chiefs with his own men,” earning the contempt of the Vietnamese citizenry (472). Hated by citizens, Diem was becoming “an embarrassment, an obstacle to effective control over Vietnam” (475). The CIA quickly put him down. Yet, the pedagogical frame makes no mention of this, instead, focusing on the “unknowability” of truth. The irony of a town that “did not know shit about shit, and did not care to know” during the very event it chooses to ignore loses its fangs when the readership does not understand the event either (O’Brien 2009 137). The town acts as a synecdoche for the US, past and present.

However, *The Things They Carried* when presented by the pedagogical frame goes beyond simple ignorance and laziness, into the outright rejection of history. O’Brien notes that “the town could not talk, and would not listen. ‘How’d you like to hear about the war,’ he might have asked, but the place could only blink and shrug. It had no memory, therefore no guilt” (O’Brien 2009 137). The town, as a synecdoche for the US, has no memory. Citizens have forgotten events as they happen. The word “could” implies the inability to know. This instantaneous forgetting is linked to flexible accumulation and the “throwaway” culture and planned obsolescence of late capitalism. O’Brien opens up a path for historicized critique of the rejection of historical truth by the public. Indeed, myth is increasingly presented as being the only possible way of understanding the world. The public has very little choice in the matter, as any other modes of understanding are delegitimized or concealed. *The Things They Carried* can become radicalized, given the proper historicization. Indeed, “in the end, of course, a true war story is never about

war... It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow. It's about sisters who never write back and *people who never listen*" (81 – emphasis added). War, since Vietnam, is about *forgetting* and *denying*, not healing. This postmodern amnesia, as Timothy Melley calls it, is effective as a method of critique only if the reader understands what information is missing.

O'Brien's explication of "story-truth" and "happening-truth," as evidenced by the Neilson-Clarke debate, can simultaneously open pathways for historicization and shut those same pathways off, depending on the pedagogical frame. The controversial phrase, "Story-truth is sometimes truer than happening-truth," is representative of "real truth" being truer than "official" truth (171). Indeed, the "official" Vietnam narrative is little more than neoliberal fantasy and revisionism. When O'Brien suggests, "it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening," the reader can chalk this up to postmodern ambivalence – as the pedagogical frame does – or examine the material relations that influence this (O'Brien 2009 67). In terms of military reality, the media blackout after the Vietnam War and the mediation of reality, this is an easy examination. In the political economy, the flexibility of late capitalism and extension of ISAs to all quadrants of life make image and reality difficult to separate. For the Vietnam War, what seems to happen replaces actual happening: "In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be skeptical. It's a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't" (68). The absurd becomes the "real" and the real becomes absurd. Even though O'Brien attempts to call attention to contradictions – "the truths are often contradictory" – this call becomes just another postmodern element to point out (77).

Though *The Things They Carried* may not be a radical text, it contains pathways for radical historicization and critique. Indeed, “what stories can do, I guess, is make things present” (O’Brien 2009 172). Narrative, even postmodern narrative, can bring history to the forefront. If I may take a cue from Derrida, the very absence of a historical context alerts us to its presence. However, its presence must be uncovered – the efficacy of *The Things They Carried* now only exists if the reader chooses to look for the information to which it alludes. Yet, “stories can save us” (213). Stories can alert us to gaps in our knowledge, to open pathways to historical fact, to material relations. All of *The Things They Carried* is an attempt of the present to reconcile its past, just “Tim trying to save Timmy’s life with a story” (233).

III. *In the Lake of the Woods*

In the Lake of the Woods occupies different territory in the pedagogical frame. While there is intense scholarly debate about *The Things They Carried*, *In the Lake of the Woods* is mostly overlooked by scholars, but very frequently taught. Most articles and books dealing with the text deal with it in the same way as most curricula – through the lens of PTSD. It is my contention that *In the Lake of the Woods* has similar radical potential to *The Things They Carried*. However, we are again faced with the fact that irony is only effective as a critical tool if we know something the characters do not or vice versa. When Melley suggests that the US has collective postmodern amnesia, we must remember that the irony of a society in collective denial is only effective if that society is aware of both what it denies and the act of denial. As such, *In the Lake of the Woods* is far less critical than *The Things They Carried* because its use of American myths to point out denial is only historically useful if the reader is aware of these myths

as such. The pedagogical frame conceals this denial, makes the myths either fact or forgotten. Indeed, perhaps the readily concealable denial has made *In the Lake of the Woods* so popular in the United States education system.

The act of “collective forgetting” inhabits all curricular manifestations of *In the Lake of the Woods* and *The Things They Carried*. Teaching these texts can be revelatory for students, but popular methods avoid going beyond the work itself, removing it from both its content and its context – in essence, removing it from its content about the Vietnam War and its context in a newly globalized, neoliberal economy. Doing so reinforces the demand for an expanded war economy, for privatized labor. *The Things They Carried*, is typically dehistoricized and rehistoricized, chalking up contradictions to postmodern ambivalence, reinforcing the acceptance of late capitalist ideology. The text leaves entry points for historicization; the pedagogical frame conceals but does not explain the contradictions. The pedagogical frame primarily dehistoricizes *In the Lake of the Woods*, and explains the contradictions through the scapegoat of PTSD. In doing so, contradictions are more difficult to pinpoint, to historicize. The focus on PTSD enacts the liberal humanist ideology, making “war” the enemy – as such, R&D, MIC, and privatized labor are expanded to avoid sending “good American” boys to war.

Indeed, on the eve of publication of *In the Lake of the Woods* in 1994, O’Brien commented that, “evil has no place, it seems, in our national mythology. We erase it. We use ellipses. We salute ourselves and take pride in America the White Knight, America the Lone Ranger, America's sleek laser-guided weaponry beating up on Saddam and his legion of devils” (“Vietnam in Me”). These national mythologies are perpetuated by and through the pedagogical frame. “Evil” becomes a metaphysical supposition, when in

reality, O'Brien is clearly referring to American treatment of the Vietnamese as evil. For O'Brien, evil is not metaphysical or transcendent, but historically contingent. However, myths have overtaken history, and his texts. These mythologies make "war" in the abstract the enemy, "evil" something the US alone can combat, concealing the class contradictions and material relations that produce the war and the text. War in the abstract gives cause for the "confidence in 'smart bombs' sparing civilians," despite the fact that "40% of the laser-guided bombs dropped in Operation Desert Storm missed their targets" (Zinn 2015 597). The pedagogical frame justifies technowar, allowing for a perpetual war, and a perpetual war economy.

Since the Vietnam War, neoliberal tendencies have attempted to make war in the abstract the enemy, rather than Vietnam. In fact, in his 1989 inaugural speech, Bush "explicitly blamed 'Vietnam' for all the 'divisiveness' in America.... meticulously reversing the roles of victims and victimizers" (Franklin 2013). During the Vietnam War, the public outcry against American involvement rose as more troops were deployed. Vietnam, as the first war to be televised, allowed "glimpses of the war's reality [that] were so horrendous and so influential that these images have been scapegoated as one of the main causes of the United States' defeat" (Franklin 1994 56). Since then, the neoliberal machine has spent enormous energy rewriting the story of Vietnam; the reality of the Vietnam War was replaced by the image of the Vietnam War. Vietnam revisionism allowed three effects: 1) greater concealment of US imperial tendencies through restricted media, 2) emphasis on the "humanist" enterprise of technowar, and 3) make war a villain, rather than a symptom of capitalism. Vietnam became, "merely an uninhabited jungle that for inscrutable reasons shoots at nice American boys who happen

to be passing through” (Franklin 2013). Indeed, the blame is placed on *war* rather than the conditions that created it. Wars can be carried out around the globe without attracting the attention of citizens, because there are fewer soldiers involved. Wars can be carried out by guided missiles, drones, and rebranded versions of “Vietnamization”.

As for John Wade, he exploits this image in which “the Vietnam Veteran has acquired an almost mythic stature, where he is seen as the ‘survivor-as-hero,’ who fought under insane conditions in Vietnam and then rebuilt his life in an ungrateful America” (Dean 60). During the war, Wade “sometimes imagined returning home a hero, looking spiffy in a crisp new uniform, smiling at the crowds and carrying himself with appropriate modesty and decorum. And it was also true that uniforms got people elected” (O’Brien 2006 36). However, the myth of the Vietnam veteran is contingent on Vietnam revisionism. The image of the “spat-upon veteran then became a mythic figure used to build support for military fervor and, later on, the Gulf War” (Franklin 2001 62). This figure did not emerge until the 1970s, so by the time of the book’s publication and setting, the image would have become intelligible as truth. The broken, unwanted veteran becomes a lynchpin for the perpetuation of technowar and an expanded military economy.

The pedagogical frame propagates the primacy of PTSD as an abstract condition caused by an abstract war without contradiction. The pedagogical frame provides a false solution to the problem of PTSD – eliminate the need for soldiers in the war. War becomes the enemy according to neoliberal ideology: “open-ended myths of national victimhood can offer general warnings against outside threats without identifying any specific enemy” (Benner 136). In the curricula examined, learning objectives perpetuate

this diversion. Bernards Township asks students to “identify symptoms of PTSD and evaluate its effect on individuals and families” through examining veteran interviews about PTSD (Bernards BOE). Hillsborough’s main objective for *In the Lake of the Woods* is to “understand how the soldier comes to see brotherhood, identity, and courage,” despite being a class on “War Literature” (Hillsborough BOE). Neither of these objectives involve examining the causes of PTSD nor the circumstances that create the possibility of PTSD, only the disorder in abstract terms. Once again, the pedagogical frame dehistoricizes trauma, makes it an abstract notion rather than a historically conditioned disorder. Similarly, the questions students should be able to answer by the end of the unit continue the personified war dynamic. Students should answer the question, “How does war shape and change a soldier’s personality?” (Bernards BOE). Similarly, Montgomery High School does not even deal with trauma, but asks, “what personal qualities can help people improve their social or economic situations?” (Montgomery BOE). Upper class curricula do not lie about PTSD or war, but instead *dehistoricize* them into blind universality.

The Vietnam War is not only to blame for Wade’s psychological collapse, but also his nature. My Lai seems to be the trigger for Wade’s “postmodern amnesia,” as Melley names it, but his mental instability catalyzed in his youth. As Eleanor Wade mentions, “it wasn’t just the war that made him what he was. That’s too easy. It was everything – his whole nature” (O’Brien 2006 27). Wade’s post-traumatic stress disorder is clear; he repeatedly relives moments in the My Lai massacre and in his childhood. Verbally abused by his alcoholic father, Wade’s involvement in Vietnam, to the reader, is the triggering circumstance. Indeed, the image of the Vietnam veteran was born when

“critics of the war attempted to show that the *war* was doing psychological damage to troops, who were supposedly haunted by guilt from war experiences,” despite the fact that many veterans were “well-adjusted and untroubled by the war” (Dean 68). O’Brien, in enmeshing “the distinct traumas of John Wade’s life,” like Wade, exploits this image without confronting the reality of it (Melley 118). By antagonizing the Vietnam War as the corrupter of soldiers, *In the Lake of the Woods* perpetuates the illusion of a mythic military. The reality, however, is that the MIC is directly responsible for trauma inflicted on soldiers.

Turse argues that civilian casualties and abuse were not isolated to My Lai, but the product of widespread policies that embraced war crimes. Soldiers were indoctrinated into these policies during boot camp, which was designed to strip away humanity “through shock, separation, and physical and psychological stress, creating a tabula rasa on which a military imprint could be stamped” (26). O’Brien makes no mention of this, diverting the stressors on Wade onto war and his childhood. However, during the Vietnam War:

Recruits were also indoctrinated into a culture of violence and brutality, which emphasized above all a readiness to kill without compunction. Like many soldiers, the Vietnam-era draftee Peter Milord told Appy that at first he only mouthed the violent chants during his army training – ‘Kill! Kill! Kill! To kill without mercy is the spirit of the bayonet!’ – but later found himself being overtaken by the ethos. ‘I didn’t become a robot,’ Milord said, ‘but you can get so close to being one it’s frightening.’ Another veteran put it this way: ‘For eleven months I was trained to kill. For eight weeks, during basic training, I screamed ‘kill, kill.’ So when I got to Vietnam I was ready to kill.’ Still another told me that after having chanted ‘kill, kill, kill’ through basic training, advanced infantry training, and long-range reconnaissance patrol instruction, he felt absolutely ‘brainwashed.’ (27)

John Wade was most certainly indoctrinated in this same way, but it is never mentioned. It is moment like this when the historical efficacy of *In the Lake of the Woods*, like *The Things They Carried*, is contingent on a *pre-revision* set of facts. The reader must know what Wade's training was like to understand his trauma, but the horror of training has disappeared from collective memory. By 1994, the year of publication, the public had accepted revisionist narratives. Similarly, by 1986, the setting of the book, Reagan's revisionist rhetoric was in full swing, and essential to containing public image of the newly-breaking Iran-Contra Affair. The outrage the public feels toward Wade's participation in My Lai demonstrates the efficacy of revisionism. Indeed, veterans consistently denounced the role of the US in Vietnam, and even government higher ups admit that "every unit of brigade size has its My Lai hidden some place" (Zinn 2015 479). Yet only Wade's involvement in My Lai is mentioned as a trigger of his PTSD. Again, this gap in narrative – Wade's time in training – could be used as an entry point of study, even furthering the idea of repression in the text. Turse is radical; O'Brien is not. Turse's work offers a set of historical facts that can make O'Brien's work radical. As such, the pedagogical frame must necessarily exclude authors like Turse – they would make the readers aware of their own unawareness.

The pedagogical frame surrounding *In the Lake of the Woods* perpetuates the narrative that the My Lai Massacre was simply the result of "a few bad apples" despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Civilian suffering was not the result of a few traumatized and confused soldiers like John Wade, but the "inevitable outcome of deliberate policies, dictated at the highest levels of the military" (Turse 6). Despite the fact that "the novel makes the My Lai Massacre a crucial nexus between what O'Brien

calls ‘story truth’ and ‘happening truth,’ and a devastating revelation the horrors America is inflicting on the world and itself,” the My Lai Massacre remains only a portion of the widespread policies of overkill (Franklin 2013). *In the Lake of the Woods* only describes the My Lai Massacre. While Wade cannot “recall his actions on the night of Kathy’s disappearance, he does remember the intensely traumatic events at Thuan Yen, where he ran from the butchery of his comrades” (Melley 116). While *In the Lake of the Woods* mentions other war crimes in passing, the text devotes a majority of its time to the My Lai Massacre and its aftermath.

While these brief allusions could open ways to historicization, the pedagogical frame remains a tool of the scholastic ISA, adopting “official” narratives – myths. The Pentagon’s “strategy centered on portraying My Lai as a one off aberration” and enforced this narrative by blaming Lieutenant Calley (230). Even Howard Zinn mentions only this massacre, not the widespread nature of abuse. The military blamed Calley for the massacre to avoid “sully[ing] the reputation of the army’s academy trained top ranks” (227). The “few bad apples” narrative conceals reality. Rather than confronting this, the pedagogical frame dehistoricizes *In the Lake of the Woods* thereby reinforcing that narrative. In fact, out of over thirty content topics in the curricula studied, only one mentions My Lai and two mention Vietnam: “Vietnam War and My Lai Massacre” (Bernards BOE). Furthermore, the curricula reinforce Calley as the persuasive force behind the massacre.

O’Brien depicts Calley as the sole perpetrator of the My Lai Massacre as well. During one of the vivid scenes of the massacre, “Two or three men were crying. Others couldn’t remember how. ‘Kill Nam,’ said Lieutenant Calley” (*Lake of the Woods* 103).

He is one of the few soldiers who maintained composure during the killing. The text later depicts him commanding the troops: “‘Jeez, come on,’ the lieutenant said, ‘get with it – move – light up these fuckers’” (107). Indeed, Calley is also the force of repression. During the infamous torture scene in which he holds flies over Richard Thinbill’s ears and mouth, Calley’s actions illuminate the attempted cover-up; he says, “You hear this? Fuckin’ flies. They’re claiming something criminal happened here. Big noisy rumor. Anybody else hear it?” (210). However, Calley was following orders from Ernest Medina and Thomas Willingham (Turse 139). Even a cursory understanding of the historical context of Operation Speedy Express or Operation Phoenix would reveal the extent of US war crimes. However, the pedagogical frame uses My Lai as a stand in and smokescreen for these crimes. Even the Peers panel “blamed Colonel Oran Henderson, the commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade, both for failing to stop the slaughter and *for filing false reports about it afterward*” (229 – emphasis added). Yet, the Pentagon prevented the panel from publishing its report. In this moment, the collusion of the political and scholastic ISAs is seamless.

Not only was Calley not solely responsible for the massacre: the cover-up was not his alone either. Yet, the curricular units ignore this fact or dehistoricize the massacre. The Bernards Township curriculum states, as a key learning objective, that students “Compare/contrast Lieutenant Calley’s ability to manipulate his soldiers to participate in the My Lai massacre with Patrick Henry’s” during his famous “Give me liberty or give me death” speech (Bernards BOE). Reductive in its approach, the curriculum promotes the canonization and dehistoricization, of the texts it selects. Suppressing textual temporality reproduces the values of the culture doing the suppressing. The pedagogical

frame dehistoricizes through reductionism and comparison, only to rehistoricize with American myths – the co-historical circuit. Teaching *In the Lake of the Woods* in this manner advocates for the “few bad apples” narrative, and distracts from the systemic nature of civilian suffering.

In the Lake of the Woods through the pedagogical frame glosses over most American war crimes including mass civilian murder, rape, the use of inhumane chemical warfare, and the mutilation of the dead or dying. Turse reveals several other large-scale massacres committed by the American military. In October of 1967, Lieutenant Maynard ordered the destruction of Trieu Ai (39). In all, there were twelve civilian deaths and countless civilians became refugees as their homes and land were burned (39). Despite all this, Maynard, who ordered the murder of children for “growing up VC,” was convicted of “nothing more serious than failing to properly report the incident in the village” (38). Turse goes on to describe Operation Speedy Express, orchestrated by Major General Julian Ewell in the Mekong Delta, responsible for an estimated 10,000 casualties, most of them civilians (253). Yet, he was convicted of nothing, and Speedy Express remains mostly unknown to the American public. In fact, Ewell was commissioned by the army to document his methods in a book, titled *Sharpening the Combat Edge*, which failed to “even mention Speedy Express by name” (257). As Tim O’Brien argues:

All this is history. Dead as those dead women and kids. Even at the time, most Americans seemed to shrug it off as a cruel, nasty, inevitable consequence of war. There were numerous excuses, numerous rationalizations.... Evil has no place, it seems, in our national mythology. We erase it. We use ellipses. We salute ourselves. (O’Brien 1994)

The only narrative schools tell through *In the Lake of the Woods* is the story of Rusty Calley perverting his men to kill civilians. Because the reader is unaware of any other

narrative, this narrative becomes the only narrative. Once again, the irony meant to make postmodernism radical – and did once – becomes its downfall.

The narratives “a few bad apples” and “the broken veteran,” perpetuate the fantasy of a perfected technowar. These narratives evoke nationalism and humanism. No citizen wants his or her nation to suffer because of war. One of the main goals of political hawks “was to create the impression of a ‘clean’ technowar – almost devoid of human suffering and death, conducted with surgical precision by wondrous mechanisms” (Franklin 1994 63). The televised aspect of the Vietnam War aided in this fantasy. Televised scenes of suffering *demanded* that the public fight a “more humanitarian” war, dependent on technology. Indeed, “by the mid-1960s, the American military had turned war making into a thoroughly corporatized, quantitatively oriented system... by combining American technological and economic prowess with sophisticated managerial capacities, the Pentagon meant to guarantee ultimate success on the battlefield” (Turse 2013 41).

The military wanted quantifiable data suggesting progress – body counts, square miles taken, square miles burned, prisoners taken. The point was to win the war by the “application of massive firepower” by technological innovations (Turse 2013 233). These innovations included pineapple grenades, Agent Orange, airstrikes, intelligence gathering, and even nuclear weapons: “under the spell of technological fetishism, some imagined a final solution to the Vietnam problem in the form of that ultimate technological fix: nuclear weapons” (Franklin 1990 344). The fantasy of a technowar without American civilian casualties “helped to reconstruct domestic support for the use of force” and promised to “keep American costs low” (Casey). If there were no boots on

the ground, there could be no trauma to troops; if there were no boots on the ground, there could be no bad apples to commit atrocity. Illusions of nationalism and humanism spring forth from the spectacle of a “clean” technowar, in which casualties are invisible or foreign. Technological fantasies pushed the anti-war public to support, or at least tolerate, a war “employing capital as a substitute for military labor” (Caverley 120). Beyond the clear ideological benefit of the perfected technowar, it was also in the best interest of neoliberal capitalism.

In the Lake of the Woods is based on the processes of forgetting and remembering. Wade’s amnesia, Wade’s cover-up, testimonies, and evidence are all modes of memory. John Wade’s forgetting is, to some extent, legitimized by trauma: “He gave himself over to forgetfulness. ‘Go away,’ he murmured. He waited a moment, then said it again, firmly, much louder, and the little village began to vanish in its own rosy glow” (O’Brien 2006 108). Wade engages in the denial of My Lai, thinking that, “This could not have happened. Therefore it did not” (109). Indeed, the reader legitimizes Wade’s forgetting – as a “broken veteran,” his PTSD is an excusable trauma. Amnesia and lost time are symptoms of PTSD, present at all parts of the text. After Kathy’s disappearance, John had a hard time coming up with a “neat chronology of those last hours together. The images did not connect” (130). Yet, the military further legitimizes this forgetting.

Despite their differences, O’Brien and Turse would both agree that even though John was doing some of the cover up, “at higher levels... such documents were being redrafted, other such facts neatly doctored” (269). It is no mistake that O’Brien uses the passive voice here – the doer of the cover-up is concealed, the military protected. Yet,

Wade's forgetting is "not simply an interesting individual anomaly but a way of representing the status of collective memory in contemporary American culture" (Melley 121). In *In the Lake of the Woods*, "O'Brien depicts an entire society committed to the forms of forgetting and 'deniability' that have defined American political leadership since the presidency of Ronald Reagan" (121). For the US, as for John Wade, forgetting allows progress. John was no longer tethered to the trauma of his past, allowing him to climb up the political ladder. His rise is only stopped by the *reentrance* of memory, when Durkee exposes his presence during the My Lai Massacre. Tony Carbo reminds John that "certain secrets had been betrayed – ambush politics" (O'Brien 2006 48). During Bush's inaugural speech, he claimed, "the final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by memory" (Franklin 2013). Collective, cultural forgetting preserves the national narrative – citizens can be proud Americans if they believe a mythologized national narrative.

Curricula for *In the Lake of the Woods* either perpetuate the futility of truth or actively replace it with false universality. Montgomery Township views human nature as an autonomous entity, asking students to understand the "universality of human nature past and present" (Montgomery BOE). This illusion of universality allows a brand of determinism: greed will always exist, people will always be violent, death, taxes, etc. Indeed, the best way to ensure obedience to an established order is to naturalize that order, to make it appear futile to fight against. Again, Montgomery wants students to know that "fiction, while 'not true,' reflects the human experience with as much validity as nonfiction" (Montgomery BOE). But "story-truth" validity only tells a portion of a given narrative. The "truth" for John Wade is not the "truth" for the man he shot or the

civilians of Trieu Ai. Schools reproduce the ideology of experience-as-truth and, in doing so, actively create illusionary relations to real relations of production. The act of mystification is complete upon the canonization of a text. Indeed, every curricula asked students to focus on theme, writing style, and “postmodern topics” (Bernards BOE). The pedagogical frame thoroughly dehistoricizes *In the Lake of the Woods* and explains away contradictions with PTSD. Any potential for a confrontation with false consciousness disappears in the classroom, and O’Brien’s work is closed. Rather than acting as a door to open up the atrocities of Vietnam, *In the Lake of the Woods* is dehistoricized by the pedagogical frame, maintaining a humanist desire for technowar.

IV. Conclusion

More than any other war discussed in this project, Vietnam is the most obvious in its design – imperialistic, exploitive, and concealed. It was the war that sparked the greatest reaction against it, and the greatest reaction against those who opposed it. The crackdown on student protests and the arrest of leftist sympathizers are just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. The literature that came out of it, therefore, had to be the most radically defanged, and so it was. The strategies used to “win” the war, and the strategies to conceal it, would be reproduced and enhanced in every US conflict since then. It was, and is, a lynchpin war.

Study Questions:

1. Is irony an effective method of critique? Why?
2. Is irony truly the central trope of late capitalism? If so, has late capitalism mediated it as a method of critique? When and how?

3. In what ways does neoliberalism circumvent critique?
4. Should *The Things They Carried* be taught in parts or as a whole? Why?
5. How can *The Things They Carried* be connected to current US wars without succumbing to blind universality?
6. Would *The Things They Carried* be more “radical” if it were published earlier?
7. Does John Wade abuse the Vietnam veteran myth, or has he convinced himself of it?
8. In what ways are technowar and Vietnamization contradictory to humanism?
9. Can we consider *In the Lake of the Woods* to be allegorical? If so, how?
10. How can these texts be effectively historicized without accusations of “politicizing” education?

IV. Praxis: Notes for the Pedagogical Front Lines

“But, if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to *ruthless criticism* of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.”

-Karl Marx

“Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience.”

-Howard Zinn

I. Introduction

As US operations expand in the Middle East and Africa, the driving questions of this project become of the utmost importance. Indeed, under President Obama, “operations in Africa have accelerated,” and we should anticipate the same to occur under Donald Trump (Turse 2015 13). The “War on Terror” has become ideological justification for increased imperialism, moving the US into “South Asia (primarily Afghanistan), the Middle East (primarily Iraq), and the Horn of Africa” (14). The permanent arms economy has become reality, even if that reality is concealed from the public.

Even as the US attempts to “Vietnamize” Iraq by training troops, the damage has been done. Much like the Marshall Plan, the destabilization of the Middle East has presented US interests with great opportunity for investment and accumulation, imposing neoliberal conditions of foreign aid and assistance. Besides the raw materials the Middle

East, Africa, and Asia provide, destabilization also puts countries in debt to the US politically and economically. Africa has become increasingly unstable. As Nick Turse reports:

Recent history indicates that as US ‘stability’ operations in Africa have increased, militancy has spread, insurgent groups have proliferated, allies have faltered or committed abuses, terrorism has increased, the number of failed states has risen, and the continent has become more unsettled. (Turse 2015 22)

This instability creates an important antinomy for the US. As Western imperialism spreads, so does defiance against it. In the case of Africa, Western imperialism has created radical conservative movements like Boko Haram, LRA, Ansar al-Dine, al-Shabaab, and the infamous ISL. Such opposition threatens the expansion of capitalism while still opening up markets for capital to exploit. The instability in Africa is both a blessing and a curse for capitalism. Old connections between racism, capitalism, and anticommunism are made new again, allowing for the election of conservative populists and members of the radical right. War is inevitable, much to the benefit of the ruling class, and the detriment of the masses.

While right-wing groups in Africa and the Middle East confront imperialism, left-of-center groups in the US have also grown; however, this is not necessarily a good thing. Liberals, though they may mean well, inadvertently perpetuate neoliberal tendencies by not attacking capitalism at its roots, only symptoms of it like racism, sexism, or class disparity. This is, of course, not to dismiss the benefits of a growing left-wing, but it is a still a moment of fluidity for anyone left-of-center⁵. The sort of “Bernie-Sanders-Socialism” that has gained popularity with millennials is important to the left, and the

⁵ For more information on the evolution of the left, see *The Communist Horizon* by Jodi Dean.

varying definitions of “socialism” are an important area of discussion for all leftists; however, the fluid nature of this moment runs the risk of falling right back into “business as usual” liberalism. Over the past decade, liberals have demanded more humanized war – fewer civilian casualties. This, of course, does not mean fewer wars; it only means the concealment of them, especially where proliferating Special Forces are involved. Drone strikes increased exponentially in Obama’s liberal administration. In 2012, “it was revealed that the Department of Defense has identified 110 potential bases for drone operations at military installations in the United States alone” (Turse 2012 22). Worldwide, there are over 60 confirmed drone bases (23). Besides drone strikes, the US frequently trains the soldiers of other countries, establishing numerous proxy wars. In 2012 alone, the US engaged in “counterterrorism training” and “joint-training exercises” in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Tunisia, Morocco, Cameroon, Gabon, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Nigeria, and Iraq (Turse 2015 16). War is everywhere, even if we could not name it on a map.

It has become ever more essential for State Apparatuses, both Ideological and Repressive, to support capitalist interests. The expansion of capitalism and the exploitation of labor have to be concealed or justified at all costs. Schools in the US are becoming increasingly regulated, privatized, and controlled. Now, more than ever, teachers must fight back. The educational ISA need not be under the employ of the State – at least not all the time. Although the school is an arm of capitalist state ideology, it is still a site of struggle. Schools can be a site of struggle. Teachers can expose elements of interpellation and ideology that can be exposed, subverted, and opposed. Indeed, with the

right tools, students can reach conclusions about capitalism on their own. What matters is that teachers defy control of the ISA by whatever means necessary.

II. Alternative Curriculum

Throughout this project, I pored over more curricula than I care to count. I searched statewide, nationwide, and internationally. In what follows, I present some elements of an alternative curriculum, one that opposes capitalist ideology to the best of my ability to conceive this opposition in a school context. Though certainly not the most radical of pedagogies, the tools I present are meant to allow teachers to revolt within the school. These tools should be constantly updated and modified for the particular needs of each set of students or the context of the district. For example, as literature of the Gulf War and Iraq War begins to emerge – or become more acceptable – it should be examined with the set of tools I propose in this conclusion.

a. Essential Questions

These are the starting points from which students can begin to criticize the world around them. Some scholars may scoff at teacher-generated questions as being too “top-down.” However, in a world where reality is replaced by myth, there has to be a foothold.

1. Who benefits from war?
2. Why does the US get involved in wars today?
3. Can a war be totally “just”?
4. Why do we read about war?
5. What does literature reveal about war?

6. What else do we need to know about historical reality that is behind and between the lines of any piece of war literature?

Applying any of these questions to a text or set of texts can begin the process of inquiry into capitalism and war.

b. Required Reading

The following texts are recommended based on my own experiences in teaching and writing. I have divided these recommendations into those appropriate for teachers and students.

a. Teachers

These texts are essential for radical teachers. They provide a base for understanding the current state of the profession and the history of the texts they teach.

i. *Brief History of Neoliberalism* by David Harvey

Though I would recommend any book by David Harvey, *Brief History* is essential reading. It details the global history of neoliberalism, while defining it for the reader. The importance of understanding the history and characteristics of neoliberalism is ever more crucial as it solidifies its hegemony.

ii. *People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn

Perhaps the most well-known title on this list, *People's History* offers an easy to read entry to the untold history of the US. I have frequently used excerpts with high school students to

historicize readings like “Harrison Bergeron,” *The Crucible*, and others. Though it is a biting critique of American ideologies, it is not so radical as to raise suspicion. I have left it open to critique by students as well. Generally, students find that Zinn is not radical enough.

iii. *Kill Anything That Moves* by Nick Turse

The book that started it all. When I began doing research to aid in teaching *In the Lake of the Woods*, I picked up this book. What I read disturbed me, mostly because I was confronted with own staggering ignorance. Excerpts work well with O’Brien, opening his texts up for clear historicization.

iv. *The Changing Face of Empire* by Nick Turse

Clocking in at fewer than 100 pages, *The Changing Face of Empire* is a powerhouse. Turse exposes current US imperialism around the globe and the tactics the military uses to conceal its operations. The text is highly critical of Obama’s foreign policy, and rightfully so given the drone strikes, airstrikes, proxy wars, and clandestine operations.

v. *Dialectical Investigations* Bertell Ollman

Ollman’s discussions and examples of dialectical thinking provided much needed vocabulary for this project and the machinations of the pedagogical frame.

vi. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* by Louis Althusser

Like *Kill Anything that Moves*, this text started this project.

Though I have come to disagree with some of Althusser's assertions about ideology, his analysis of what makes the reproduction of capitalism possible has been invaluable.

b. Students

Though I would prefer a more diverse lineup of texts, the ones below are "safe" in most districts. They hold enough "literary merit" to be accepted.

i. *Young People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn

A suitable substitute for younger readers, this is a rewriting of *People's History* for children. I have used it to moderate success with middle school students. In the translation into a lower reading level, some punches are pulled. However, it still gets the original point across: in American history, there is much more than you think you know.

ii. *On War* by Howard Zinn

Zinn's collection of essays about war makes for perfect student reading. It is a much more focused alternative to *People's History*. Yet, *On War* is wildly helpful at getting students to ask meaningful questions about who benefits from war and what really causes war. I would recommend opening a unit on a war novel with a selection from this collection, then move to *People's History* if applicable.

iii. *The Complex* by Nick Turse

Turse's writing is clear, concise, and well researched. *The Complex* offers a rather terrifying look into the ways militarization has been naturalized in the US. Some of the more applicable examples are the use of video games to train soldiers and the school to military pipeline in poverty-stricken schools. Students connect to parts of this text in unexpected ways. I recommend this book to reluctant male readers frequently.

iv. *Quiet American* by Graham Greene

This book has been a successful recommendation to both male and female students. I will never forget one of my students asking, "Holy shit, did all this really happen?" I referred her to *Kill Anything that Moves* soon afterwards.

v. *Hiroshima* by John Hersey

I read this book as a sophomore in high school. The scenes from Chapter Two, "The Fire," are some of the few things I vividly remember. Hersey's descriptions are firsthand accounts from six survivors from the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. Though I would prefer the unmediated accounts, Hersey spares little. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are revealed as the war crimes they were.

c. Suggested Activities

The following activities offer “safe” ways of teaching against capitalism and war. They fulfill all the requirements of contemporary education – CCSS, Danielson Framework, etc. – while still opening pathways to historical and contemporary issues.

a. Historicizing Curricula

One of my favorite activities. Students often ask, “Why are we learning this?” The question is an important one, with a handful of answers. I begin to answer their question by giving them the actual curriculum. They are tasked to identify two things: what is valued and what is missing. From here, the questioning continues, “Why is it important that you learn this content and these skills, but not what is missing?” By interrogating the curriculum, students have to confront the necessities of specific ideologies. Even if students do not get so far as to question capitalism or the US, they at least become suspicious of the things schools value. If nothing else, skepticism of the world they are presented with is an adequate starting point.

b. Pairings and Excerpts

Curricula are being even more rigidly enforced. I have run into problems with this in the past – stick to the program, or else. However, the emerging demand for teaching nonfiction has districts scrambling for quality nonfiction to teach, either in part or whole. The relative confusion at the current moment is prime for pairing a fictional text with an excerpt from a nonfictional text. Even if the excerpt is a single

paragraph, it can be powerful while flying under the radar. Some of my favorite pairings: *Things They Carried* and the introduction chapter of *Kill Anything that Moves*; *The Crucible* and “A People’s War?” from *People’s History*; *Ender’s Game* and the video game portion of *The Complex*; *Of Mice and Men* and “Self Help in Hard Times” from *People’s History*. The popularity of YA dystopian literature makes for easy pickings especially. Any magazine or newspaper can also provide useful nonfiction. I prefer *The Nation*, *Roar*, and NPR as sources. Even though NPR is not radical by any means, pairing a story about Edward Snowden with *1984* is just as powerful as a more radical source.

Regardless, pairing a board-approved fiction text with a small chunk of radicalism is a powerful tool. In my experience, students quickly begin making historical connections and demanding answers to some biting questions about the nature of American myths. While fictional texts can be paired as well, I have found this to garner far more negative attention and generate fewer questions.

c. What is to be Done? – Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning is a relatively new trend in education. Students are posed a question and given a realistic scenario surrounding it. They must use research, writing, and reading to create an answer to the question. The gimmick is that PBL is supposed to teaching “job skills,” making students into more valuable assets upon graduation.

However, PBL can be used to question the world using two methods.

First, if possible, design a project that requires students to examine one aspect of the political economy. This can be how products are made, how wars are won, how products are sold, etc. The point is to get students asking questions about what seems “natural”.

For example, while reading *Christmas Carol*, we discussed how the Industrial Revolution created great disparity by exploiting workers. I introduced a project in which students owned a store in a progressive neighborhood, whose residents were concerned about human rights, animal rights, and the environment. Students had to pick a product they wanted to sell – something popular. Their job was to determine whether or not the product was produced under ethical circumstances and whether or not the residents around their store would buy it. This project brought students into the tracks of neoliberalism, globalization, and exploitation. The results of the project were astonishing. Last year, a group of girls boycotted Ugg.

Of course, not everyone has the liberty to design a project. If this is the case, adding two simple requirements can change PBL into a powerful tool. Ask students to identify the social issues at stake in the project, and ask them what they can do about the issues. Requiring students to answer these two questions can get them on the right track. Indeed, if students can understand the relation of their project to the world around them, they are contextualizing something meant to remain

isolated. Even if it only ends in weak liberalism, the questioning, criticism, and contextualizing of the project can result in activism.

III. Final Thoughts

Challenging the scholastic ISA is no easy task. It is risky, to be sure. It can cost a teacher his or her job, reputation, and sanity. As education is increasingly codified and regulated, the mandate is simple – Obey. Every year, the unions get weaker; every year, it becomes easier to fire teachers; every year, education becomes less about the students and more about the maintenance of capitalist ideologies. Abandon your ideals, or else. A simple mandate – Obey... or else.

Though the application of the tools proposed in this project is historically bound, the overall intent remains the same – to challenge the uncritical acceptance of the pedagogical frame and the narratives it perpetuates. Perhaps the analysis presented here may appear alarmist, but things seem darker now than ever. We face the Betsy DeVos, an Education Secretary under the direct control of private interests, in the cabinet of a president who racks up more and more points on the fascist checklist: racist nationalism, disdain for human rights, military expansion, cuts to the arts, and attempts at the control of mass media, to name just a few. As Trump and his cronies push policy farther to the right, we should anticipate all State Apparatuses to follow suit in the ideologies they deploy. Teachers, as actors in the educational apparatus, must be prepared to work against these ideologies in their daily practice. Indeed, these are dark times, to be sure, but they are not hopeless. It is my hope that tools I have set forth in this project may give teachers a method to engage in revolt against the State – one lesson at a time. Teachers are on the front lines of this revolt and must be armed accordingly. We must engage in

direct action against the State from within its own apparatus. It is an inside job and we must start our struggle now.

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