Ideology and Educational Policy: An Analysis of the Religious Right

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This article argues that the characterization of the Religious Right as irrational does damage to progressive educational policy because it obscures the Religious Right's effectiveness in influencing educational policy and is counterproductive for resistance practices. The authors discuss briefly the common views of the Religious Right and critique those views on the basis of their own claims. They suggest an alternative conceptualization of the Religious Right, one that rejects the rational/irrational dichotomy of the prevailing views. They argue that the imperatives of the Religious Right are guaranteed by the prevailing ideology of the Christian, liberal state. The authors contend that counteracting the Religious Right requires a recognition of this prevailing ideology and the discursive practices that maintain it.

THE RELIGIOUS Right's effectiveness in influencing educational policy cannot be underestimated by anyone. One need only consider recent conservative educational policies to be convinced of this. For example, Kansas's and Kentucky's decisions to delete all references to evolution in their science curricula and standardized tests are attributed to the efforts of the Religious Right (Gould, 1999; Hanna, 1999a, 1999b; Lane, 1999; Rodriguez, 1999). The Religious Right also has been successful in removing textbooks from school libraries (Adler, 1996), defeating outcome-based education initiatives (Boyd, Lugg, & Zahorchak, 1996), and ensuring that its candidates are elected to important educational positions (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998).

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Despite what seems to be an effective use of the political process, most of the scholarly and popular views of the Religious Right characterize it as paranoid or extreme to discredit its role in influencing public policy or to incite others to fight against its supposed policy domination (see, e.g., Boyd et al., 1996; Halsell, 1986; Herman, 1997; Lugg, 1998; Ostow, 1990; Streiker, 1984). This characterization, however, apparently encourages politically progressive[1] individuals either to discredit the Religious Right as paranoid, thus missing its effectiveness in influencing policy, or to respond to the Religious Right in like extreme manner, thus alienating other individuals.

We question whether such views adequately explain why the Religious Right is effective in influencing educational policy. We argue that the prevailing discourse about the Religious Right is embedded in a "rationality" that defeats itself.[2] Such rationalism defeats itself because it does not allow for the irrationality that it hurls against the Religious Right. In other words, the argument that the Religious Right engages in extremist and paranoid politics mischaracterizes it under those very terms, obscures its effectiveness in educational politics, and is counterproductive for resistance practices.

More important, we contend that the prevailing views of the Religious Right do not account adequately for the role of ideology in educational policy making. We suggest that the prevailing ideology and the discursive practices that further it permit certain political positions, including those of the Religious Right but also those of its opponents. We assume, therefore, a structural view of the Religious Right, focusing on the role of ideology in the constitution of human subjectivity. We acknowledge, however, that ideology is but one discourse in a field of many others that seeks to explain human subjectivity and that such subjectivity may be the effect of more localized, disconnected, disorganized, and heterogeneous forms of power.

In this article, we first discuss briefly the common views of the Religious Right and critique those views on the basis of their own claims. Next, we provide an alternative conceptualization of the Religious Right, one that rejects the rational/irrational dichotomy of the prevailing views. We argue that the imperatives of the Religious Right are guaranteed by the prevailing ideology of the Christian, liberal state.[3] We end the article with a discussion of some of the implications of our study.

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Although scholars recently began to describe the actions of the Religious Right in educational policy making (see Boyd et al., 1996; Lugg, 1998), few attempt to explain the movement's successes and failures.[4] Barkun (1997) has suggested three reasons for the lack of research on the Religious Right in

educational policy. First, despite the rise of conservative Christians in the political arena during the past few decades, some scholars continue to regard religion as politically irrelevant. Science privileges secularism, even in the face of the predominance of religious beliefs in this country. Second, many scholars appear not to take seriously a political movement whose beliefs (and actions) seem strange and repugnant. Because such a movement is not taken seriously, it is deemed unimportant in the political landscape. Finally, given that the Religious Right always has been organizationally fragmented, defining and identifying the Religious Right is made problematic by rivalries among leaders, organizational splits, and the extinction of old and the creation of new groups. At any rate, it is only recently that the Religious Right's role in educational politics has been explored.

What Is the Religious Right?

The term *Religious Right* is one among many terms used to refer to a kind of political movement that defies boundaries and is almost impossible to define in a precise manner. Other terms also are used to refer to the Religious Right, including *Christian Right*, *Conservative Christians*, *New Right, Fundamentalists*, and *Social Conservatives*. There is substantial disagreement about both definition and terminology with regard to who and what constitutes the Religious Right. The three most common definitional strategies of scholars discussing the movement include those focusing on faith, those focusing on political agenda, and those who simply do not define the Religious Right at all.

The definitions based on faith assume there are communities within the Religious Right where belief is homogenous and static. These definitions obscure obvious interdenominational and intradenominational differences (Urofsky & May, 1996). For example, the divergent beliefs between Fundamentalists and Pentecostals illustrate interdenominational differences, whereas intradenominational differences are involved when Hassidic Jews join with Roman Catholics on an antiabortion or antigay measure. As Neuhaus (1990) cautioned, it is "well to remember that there are worlds within worlds of fundamentalism" (p. 141). More significant, defining the Religious Right on the basis of faith fails to account for the large number of other groups and individuals who join the Religious Right on certain issues affecting education (Berlet, 1996). For example, conservative intellectuals, politicians, regressive populists, racial nationalists, and libertarians might align themselves with the Religious Right on such issues as school choice, parental rights, and outcome-based education.

The definitions based on political agenda suggest that the Religious Right includes any religiously affiliated group or association that seeks either to

eliminate all vestiges of secular humanism or to gain respect and fair treatment in the political process (Cibulka, 1996; Diamond, 1998). Those definitions that emphasize the movement's objective of eliminating secular humanism miss the important linkages the Religious Right forms with other individuals and groups that do not share such an objective, such as, for example, conservative intellectuals and libertarians. Those that emphasize the Religious Right's goal of gaining respect and fair treatment inappropriately attribute to it a tolerance for all other perspectives and ignore the movement's transcendent claims of, for example, moral collectivism (Bruce, 1988). Even the popular claims that the Religious Right rejects and opposes modernism obscure its heavy reliance on modern technology to transmit its messages (e.g., World Wide Web, e-mail, faxes, satellite television, etc.).

Perhaps because the movement defies definition, some scholars simply avoid defining it, taking what appears to be a we-know-it-when-we-see-it stance (see, e.g., Boyd et al., 1996; Lugg, 1998; McCarthy, 1996). The problem with taking such a stance is that it encourages one to treat the Religious Right (or its concerns) as static and monolithic. In actuality, there currently is disagreement among the leaders of the Religious Right with regard to its role in politics. Cal (1999), a prior vice president of the Moral Majority, argues that the Religious Right should reconsider its role in the political arena, contending that the movement's primary problems are not economic and political but moral and spiritual. Dobson (1999), president of Focus on the Family, however, stresses the importance of political action for the Religious Right. In addition to obscuring serious contention within the Religious Right, the failure to specifically identify the movement raises questions about how one is to mount concerted opposition to it.

We define the Religious Right loosely as a coalition of religious-conservative groups and individuals,[5] but we stress the difficulty in defining the Religious Right to show that the predominate extremist/paranoid discourse is problematic. In the next section, we illustrate how the extremist/paranoid discourse associated with the Religious Right relies on rationalistic principles that deny the existence of any kind of irrationality and amounts to a deriding rhetoric that itself suffers from the accusations it charges.

EXTREMISM/PARANOIA AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT: THE DISCOURSE OF DERISION

The prevailing discourse of the Religious Right in the scholarly and popular literature relies on notions of paranoia and extremism elaborated by Hofstadter (1965) and Lipset and Raab (1970). Though extremist and paranoid politics were defined differently, we use the terms *extremism* and *para-*

noia interchangeably because in social movement theory they refer to the same political conditions. We suggest that the extremism/paranoia discourse is problematic because it relies on rationalistic principles that deny its own normative position and the rationality of the Religious Right.

Educational studies of the Religious Right similarly use the extremist/paranoid framework. Consider, for example, the language used by Lugg (1998), who studied the Religious Right's antigay agenda and cited Hofstadter in her study. She argues that

> there is more than a whiff of paranoid politics in the Religious Right's antigay rhetoric. Because homosexuality is portrayed as a threat to Western Civilization, to Christian salvation, and, in particular, to school children, any policy or program that can be perceived as being remotely pro-gay is quickly denounced as part of an overarching conspiracy by gay activists to recruit children. The paranoid rhetoric is designed to mobilize parents and concerned citizens to join the battle, for it appears that "our very way of life" is threatened by the evil other. . . . It is this deliberately constructed spectacle of fear that gives the Religious Right current potency regarding the politics of public education. (p. 273, citations omitted)

It is difficult to argue with this characterization of the Religious Right. The Religious Right appears to take stances on issues that are contrary to common sense understandings of the intent and wishes of most Americans. For example, many individuals may be somewhat ambivalent about abortion rights, sex education, and gay rights. But the Religious Right takes an absolutist stance on these issues. This attribution of extremism and paranoia to the Religious Right is further fueled by the tactics of some of the movement's leaders. For example, in response to the devastating fires in Florida in 1998, Pat Robertson (1998) indicated in a broadcast of *The 700 Club* that the fires resulted from God's wrath over Orlando, Florida's Gay Days.

The use of the extremism/paranoia framework, however, is misleading because that framework refers specifically to radical rightist movements of economically and politically displaced individuals. Hofstadter (1965) and Lipset and Raab (1970) suggest that such individuals attribute their social and economic condition to a target group, which is blamed for the change in the individuals' status. Furthermore, the target group is deemed by the displaced individuals to be engaging in a conspiracy to deliberately take over their status, rights, and resources. The individuals within a paranoid/extremist movement feel that the targeted group has usurped their economic status and that they have no political channels open to them in which to make their grievances known.

If economic and social status loss is necessary for the emergence of extremist/paranoid movements, then the Religious Right's activism cannot qualify as such. First, not all members of the Religious Right share the same socioeconomic status, and its spokespersons often have high socioeconomic statuses. Pat Robertson, for example, purportedly heads an organization with 1.8 million members and an annual budget of $27 million (Salter, 1998). More significant, extremist and paranoid politics often are associated with individuals who are, or feel, politically impotent. But religious conservatives would concede very little political failure. Their national leaders claim credit for many political victories. For example, Brian Lopina, lobbyist for the Christian Coalition (personal communication, October 14, 1996), and Robert Simmonds, president of the Citizens for Excellence in Education (personal communication, March 27, 1996), attributed the Republican Party's overwhelming victory in 1994 to the Religious Right's efforts. The Religious Right now can claim unprecedented access to the legislative process (Sheldon, 1990). If anything, the access to lawmakers has made the Religious Right feel more optimistic about its political chances. Thus, the attribution of extremism/paranoia to the Religious Right obscures divergent economic interests and political power within the movement.

In education, especially, the literature shows that the Religious Right has made itself central, not peripheral, to educational policy making. To illustrate, consider Kansas's and Kentucky's decisions to remove all references to evolution from their science curricula (Ferguson, 1999; Hanna, 1999a; Hussain, 1999; Manning, 1999; Rodriguez, 1999; Wolfe, 1999). The Religious Right also was involved in decisions to remove or restrict textbooks (e.g., Adler, 1996) and outcome-based education (Boyd et al., 1996) from other states' curricula. The Religious Right's effectiveness in getting its candidates elected to local school boards also has been noted (see Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). And no one can question the movement's noticeable involvement in school-prayer and parental-rights initiatives (McCarthy, 1996). The public concern with crime, spouse abuse, teenage pregnancy, drugs, and violence has also been a rallying point for the Religious Right's participation in schools (Layton, 1996).

The extremism/paranoia framework, however, explains neither the Religious Right's presence nor its effectiveness in school policy making. The extremist/paranoid discourse relies on a rationalism that does not account for any kind of irrationality so that the actions of the Religious Right also appear rational. Indeed, opponents of the Religious Right illustrate well the Religious Right's rational takeover of educational policy making. At the same time, this reliance on rationalism obscures the irrationality of the discourse levied against the Religious Right. Such discourse assumes that only certain rational or

reasonable actions or beliefs should be possible in politics, denying in essence that all notions of politics are normative and historically situated; that is, all politics are premised on a historically specific ideal. Thus, all political claims are vulnerable to accusations of irrationality and unreasonableness at any given time. If all of politics is normative, then irrationality—that which does not correspond to the ideal—is always possible. And as such, a rationalistic discourse that seeks to discredit others on the basis of a rationality/irrationality ideal may actually deny itself.

More significant, the suggestion that the Religious Right operates outside of the democratic process obscures the movement's effective use of conventional pressure tactics to get its issues on the political agenda, such as voting, lobbying, media campaigns, and mutually beneficial ties with established political parties. And such a suggestion misses the crucial links the Religious Right forms with others, including leftist individuals or groups, on certain issues (e.g., home schooling). The extremism/paranoia framework, therefore, if useful to explain the actions of radical rightist movements such as the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, or McCarthyism, does not explain the political positions taken by the Religious Right and those who join them.

We suggest that the political clout of the Religious Right (and its opponents) is guaranteed by the prevailing ideology of the Christian liberal state, which constitutes individuals as Christian, moral, individualistic subjects. It is estimated, for example, that the Religious Right represents 24% of voters (Pew Research Center, 1996). More important, polls indicate that 42% of adult Americans identify themselves as born-again Christians, 66% say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and 41% say they are absolutely committed to Christianity (Barna, 1996; Diamond, 1998; Princeton Religion Research Center, 1996). The Religious Right, therefore, draws its strength not from politically and economically displaced individuals but from the many who are committed to furthering its understanding of Christian values and ideals.

Even if these numbers are exaggerated, many Americans seem uncomfortable with the rapid pace of social change, high rates of divorce, rising teen pregnancy, increased drug use, and so forth. The Religious Right's family values theme resonates with Americans who have a nostalgic wish to return to a simpler time (Diamond, 1998). Thus, what distinguishes the Religious Right from the rest of Americans may be only a matter of degree of commitment to Judeo-Christian values. The extremist/paranoid discourse, therefore, misapplies its own criteria in its elaboration of the Religious Right.[6]

The extremist/paranoid discourse associated with the Religious Right amounts to what Ball (1990) referred to as a discourse of derision.[7] It incites progressively minded individuals to respond in like extremist manner to the

Religious Right, thus alienating many others, who, as we indicated, may consider themselves committed to Christian ideals. More important, we suggest that the discourse of derision hinders the possibility of serious policy critique. It shifts emphasis away from critical deconstruction and toward radical reconstruction. Hold-outs and defenders against change are deemed "subversive, damaging to the interests of children and the nation, and reactionary, irrationally persisting with old, disreputable ways" (Ball, 1990, p. 32).

The discourse of derision creates a division between madness and reason, and, in doing so, makes possible only certain types of policies; others are deemed irrational. For example, any discussion of the viability of parental rights, school prayer, and creationism crosses the boundary into madness. The derision of the Religious Right illustrates the potential effects of policy discourse. Such discourse, following Foucault (1981), manifests a point of resistance to the prevailing notions of Christianity and political conservatism, but it also is a starting point for an opposing strategy by the Religious Right, which can provide evidence not only of its correspondence with the wishes of many Christian, "moral" individuals but also of its opponents' disconnection with those wishes. The discourse of derision may debunk and displace the Religious Right but in doing so also debunks and displaces the speakers themselves. They too appear radical and extreme.

We argue in the alternative that a critique of the Religious Right should move away from the discourse of derision and the rationalistic principles of policy making that sustain it. A more fruitful critique would consider the role of ideology in constituting individuals as subjects of the ruling ideology of Christianity (but also liberalism, economic individualism, and moral collectivism).[8] In the next section, we elaborate on the notion of ideology and suggest that the Religious Right's influence in educational policy is ensured at a structural level by ideology and other discursive practices. In elaborating our argument, we borrow heavily from the philosophical perspectives of Althusser (1971).[9]

IDEOLOGY AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

The function of ideology and discourse in the constitution of social reality is beginning to receive attention, particularly in poststructuralist critiques of liberal-humanist perspectives. Liberal-humanism assumes that human subjects possess a "unique essence," a "rational consciousness," which forms the basis for such political demands as equality and self-determination (Weedon, 1987, p. 77). Because this human subjectivity is deemed fixed and essential, language merely expresses that which already exists. Language in this sense is transparent, and social change does not come about through language

(Weedon, 1987). But such liberal-humanist perspectives fail to account for how discourse, ideology, and heterogeneous forms of power constitute the rational consciousness that is the basis for the liberal-humanist view of subjectivity. In other words, these perspectives assume that human subjectivity exists prior to, and creates, a particular form of discourse, ideology, or power. But, as we suggest in the article, human subjectivity may be the effect, not author, of such discourse, ideology, or power.[10]

Ideology in General

Althusser (1971), extending Marxist theory beyond its economic bases, argued that the ideology of the ruling class is promoted through ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), which organize and promote the ideology of the dominant class. Althusser noted the relatively large number of ISAs: the educational apparatus, the religious apparatus, the family apparatus, the political apparatus, the communications apparatus, the cultural apparatus, and so forth. For Althusser, ideology materializes from the rituals, practices, and institutions of the ISAs. The ISAs, therefore, are not merely secondary mechanisms of the promotion and installation of ideology—they provide the very mechanisms that generate it.[11]

The dominant ideological apparatus in this era, according to Althusser, is the school, where children are drilled in the ruling ideology. Hunter (1991) similarly illustrated in *Culture Wars* the "intrinsic link between public education, community and national identity" (p. 198). It is there, in the educational apparatus, where the ideological struggle does (and must) take place. As Robert Simmonds, president of Citizens for Excellence in Education, noted explicitly, a "[battle is taking place in America] for the heart and mind and the soul of every man, woman, and especially child in America . . . the battle is for the minds of our youth" (cited in Hunter, 1991, p. 201). It should not be surprising to anyone, therefore, that the Religious Right and its opponents focus their attentions toward the schools.

Althusser argues that ideology in general is a precondition of social existence. Such ideology ensures domination because it is enforced not only through repressive means—through the legalized violence of the repressive state apparatuses, such as the courts and the police—but also through *interpellation.* According to Althusser, subjects are interpellated (constituted or created) by the ruling ideology, but the force of this ideology is so silent and invisible that individuals come to think of their identities, actions, or situations as obvious. He explained,

> It follows that, for you and for me, the category of the subject is a primary "obviousness" (obviousness are always primary): it is clear that you and I are subjects (free,

ethical, etc. . . .). Like all obviousness, including those that make a word "name a thing" or "have a meaning"(therefore including the obviousness of the "transparency" of language), the "obviousness" that you and I are subjects—and that that does not cause any problems—is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect. (pp. 171-172)

Interpellation is a structural feature of all ideology; it creates individuals as subjects of ideology, but the ideology disguises itself in obviousness, self-evidence, and truth.[12] Thus, individuals are subjects of ideology, which determines the representation of the world for those individuals (such as religion, freedom, autonomy, morality, ethics), but they believe themselves the authors of their identities. Believing themselves autonomous, individuals then become agents of specific ideologies, such as defenders of creationism or evolution (see Weedon, 1987). Specific ideologies, Althusser indicated, are historically contingent and ultimately are traceable to the ruling ideology, or ideology in general, the latter having no specific history in the sense that it is a precondition of social existence.

Furthermore, by linking interpellation with language ("those that make a word, 'name a thing' or 'have a meaning'"), Althusser indicates that language plays a key role in ideology. Indeed, for Althusser, the domination of the ruling class is conducted "in words" (p. 133). That is, the state apparatuses teach "know-how," but in the "forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'" (p. 133). Language, therefore, might be inextricably linked to ideology and does not merely express it. Pecheux (1994) similarly argued that interpellation, which occurs before one is made a "subject" and ensures the "self-evidence of identity," centers on discursive mechanisms which generate that evidence. That is, ideology conceals itself in a web of discursive practices guaranteeing "'subjective' evident truths" (p. 147).

This is not to say that there is no contestation of ideology. Subscribing to Marxist notions of the grand narrative of the class struggle, ISAs have meaning for Althusser only from the point of view of the class struggle—ISAs guarantee the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction.[13] Because ideology in general interpellates individuals as subjects of the ruling ideology, however, it must come from elsewhere. For Althusser, ideology in general is realized by the installation of the ISAs and by realizing itself as the ruling ideology. But the ruling ideology is not achieved all by itself—it is at stake in the bitter and continuous class struggle.

Thus, the ISAs are the sites of ideological struggle. Althusser argued that the class alliance in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the repressive state apparatuses (the courts, the military, the police)

because the former ruling classes are able to retain strong positions there for a long time, and the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there, "either by the utilization of their contradictions, or by conquering combat positions in [ISAs] in struggle" (p. 147). Thus, because the class alliance in power is less able to control the ISAs than the repressive ones, the ISAs may simultaneously and contradictorily provide the site of domination and transformation. As Pecheux (1994) theorized, the dominant class alliance may seek to ensure contact and dialogue with its class adversaries in the ISAs, but, in doing so, it provides those adversaries with the conditions for ideological transformation (e.g., the presentation of multiple positions on legislative proposals in congressional hearings allows for contestation). Thus, because the ideological practices of the ruling classes are not always effective, schools represent sites of contestation in which conflicting ideologies (and their discourses) struggle for dominance.

The Religious Right and Ideology in General

The prevailing views of the Religious Right indicate that its ideology is extremist and paranoid—out of touch with the mainstream beliefs of most Americans and dangerous to the functioning of schools (see, e.g., Adler, 1996; Boyd et al., 1996; Diamond, 1998; Herman, 1997; Lugg, 1998; and Urofsky & May, 1996). As with Pecheux (1994), however, we argue that it is inappropriate to assume that the Religious Right has "its own ideology . . . with its own conditions of existence and its specific institutions, such that the ideological class struggle would be a meeting point of two distinct and preexisting worlds" (p. 142). In other words, we contest that the schools represent a meeting point between the separate worldviews or beliefs (or ideology) of religious conservatives and their opponents. An understanding of ideology in general might allow the recharacterization of the debate about Religious Right from accusations of extremism/paranoia to the understanding of the Religious Right's legitimate ideological imperative.

In what way might the ideology of the Religious Right be legitimate? One can argue that the Religious Right's positions are ensured by the ruling ideology of, for example, Christianity. If so, its positions are not of its own doing, in the sense that individuals are interpellated as ideological subjects under the ruling ideology of Christianity. Therefore, the Religious Right's specific ideological stances might be ensured a priori by its members' interpellation as obviously and self-evidently Christian (and ethical, moral, law-abiding, etc.) autonomous individuals who exert pressure on the education system to ensure its proper role of protecting and dictating the moral stances of children.

If Althusser (1971) is correct that Christian religious ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, ones that can obey or disobey God's commandments, and that permits a multiplicity of possible religious subjects, then there need not be consensus on the particular Christian position; there need only be a God, one's obedience to that God, one's sacrifice to that God, and so forth. In fact, the notions of *obedience* and *sacrifice* might be central to an understanding of Christian ideology; they require individuals to forsake all so-called rational judgments in favor of obedience and sacrifice to God. And the "truth" of that obedience and sacrifice, its conditions, are present for Christians in the Bible.[14] The ISAs (particularly the religious apparatus, but also its link to the family, the media, the government, courts, etc.) drills into individuals the obviousness of that truth. For example, the practices and rituals of the legal system generate Christian truth; consider how the courts require individuals to swear to the tell the truth by placing their right hands on the Bible.

The liberal-humanist views of rationality/irrationality, particularly those associated with policy making, should be questioned not only because they assume that rational action does, and should, take place in the political and educational apparatuses but also because they ignore the obvious (interpellative) truth of Christianity (and the Bible) for many, if not most, individuals in the United States. These rationalist perspectives assume a rational consciousness and unique essence that exist separate from and prior to ideology in general. We suggest that the stances that the Religious Right and its opponents take to further their "truths" are neither rational nor irrational—the meaning individuals have for those terms themselves are subject to ideology. Instead, the positions taken within the ISAs by individuals constitute specific ideological formations within the ideology of Christianity (whether promoting or contesting it). Thus, the battle waged by the Religious Right and its opponents in the schools and politics might be evidence of conflict over the ruling ideology in general, though it is framed in terms of specific ideological formations. And conflict is part and parcel of what happens in the ISAs.

IDEOLOGY AND RELIGION: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY

We make no claim in this article to be objective and neutral with regard to the Religious Right. We believe that its tactics present serious problems for the education of students in a seemingly pluralistic world. The tactics of the Religious Right stifle progressive thinking and limit the possibilities of educational policy serving important politically progressive goals, including

those permitting critical thinking that leads to social change. On the other hand, the discourse of derision used by politically progressive individuals may be as alienating as the apocalyptic one of the Religious Right, and it ignores the constitution of every individual as ideological subjects.

So, what might this mean for education and policy? As we discussed, although the schools promote the ruling ideology of the liberal Christian state, they represent sites of ideological struggles. The ruling ideology claims power only when it establishes itself as such; however, this is never without contestation, for the former ruling ideology still maintains strong positions in the schools for a long time. We suggest that secularism is attempting to establish itself as the ruling ideology in education and politics, but the former ideology, that is, Christianity, still finds "means and occasions to express itself there, either by the utilization of their contradictions, or by conquering combat positions in them in struggle" (Althusser, 1971, p. 147).

Consider that the liberal state promotes individual freedom and the separation between church and state, whereas the Christian state promotes Christianity. The contradiction in the simultaneous existence of religion and secularism permits the Religious Right to use individual rights to promote Christianity in schools. For example, the Religious Right furthers school prayer, and thus Christianity, as an individual freedom but couches it in the secular language of *moments of silence* or *moments of reflection*. Therefore, the contradictions in educational and institutional policies permit the former ruling ideology of Christianity to find means and occasions to express itself in schools.

It is through this notion of contradiction within the ISAs, however, that politically progressive educators and policy makers can find the opportunity to combat the hegemonic tendencies of the Religious Right. Because the ISAs ensure the domination and transformation of specific ideological formations, conflict should not be deemed inherently problematic; conflict within the ISAs (especially the schools) sets the stage for the kind of critical agency that will resist the oppressive tendencies of the ruling classes and redirect them toward more progressive political goals. The conflict within the ISAs does result in victories for the Religious Right, but those ISAs also permit progressively minded individuals to utilize "their contradictions, or [take] combat positions within them in struggle" (Althusser, 1971, p. 147). Thus, progressively minded individuals might invoke the requiring of the pledge of allegiance (one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all) as an example of the educational apparatuses' promotion of both Christianity and secularism. Or, as we discussed above, progressive politics must expose the contradiction in moments-of-silence policies. It is through the aggressive and sustained exposure and critique of such contradictions that

educators and policy makers may promote awareness of the influence of Christian ideology but also its potential points of resistance.

Furthermore, because language plays a crucial role in ideological domination, scholars should explore how language (particularly that of secularism and science) furthers and impedes the imperatives of the ruling ideology. Althusser (1971) noted that all discourses have ideological effects, "including even scientific discourses" (p. 172). Indeed, Althusser contended that ideological domination occurs "in words" (p. 133). But Althusser's argument that domination occurs discursively also suggests a solution, for all discourses are vulnerable to reappropriation and, therefore, transformation. As Foucault (1981) theorized, discourse provides both a "point of resistance" but also a "starting point for an opposing strategy" (p. 101). Consider the example of evolution, which conflicts with prevailing notions of Christian belief. Yet, creation scientists now invoke evolution concepts to contest evolution itself. Although this example illustrates that the Religious Right can utilize the evolution discourse as a point of resistance to evolution, it illustrates as well how language can be used to further ideological imperatives.

The ideological domination enacted by the discursive practices of the ISAs thus provides the stage for contestation. If language generates ideology in general, then language can be used against itself. This requires, of course, that educators become aware of how language furthers ideology and then how language can be used as a starting point for an opposing strategy against the Religious Right. Because this kind of awareness requires critical thinking, the practices of the Religious Right must be discursively resisted at every opportunity.

Finally, although focusing on the specific ideological formations of the Religious Right (such as its antigay education agenda) is important—such formations have direct impact on educational practice—one should account as well for the role of ideology in general. Secularism, perhaps potentially more progressive than sectarianism, similarly constitutes an ideology, and it needs to view itself as such. What this means is that given the successes of the Religious Right, secularism is not completely the ruling ideology; thus, it is in a class struggle with Christianity and the specific ideologies of the Religious Right that support it. As a result, secularism must attend to its own contradictions to combat the Religious Right within the schools, as well as recognize the Religious Right's contradictions, and to take "combat positions in [schools] in struggle" (Althusser, 1971, p. 147).

In conclusion, an understanding of the Religious Right through ideology permits understanding not only its effectiveness in educational policy but also how it can be resisted. Ideology functions by making itself obvious within discursive practices in schools and politics. The key to exposing

ideology, which functions unconsciously, is to recognize any position's obviousness. Educators and policy makers should be as concerned, therefore, with how the difficult, pervasive, and subtle discursive practices of Christianity (but also liberalism, economic individualism, and moral collectivism) constitute identity, obviousness, facts, and self-evident truths and how schools, as ISAs, both reinforce and transform these discursive practices.

NOTES

1. We use the terms *conservative* and *progressive* politics to indicate opposing views of government action. Conservative views privilege private normative authority as the basis for government action; progressive views, on the other hand, deem such authority as inherently illegitimate because it creates or maintains social hierarchies (West, 1990).

2. The term *rationality* characterizes two inextricably linked philosophical positions: (a) one should always choose those actions or beliefs that are rational or reasonable and (b) any belief that conflicts with what one should obviously know is irrational or unreasonable. The rationality of any action or belief is determined either by self-evidence or "consistency with the overwhelming majority of one's beliefs" (Audi, 1995, pp. 674-675).

3. We mean by the *Christian, liberal state* all Western nations, especially the United States. The term refers to the overriding ideologies of liberalism and Christianity that guide those states.

4. We use the term *movement* not to suggest a unified, coherent organization but to indicate similar action and activity by temporal (and unstable) associations of religious-conservative individuals and groups.

5. We choose the term *coalition* because it accounts for the instability of loosely affiliated groups that coalesce for limited campaigns on issues, where such campaigns involve different participants with divergent faith or policy objectives and where the coalitions may not outlast the issues themselves (Salisbury, 1983).

6. We refer readers to Opfer (2000) for a more extensive critique of the extremist/paranoid framework associated with the Religious Right.

7. We play with Ball's term, which he used to describe the tactics of religious fundamentalists in Great Britain. We agree that Ball's term similarly applies to the Religious Right's tactics in the United States but argue as well that it also characterizes the actions of the opponents of the Religious Right.

8. *Liberalism* refers to the political philosophy advocating personal freedom for individuals (e.g., the right to exercise one's religion without government interference). *Economic individualism* and *moral collectivism* ensure that the state has relatively strong interests in regulating morality, but it should leave economic markets alone; the individual is regarded as autonomous when making economic decisions but needs supervision when making moral decisions (see Hovenkamp, 1997).

9. We assume that most readers are unfamiliar with Althusser's notion of ideology; thus, we use a substantial amount of this article to describe ideology and its effects on human subjectivity.

10. In this article, however, we address only how ideology, particularly Christian ideology, constitutes human subjectivity.

11. In this regard, Althusser and Foucault can be linked significantly to create a deeper understanding of ideology and power. Foucault's counterpart to Althusser's ideology is the disciplinary mechanisms, which operate at the level of micropower and which allow power to inscribe itself into the body directly. As Zizek (1994) pointed out, however, Foucault bypasses ideology because it connotes some supreme being or force; he resorts instead to vague notions of the

"intricate network of lateral links, left and right, up and down" (p. 13). Althusser also focuses on micropower, but he contends that such power materializes itself in the ideological state apparatuses and is ultimately traceable to a grand ideological force, that is, the ideology at stake in the bitter and continuous class struggle (Althusser, 1971, p. 184).

12. Althusser's notion of *interpellation* coincides with Gramsci's (1971) notion of *hegemony*. Gramsci similarly expanded Marxist theory past its economic bases to include the cultural domination of individuals. Relying on an understanding of hegemony, Gramsci argued that society's cultural institutions (e.g., schools, courts, churches, etc.) support the economic domination of some individuals by others. These institutions ensure this domination by promoting the norms and culture of the dominant class. For Gramsci, domination occurs less through physical force than through the hegemony of such norms and culture, and because this domination uses norms, individuals in effect "consent" to be controlled without realizing it. Gramsci, however, indicated that individuals can resist hegemony through counterhegemonic practices. But Althusser argued that ideology in general is a precondition of social existence.

13. We question the appropriateness of any grand theory of human subjectivity, including one that emphasizes the class struggle. The theory of a class-based struggle over the ideology, however, has usefulness in the contexts of the political and educational apparatuses, where discursive practices require that conflict over economic or cultural resources be framed as class based (e.g., conflict between interest groups, the prohibition against government serving individual interests).

14. For non-Christians, their "truth" may be present in the Torah, the Koran, and so forth.

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