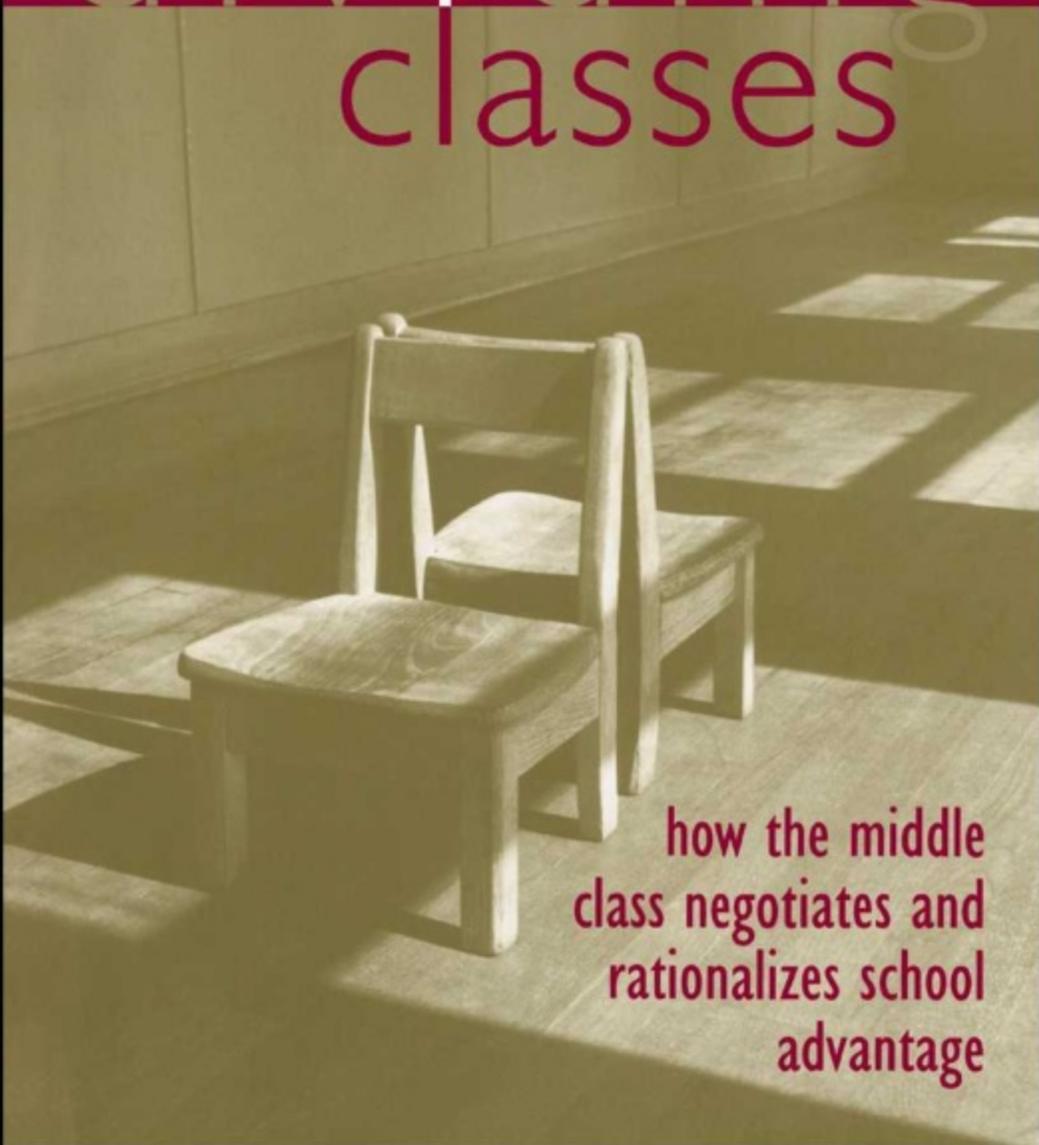


ellen brantlinger

# dividing classes



how the middle  
class negotiates and  
rationalizes school  
advantage

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# **Dividing Classes**



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**HOW THE MIDDLE CLASS NEGOTIATES AND  
RATIONALIZES SCHOOL ADVANTAGE**

*ELLEN BRANTLINGER*

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\*A pseudonym, as are all names of people and places in this book.

stand that this book is another venue in which an author has reacted to their public actions.

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## Preface

As with many current article and book titles, *classes divided* is a double entendre that alludes to more than one kind of class and more than one type of division. *Classes* refers to society's hierarchical socioeconomic structure as well as various levels of tracked classrooms and children class(ifi)ed as they are assigned to those levels. *Divided* captures how classes live in isolated residential areas (Wilson, 1987; Young, 2000) as well as how children are educated in classes and schools with spatially bounded (class-wise and racially) enrollment patterns (Oakes, 1985; Orfield, 2000; Orfield, Eaton, & Harvard Project, 1996). High-income people cluster in gated communities and prestigious schools and receive high-status epithets (e.g., bright, gifted, talented); lower-income people, whether working or "under" class, are relegated to less desirable neighborhoods (e.g., ghettos, housing projects, rural slums, trailer courts, older inner-ring suburbs with small homes) and underfunded, poorly situated schools with lesser facilities and fewer resources. Their children are dubbed at risk, culturally deprived, and often disabled. Social class divides how students participate—or do not participate—in activities, and it influences peer acceptance and rejection. This book focuses primarily on social class; however, the high correspondence between class and race/ethnicity is widely acknowledged. As Orfield et al. (1996) note: "A student in an intensely segregated African American and Latino school was fourteen times more likely to be in a high-poverty school (more than 50 percent poor) than a student in a school that was more than 90 percent white" (pp. 55–61).

When I first decided to put together my studies of affluent constituencies in Hillsdale<sup>1</sup> for this book, I had in mind the title, *Class Deficit Upside Down*. In the field of education the term *deficit* is tied almost exclusively to intellectual or achievement criteria and is thus associated with those who do not do well in school. By virtue of their poverty,<sup>2</sup> children become culturally, socially, and intellectually deficient and at risk for nonspecific but certainly negative outcomes;<sup>3</sup> they are expected not to do well in their school or postschool lives. Academic achievement is often the sole criterion used to gauge both school and student effectiveness (Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000), yet other quality indicators should be considered. For example, people who are generous, kind, well adjusted, and have a good sense of humor make good friends. People with an interest in others and their community are good companions. To build a strong democracy (Barber, 1984; Young, 2000), citizens should have constructive ideas, be articulate and assertive in expressing opinions, and be motivated to engage in debates about topics related to local or global conditions that are modifiable by personal or collective action. They should be tolerant of others' views and willing to compromise. People who help others when times are hard or things go wrong and who generally take others' interests into account are valued neighbors. Thus, risk must be based on criteria relevant to the well-being of communities. People should be judged on whether they act

within a reciprocal morality that spans across class, ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, age, ability, and sexual orientation. In my alternate title, *deficit* refers to people who do not display morality or a democratic spirit in their everyday lives. Certainly such deficits are of more consequence than a few IQ points or right or wrong items on achievement tests.

As I considered the statistics about widening income gaps and threatening environmental, economic,<sup>4</sup> and social conditions, the idea that moral deficits were particularly problematic grew in importance. Unlike the portrayals of deficit that pertain to the poor, this version of deficit applies to people of higher classes—in the case of this book, to educated middle-class parents who do not think beyond their own children when they interact with schools, or to teachers and administrators who cater to prominent people's interests to retain employment, advance in careers, or avoid inconvenience. Moral deficiencies encompass those not directly within sight of my ethnographic lens—and invisible to many mainstream Americans except indirectly through ads or media messages sponsored by them—the managers of transglobal corporations whose personal financial gains and political power are increasingly based on others' loss and oppression (Medovoi, 2002; Seldon, 1990). According to my criteria, such dominant and domineering people have a social and moral deficit that interferes with our country's achieving the best forms of democratic community (see Glendon, 1991; Gutmann, 1996; Rorty, 1998; Schudson, 1998; Sober & Wilson, 1998; Tilly, 1999; Unger, 1987a, b; Worsham & Olson, 1999).

Typically, middle-class parents are viewed as the model for educational values, goals, and participation in children's education. The statement, "Middle-class parents expect their offspring to do well in school and believe schooling is the means to post-school career and social success," seems a banal synopsis of class standpoint and straightforward assertion of fact. When the ideological grounding of the statement is examined, however, its simplicity and neutrality become clouded. Because it is well documented that schools facilitate middle-class agendas—that members of this class are winners in the U.S. educational and occupational systems—notions of doing well (i.e., better than others) and getting ahead (i.e., creating social hierarchies) are problematic. The downside of some classes perpetually winning is that it depends on others losing; to state the obvious, social ranking stratifies and divides.

This book provides an overview of how members of the professional class—and I situate myself in this class and accept responsibility for complicity in class politics—use (our) agency in crafty ways to secure the best of what schools have to offer for our own children. In interviewing educated middle-class people, my goal was to understand the thinking that accompanies the pursuit of school privilege for children of one's own class. I designed the studies to learn whether the proponents of stratified structures were aware of the detrimental impact that unequal school conditions have on children of other classes. As I detail how the educated middle-class negotiates<sup>5</sup> school advantage and rationalizes<sup>6</sup> their actions, it is important to note that these same individuals are esteemed as the most intelligent, liberal, and well-meaning people in society. In this book, I cast a slice of Hillsdale citizens as villains. My aim was not to portray particular individuals or a whole class as evil but rather to show how certain flawed moralities and self-centered

acts sway society away from an ethics of reciprocity and the best expressions of democratic community life.

To document the thinking of professionals who dominate school policy and practice, this book mainly draws from interviews conducted in the town where I have lived and worked for 34 years and have done a number of research projects related to social class. All my studies centered around local informants' educational values and goals, perceptions of local schools, and views of relations between people of different social classes.

In chapter 1, I review literature about stratified schooling, including the nature of social class and school structure formation as well as causes for class-related differences in educational attainment and achievement. I provide a short history of how *deficit* thinking about losers and *merit* thinking about winners shape American schools. Drawing from E.O. Wright (1985, 1989), I argue that the middle class is a contradictory class in terms of its status relative to lower socioeconomic groups as well as its thoughts about social life and schooling. Hypotheses about the extent to which the middle class monopolizes advantages and how ideologies veil both intentions and advantages are introduced in this chapter. I review theories about how neoliberal perspectives of the middle-class managers of social institutions combine with those of global capitalists to undermine the possibility of equity and democratic community building in schools.

In chapter 2, I provide an overview of my own background as it relates to this research, the nature of the town of Hillsdale, the findings of my earlier studies of low-income residents, and the methods used in the studies reported in this book. In chapter 3, I address how affluent mothers, selected because of their involvement in school affairs, describe children and parents of their class and those of other classes. My analysis of their narratives makes use of British sociologist John B. Thompson's (1984, 1990) ideas about ideology as well as theories about women's roles in status production for the family. I describe the dissonance created by the clash between liberal values regarding equitable public schools and preference for segregated and advantaged educational circumstances for offspring of affluent mothers. In chapter 4, I focus on the conflicts between mothers' sentiments about progressive education and the desire for a tightly framed, traditional curriculum in which their offspring can establish measurable superiority.

In chapter 5, I examine the narratives of 22 teachers and 4 principals and make the case that personnel at mixed- or low-income schools differ in background, present status, and educational outlook from those employed at schools attended by children of high-income families. This chapter includes information about school personnel's awareness of the impact of social class on Hillsdale schools. I take a particular look at teachers who are first in their generation to go to college in chapter 6. Their narratives reveal their opposition to stratified school practices but indicate that their low status relative to affluent parents and teachers at high-income schools leads to a passivity on their part that leaves school hierarchies soundly in place.

I start chapter 7 with a selective history of central administration and school board impact on Hillsdale schools and end with summaries of the perspectives of former superintendents and assistant superintendents. Chapter 8 includes the research of

Michelle Henderson, who interviewed school board members and a west-side<sup>7</sup> middle-class parent who had been in a position to follow school board affairs for several years. In chapter 9, I emphasize the importance of correctly identifying the sources of school disparities and provide a rationale for supporting equitable, democratic practices in schools and society.

# 1

## Class Position, Social Life, and School Outcomes

Several facts are known about American social classes, schools, and students. First, adult wages vary widely, with the income gap increasing over recent years (Anyon, 2000; Sleeter, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Second, per capita pupil expenditure correlates with social class; hence schools differ in the quality of their facilities, materials, and human resources (Burton, 1999; Kozol, 1991; Orfield, 2000; Wenglinsky, 1998). Third, there is a high correspondence between student class status and school achievement and attainment (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lee, 2002).<sup>2</sup> Although these strong links between class status, school structures, and student outcomes are well known, social class is still ignored or treated as if it were relatively unimportant to schooling. Regardless of evidence to the contrary, because schools are thought to reward capacities rather than social standing, they are believed to be meritocracies in which students have equal chances to succeed. Meritocracies, however, are not based on an egalitarian principle of success for all; rather they differentially reward high intelligence, athletic competence, work ethic, and other types of student merit.

Americans waiver between assuming that students are essentially the same or very different. Based on the first assumption, all are expected to achieve above a statistical norm and are penalized if they cannot do so. For example, although school attendance is mandated to age 16, some states have legislated that students be denied a diploma if they do not pass graduation exit exams. A rationale for this draconian measure is that it sends a reality message to corrupted adolescents, neglectful parents, and inept or uncaring teachers (Fairtest, 1999–2000a). Such “for your own good” logic also undergirds competitive grading and castigating discipline—and is the same reason given for violence in child rearing (Miller, 1986). So, in spite of inflicting penalties that create hardships for certain students, proponents of these measures see themselves as caring about them. The contrasting sense that students are essentially different results in their being subjected to ranked grouping and competitive evaluation—practices leading to the failure of many students and/or limited access to enriched curricular and pedagogical resources.

Hierarchies are structured into meritocracies, yet in theory schools are to operate in fair and impartial ways so that children have equal chances to move up in social class rank and improve their life conditions. In reality, educational circumstances are not equal; wealthy white children inevitably are advantaged (Burton, 1999; Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Kohn, 1998; Kozol, 1991; Mills, 1963; Orfield, 1992, 2000; Ryan, 1969, 1981; Sexton, 1961). In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis (1976) introduced educators to the now widely accepted theory that instead of facilitating social mobility, schools reproduce the stratified class structure of society by socializing children for

predetermined class-related adult roles and circumstances. Sociological research confirms the validity of this theory by documenting the connections between families' class positions and the nature and quality of children's education (e.g., Anyon, 1980, 1981; Bernstein, 1971, 1973; Kohn, 1969, 1994; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Kohn & Slomczynski, 1990; Lareau, 1989). For example, in *Learning to Labor*, Willis (1977) writes about how the resistance of British working-class youths to schooling and their consequent lack of school success results in their ending up with the same lowstatus jobs as their fathers. Many of these studies document the "way things are" rather than "why they are that way"; that is, little attention is paid to understanding human intentions or actions in school hierarchy creation. Morrow and Torres (1994) criticize classic renditions of correspondence theory (e.g., Althusser's structuralism) for dwelling on systemic phenomena that reduce people to interpellated, passive subjects. Structural-level analyses imply that stratification happens without deliberate human agency as perhaps the unintentional fallout of arbitrary social habits and benign conditions of practice. Scholars did ask Gramsci's (1971/1929–1935) perennially imperative "who benefits" from stratification question but did not explore how people deliberately negotiate and justify their advantage.

In *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Sennett and Cobb (1972) include the anthropological and psychological concept of pseudospeciation, which refers to the inner solidarity and cohesion of a tribe (e.g., middle-class people) becoming so strong that they see their customs as universal. Such insiders are proficient at aligning institutions with their customs and, of course, at meeting their own standards. When they excel, they attribute success to superior traits and behaviors, hence believing they are more deserving than others and that rankings are legitimate, necessary, and even neutral. This account of hierarchy creation echoes Gramsci's theory of how hegemony confounds the thinking of bourgeois and working classes, so, in spite of contrary evidence, both believe that schools are fair and enable social mobility; they are meritocracies.

In contrast to the common assumption that stratified institutional structures, practices, and outcomes *just* happen, drawing from the work of prominent Marxist theorists (e.g., Apple, 1993, 1996; Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1996, 1998; Eagleton, 1990, 1991; Gramsci, 1929–1935/1971; Thompson, 1984, 1990; Young, 1990, 2000; Zizek, 1994, 1998), I examine implications of the view that social stratification is not a benign, chance occurrence but the result of people's intention and informed agency. Indeed, this book is grounded on the belief that dominant classes actively pursue advantage and that social class formation depends on the discursive and actual development of subordinates. Given the prevalence of school hierarchies and their resistance to change (Fullan, 1993; Tyack & Tobin, 1994; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995; Weiss, 1995), it is reasonable to hypothesize that existing structures and practices are durable precisely because they correspond to influential people's desires, hence from their power to create and retain them (Bersoff, 1999; Connell, 1993; Schnog, 1997; Shor & Pari, 1999).<sup>3</sup> Although I do not deny that elites at the summit of hierarchies have the most to gain from stratification, educated middle-class individuals also benefit because they are relatively high up the social ladder. To set the stage for my analyses of the narratives of local educated middle-class people, in this chapter I give an overview of (1) the nature of dominant and

subordinate group formation; (2) the characteristics of the educated middle class's position and perspective; and (3) the ways that ideology functions to support class distinctions. Additionally, because local social class relations do not exist in a vacuum, I provide theories about the impact of global capitalism and corporate control of the media and money on schooling and on social class relations.

## DOMINANT AND SUBORDINATE GROUP FORMATION

Exploring the etiology and functioning of power in shaping activities within and between groups, Apfelbaum (1999), a Jewish refugee to France during World War II, theorizes that dominant groups develop standards based on their own characteristics and customs and expect others to emulate their styles and assimilate to their customs whether it is feasible for them or productive for society. They also create myths<sup>4</sup> about human features related to race, ethnicity, class, and gender that mark, label, brand, and stigmatize others as outsiders. Dominant group members imply that outlooks within their collective are homogeneous and that outsiders have little in common with them (Shanahan & Jones, 1999). Their power is maximized when the *us* and *them* binary is seen as fundamental and irreversible (Bourdieu, 1984). Apfelbaum points out that centering one group simultaneously marginalizes the Other.<sup>5</sup> Due to their low position in status hierarchies or history of unfavorable relations with dominant groups, peripheral groups have little access to goods and services (Nielsen, 1997). Privileging central groups in education is widespread, as is limiting the access to the best education of those on the periphery (Anderson & Saavedra, 1995; Bannerji, 1995; Bryson & de Castell, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Sleeter, Gutierrez, New, & Takata, 1992).

The creation of dominant/subordinate group binaries (or hierarchies) is not purposeless but represents an important set of interdependent relations: superiority needs inferiority, normality/abnormality, success/failure, ability/disability, winners/losers. The role, status, and even *raison d'être* of dominant groups hinges on the existence of subordinates (Stallybrass & White, 1986). Basing ideas about empire building on Lacan's (1982) signification, Bellamy (1998) claims the colonizer's identity depends on a lack that can only be filled by a colonized Other (p. 342). Domination always results in subordinate oppression (Eagleton, 1990). Young (1990) delineates the components of oppression as (1) exploitation—structural relation in which some exercise their capacities under the control of others; (2) marginalization—expulsion or exile from labor or social life; (3) powerlessness; (4) cultural imperialism in which the dominant group's experience and culture are established as the norm, so the oppressed groups' perspective is rendered inferior and/or invisible; (5) violence—intimidation, humiliation, harassment, incarceration, physical attack (pp. 197–198). Based on his meta-analysis of anthropological studies, Brown (1991) concludes in *Human Universals* that people create power and status hierarchies to varying degrees, with distinctions based on sexuality, gender, class, or family (ethnic, racial) ties.<sup>6</sup>

Implicit to class reproduction is a pattern of distinction making or bias that prevents an equal distribution of benefits to groups. Tinney (1983) distinguishes three levels of bias:

*individual* (prejudice, stereotyping), *institutional* (structural inequities), and *collective* (normative). Personal prejudice is most likely to be recognized and thus is easiest to address. In contrast, the institutional customs within and outside schools that locate some students in disadvantageous positions are rarely visible (as bias) to dominant group members (Corson, 1992). Normative bias is the most difficult to recognize because it permeates symbols and language (e.g., the term *black* has a host of negative denotations and connotations—sin, evil, crime, dirt, depression, death; Dyson, 1993; Morrison, 1993). White people do not see skin color as a privileging force (Bell, 1994; Cose, 1993; Henry, 1995; hooks, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994; Walker, 1997; Weis, 1990), men do not see masculinity as advantaging them (Connell, 1998; Gerschick, 1998; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1998; Jensen, 1997; Lorde, 1984),<sup>7</sup> affluent people do not name the benefits of financial assets (Conley, 1999; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Ryan, 1971, 1981; Sennett & Cobb, 1972), and scholars do not see how their cultural and social capital allow them to dominate professional organizations (Brantlinger, 1997).<sup>8</sup> Teachers, who are largely middle class and white (Newman, 1998), uphold Eurocentric canons and customs that distance, dislocate, underrepresent, and misrepresent Others (Asante, 1991; Banks, 1997; Bannerji, 1995; Kozol, 2001; Marshall, 1994; Spivak, 1988, 1994) and are unaware of their complicity in systems that stratify and oppress (Britzman, 1997; O'Brien, 1998; Weiss, 1995; Wright, 1994). Given the damage inherent in biased norms and institutions, a goal of this book is to show how hierarchies are normalized by discourses and how the human intentions that bring them about are managed to be played down and denied.

### **CONTRIVING LEGITIMACY FOR DOMINATION: THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY**

Because of the importance of psychological dynamics in class positioning and school structure formation, I focus less on what affluent people do to create hierarchies and more on what they say (i.e., think) about what influences education. Many constructs that are used for thinking (e.g., perceptions, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, social constructs, tacit and explicit knowledge, internalized scripts, mental representations of reality, ideologies; Pajares, 1992) could have provided a reasonable framework for analyzing study participants' narratives. Alexander, Schallert, and Hare's (1991) *tacit knowledge*—deeply embedded, subconscious<sup>9</sup> sociocultural thought—could have worked as could Nespor's (1987) *beliefs* with their strong “affective components that reside in episodic memory” (knowledge is stored semantically; pp. 311–321). I settled on ideology as a central analytic construct because of its historic links to critical theory and Marxist analysis but mostly because of its aptness in explaining the processes of domination and subordination that were apparent in the narratives of the educated middle-class people interviewed for this book.

Ideology is “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1984, p. 7) or the “production of principles, ideas, and categories that support unequal class relations” (Apple, 1992, p. 127). According to Gramsci's (1929–1935/ 1971) theory of

hegemony, ideology is integral to the struggle of dominant groups to keep subordinates in designated places and counter resistance from them. Force can be used to establish and maintain power—as it has been historically—but it is nicer and more efficient to convince those in low positions of the legitimacy of hierarchy and disparity. In democracies, dominant groups must have some degree of permission from subordinates to exert control over them; that consensus is achieved by circulating ideologies that obfuscate the rankings and power imbalances that work against equity for peripheral groups. By permeating language and thought (Bakhtin, 1981; Zizek, 1989, 1998), ideology allows privilege to redound to the powerful without people’s conscious knowledge of whose interests are served (Eichstedt, 1998; Lukes, 1974). Ideology “allows the dominant class to appear not as a class but as representative of the whole society” (Larrain, 1992, p. 52). It also insulates beliefs from criticism and establishes a basis for group solidarity (Burbules, 1992).

Ideologies are systems of representations (images) or complexes of narratives composed of familiar and respected (religious, scientific) texts (Althusser, 1974/1976; Barrett, 1994; Zizek, 1994). As “anonymous discourse on the social” (Thompson, 1984, p. 27), ideologies mediate people’s understanding in profoundly unconscious ways (Althusser, 1971; Bakhtin, 1983). Coterminous with institutional structures (Bourdieu, 1996),<sup>10</sup> ideologies work like a “network of templates or blueprints” through which experience is articulated and orientations to actions are (re) constituted (Geertz, 1973, p. 11). Institutions become bureaucracies with an excessive commitment to norms. As norms become rigid, rational situational responses are prevented (Sergiovanni, 1991). Thus, institutions resist change and defend uniform behaviors; they regulate oppression as they generate ideologies that naturalize their existence (Popkewitz, 1991). As with individual neurosis, institutional pathologies have damaging consequences (Habermas, 1978).

Rationality’s place in ideology is debated. Boudon (1994) maintains that although the irrational has a residual place in their creation, ideologies start “*not in spite of but because of* human rationality” (italics in original; p. 24). As “common sense beliefs about political and social matters,” ideologies are based directly or indirectly on scientific authority (p. 73). At the same time, ideologies resonate with people’s needs, anxieties, passions, and fantasies (Cookson, 1992). For example, a common ideology, the “egalitarian myth,” comforts American middle classes while offering hope to the poor (Boudon, 1994, p. 180). The master signifiers (identity-bearing words) embedded in ideologies are important to the psyche (Lacan, 1982).

Bucking a trend by some scholars to neutralize ideology, British sociologist John B. Thompson (1990) formulates a critical conceptualization of ways that “symbolic forms<sup>11</sup> intersect with relations of power” so that “meaning is mobilized to establish and sustain relations of domination” (p. 56). Thompson asserts that “social location and entitlements associated with positions endow individuals with varying degrees of power to make decisions, pursue ends, or realize interests.” He further clarifies that domination occurs when “established relations of power are systematically asymmetrical” and “particular agents have durable power which remains inaccessible to others” (p. 59). I use Thompson’s (1990) ideological operations and symbolic construction strategies (see

Table 3.1) to identify manifestations of ideology in participants' narratives; my critique illustrates how an interlocking stock of ideas backs normative cultural practice to support the elevated status of dominant groups, thus allowing stratified social relations to seem right, natural, and inevitable (Rochon, 1998). Polanyi (1957) notes that the ideas and customs that support stratified social relations become so internal and visceral that they are taken for granted regardless of social actors' class position. As Bourdieu (1996) writes, "social hierarchy dissimulates itself to those it dignifies no less than to those it excludes" (p. x).

Ideologies that mystify class relations take various forms including storytelling. This chapter presents familiar versions of ideological storytelling that are circulated by dominant class scholars, educators, and parents to account for class distinctions in educational and occupational outcomes. In the early to mid-1900s, lay and scholarly stories focused on genes, race, and ethnicity; that is, tales of biological determinism were widespread. Theories about genetic inferiority were accepted as proven by scientific evidence (see Gould, 1981, 1995) and the eugenic remedies that were acted upon by public officials had dire consequences for "contaminating groups."<sup>12</sup> The most dramatic example is the deadly ethnic purging (extermination) of Jewish and Roma peoples by Germans in the Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s. Subsequently, genetic explanations for human distinctions lost their appeal. Nevertheless, when explanations of genetic differences in intelligence emerge (e.g., Jensen, 1969; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), they get considerable public exposure in the popular press—some indignation and condemnation, but much is rather ambiguous.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, when genetic theories were mostly out of style, the idea of cultural deprivation was featured in social science and lay theories about social class differences in student achievement. For example, the classic ideological "American dream of social mobility," combined with tales of "school as a meritocracy," cause a range of students to believe that the playing field is level and those who excel do so by virtue of natural talents while those who fail are lacking. Another popular portrayal (ideology) is that poor people do not care if they fail in school and choose to live in poverty. The happy ending of these stories for high achievers is that they are entitled to rewards and need not worry about the negative school and life circumstances of Others. Because the affluent are distanced geographically and psychologically from poor people's lives, their impressions have little connection to reality.

Cultural deprivation arguments were debunked a generation ago (Keddie, 1973). Still, an enduring social construct is that poor children's unsuccessful school careers are due to insufficient intellectual stimulation at home and parents' not caring about education.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the criticism of victim blaming (Ryan, 1971) and of locating problems in those subjected to racism rather than in racists (DuBois, 1965), discerning inferiority in Others continues to dominate public discourse and social science research (Brantlinger, 1997; Valencia, 1997; Wright, 1993). Deficit sentiments (ideologies) also reverberate through the rationale of policy makers. Ray and Mickelson (1990) cite U.S. Secretary of Labor Cavazos's espousal of a defective worker philosophy in his claim that trade and budget problems cannot be resolved without overcoming educational problems. National projects such as *A Nation at Risk*, 1983, (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) and *America 2000*,

(U.S. Department of Education, 1991), based on assumptions of deficient workers and declining global competitiveness, passed with bipartisan support (Arons, 1997). By constantly criticizing schools and students and proposing actions that have little relevance to solving actual problems, political and corporate leaders divert attention from disadvantaging school conditions (Natriello, 1996, p. 8) and ignore the self-serving actions of powerful people. Using these tactics, corporate and government officials abdicate responsibility for the dire economic circumstances of many families.

In contrast to theory based on presumptions of poor people's inferiority, a seemingly kinder way is understanding the poor as culturally different. British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1971, 1973) locates the cause of working-class students' lower school performance in the disjuncture between their restricted code and the elaborated communication style of middle-class school personnel—that is, to code mismatch. In spite of the emphasis on cultural relativity rather than inferiority, the terms *restricted* and *elaborated* are semantically loaded and imply a hierarchy in which one style is better. Others who subscribe to difference theory<sup>15</sup> also expect the dominant class to understand differences while the onus is on subordinates to change (e.g., learn elaborated or standard code).

Whether they explicitly proclaim a conviction about parental lacks, family literacy projects also function under versions of deficit and difference hypotheses (see Auerbach, 1989). It can be argued that the burgeoning technorational enterprise<sup>16</sup> aimed at improving the educational outcomes of low-achieving children is undergirded by deficit hypotheses because inadequacies are found in children or families and remedies are designed to change them. Similarly, the standards and accountability movement is based on the complementary premises that some teachers and/or students are inadequate and either/both must improve. Although not as destructive as Nazi death camps or as great a violation of human rights as forced sterilization or institutionalization, public revelations of low test scores and enforced sanctions for failing schools and students inflict substantial symbolic violence on subordinates in the current system. The onus is on them to “catch up” with high achievers to improve their personal chances for a decent life and/or resuscitate the nation's economy. What is lacking in these scholarly and public discourses is mention of a need to equalize school expenditures or raise low-income families' salaries to reduce the disparities in educational and life circumstances.

In answering the question of who benefits (Gramsci) from recent educational trends, I argue that the educated middle class gains from expanded professional roles and accumulated evidence of their own superiority and the corporate class benefits from the sale of remedies (Metcalf, 2002) and from having a scapegoat to blame for the nation's supposed economic woes.<sup>17</sup> Ideological tales divert attention from their superior conditions and selfish actions. Subordinates are not asked how they feel about segregated or lesser status nor are they seriously included in decisions that affect them. It is implied that remedies benefit them or the whole society. Yet benefits are partial—*only* for the dominant. Harvey (2001) quotes Marx as stating that whenever there is a hoarding of resources (including social status) by some, the accumulation of misery for Others is a necessary condition (p. 28).

## THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATED MIDDLE CLASS IN SOCIAL LIFE

Most Americans describe themselves as middle class (Brantlinger, 1993; Felski, 2002); hence, in some ways, class is an amorphous and ambiguous construct. However, there are many ways this comfortable self-definition of class status is fractured. Anyon (1980) distinguishes an affluent professional (equivalent to my “educated middle”) class from lower-salaried white-collar workers. Locating what he calls the “new middle class” in a contradictory position between the polarized capitalist and the working classes, E.O. Wright (1989) points out that, lacking capital, they do work for wages and thus in a classic Marxist sense are capitalistically exploited. Because of financial assets, they tie their interests to upper classes and believe they benefit from capitalism. Educational credentials<sup>18</sup> raise them to the status of a cultural bourgeoisie with the specialized expertise to shape institutions, establish official knowledge, set standards, define social space, and generate cultural distinctions (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1996). Composed of such highly skilled wage earners as managers, social workers, teachers, and psychiatrists (Gouldner, 1979), the new middle class is empowered to “contain the struggles of subjugated classes” (Wright, 1989, p. 24).

Real authority ultimately lies with capitalists; nevertheless, credentialed workers or “faceless professionals who are competent members of a social class going about the business” of using “technical expertise to work within a discipline” (Foucault, 1980, p. 7) comprise a “reign of experts” (Troyna & Vincent, 1996) who police social life with a “technocratic certainty that they understand other people’s happiness better than they do” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 27). They control<sup>19</sup> the masses through the major disciplinary instruments of hierarchic surveillance, normalizing sanctions, and examination (Foucault, 1977). A tacit consensus exists among educators, scholars, and elites that only expert knowledge is legitimate (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Others’ cultural traits and preferences are not represented in the governance of public institutions, and, because they are devalued, attempts are made to eradicate them (Banks, 1997; Foster, 1997; Sleeter, 1995).<sup>20</sup> Funding initiatives supposedly aimed at helping the poor have increased professional jobs for the college educated. While the ranks of the poor expand, their conditions worsen, and their isolation becomes more profound, jobs in the social service sector have proliferated as have the credentials needed to obtain them. Some (Brown, 1995; Danforth, 1996; Gordon & Keiser, 1998) question the value of these proliferating specialized fields and people’s dependence on credentials garnered through higher education<sup>21</sup>—phenomena that result in an ever-expanding professional middle class with ever-tightening standards to secure their monopoly of higher ranks (Gouldner, 1979; Wright, 1985).

In modern times, social divisions are solidified and officially sanctioned by legislated regulations and professional protocols. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) authorizes disability categories and due-process guidelines for practice. States mandate high-stakes tests and accountability measures to control teachers and students. Roles of providers and consumers of services are monitored to ensure compliance with established procedures. Power imbalances between local actors are depersonalized—

professionals only do their jobs—so power relations are disguised as they are perpetuated. For these reasons, Ringer (2000) challenges the “received view” that the relation between educational expansion and democratization of nations is constructive (p. 158).

Professionals put forward members of their class as models to emulate. Educated parents are touted as the ideal in terms of valuing education and encouraging achievement (Epstein, 1990; Epstein & Scott-Jones, 1992; Mayer, 1997; Will, 2002). They constitute an unstudied but positively imagined control group against whom Others are unfavorably compared. Few in the educated middle class consider how their class might have a detrimental impact on society or Others in their community, yet studies of middle-class parents and educators show that they endorse class-partial practices (Eichstedt, 1998; Kozol, 1991; Packer, 1992). Sieber (1982) details how affluent parents who moved into renovated brownstones in an urban area demanded advanced classes for their children, thereby creating the two-tier system in which substantially more resources went to affluent children. Lipman (1998) quotes an administrator who said that upper-middle-class white parents say they are supporters of public schools but want their children isolated and tracked in them (p. 1). In Ontario, Canada, Olson (1983) documents how funds meant to improve relations between English- and French-speaking people went to French-language immersion programs attended only by advanced middle-class children.

Horvat, Lareau, and Weininger (2002) note the propensity of affluent parents to be knowledgeable about school affairs and integrated into school functions and information networks. They control their children’s course and program choices and intervene in decisions regarding them. The information resources, attitude of advocacy, and critical surveillance of practice that affluent parents bring to their school interactions are powerful and effective (Lareau, 1989). Furthermore, middle-class people believe that advocating for school advantage for their children is integral to being a good parent (Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, & Guskin, 1996). David (1993) documents how this trend toward “parentocracy” means children’s educational conditions depend on mothers’ actions. Other scholars describe how educated parents unite in collective actions to secure advantages for children of their class (Graue, Kroeger, & Prager, 2001; Kohn, 1998; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lipman, 1997; Useem, 1992; Valdes, 1996). Whitty (2000) claims that the British middle class has effectively colonized public education for themselves. Parents of the educated middle class are strong advocates for their children and, unlike their poor or working-class counterparts, are positioned to exert considerable influence over schooling (Apple, 1992; Ball, 1994; Bersoff, 1999; Farazmand, 1999; Grimes, 1997; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992; Tooley, 1999). As they pursue preferences for their children (i.e., hoard opportunities; Tilly, 1999), they determine the nature and quality of education for all children (Lovelace, 2002; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Thomas & Moran, 1992; Wells, 2002; Wells & Serna, 1996).

### RELEGATING OTHERS TO LESSER STATUS

Eagleton (1990) notes that it is the oppressors’ privilege to decide what the oppressed

should be. In schools this translates into separating children from poor and working-class backgrounds from the mainstream and referring to them with disparaging epithets (Apter, 1996; Caplan, 1995; Capshew, 1999; Kutchins & Kirk, 1997; McDermott & Varenne, 1996; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Classifications impact how others see children as well as how they see themselves (Kailin, 2000). Segregated placements inevitably result in decreased school and postschool success (Ansalone, 2001; Dunn, 1968; Wells & Crain, 1992). Reynolds and Wolfe (1998) report that children who receive special education services have lower reading and math achievement scores than comparable students left in mainstream classes and that students separated for longer times have the lowest scores. Low-achieving students placed in high tracks make academic gains within a short period of time (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Even when students select their track placements—what some school patrons mistakenly call detracking—students' track choice is influenced by their sense of identity as well as invisible institutional barriers, so lower-income students and students of color still end up in lower tracks (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002).

According to Bourdieu, schools have taken over the task of sanctifying social divisions through generating inequalities and stigmatizing even average performance (cited in Roth, 1992). Classification is a “practice of power deeply inscribed on the oppressed” (Ladwig & Gore, 1994, p. 234). Inequality and stigma inflict symbolic violence (humiliation, alienation, and rejection) on those labeled and educated in the lower echelons of stratified schools. Yet technical labels are touted as scientifically correct and objectively determined; hence, they are impervious to criticism (Howe, 1997). It is this pretense of objectivity and neutrality that makes ranking and classifying systems especially pernicious (Delamont, 1989; Fine & Roberts, 1999; hooks, 1994). Because ranking systems are officially endorsed by professional and governmental guidelines and due-process procedures,<sup>22</sup> they happen with the collusion of subordinates, although subordinates are never sufficiently informed nor can their participation be seen as voluntary (Ball, 1994; Bourdieu, 1996; Brantlinger, 1986b).

Although professionals often maintain that schools geared to distinctive characteristics of students are humane in preventing students' frustration and failure,<sup>23</sup> there is evidence that people whose children end up in second-rate alternatives are opposed to such arrangements. Kantor and Lowe (1995) claim “no black constituency demanded compensatory education; nor did any organized black group participate in the formulation of federal legislation that endorsed compensatory practices” (p. 9). My studies reveal that working-class and poor youth and their parents are bitter about low-track and special education placement (Brantlinger, 1986b, 1993).<sup>24</sup> Wrigley (1982) writes of how Chicago working classes historically fought vocational programs through labor organizations. They wanted their children in comprehensive schools because they were aware that separate systems were inherently unequal and limiting.

## EXPLANATIONS FOR SOCIAL CLASS AND SCHOOL OUTCOMES CORRESPONDENCE

Agreement exists among educational researchers that students' achievement and

attainment corresponds to their social class status (Coleman, 1988; Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks, 1972). Disputes arise about how to account for differences. Regardless of myths and stereotypes about working-class and low-income people, my interviews with parents and youth indicate that lesser educational outcomes are not due to language or intelligence deficits nor are they the result of families not valuing education (Brantlinger, 1985a, 1986a, 1993). Similarly, others have found that lower-income people share the reverence of the middle class for education and the good life as well as the conviction that social mobility depends on school success (Dibos, 2002; Kozol, 2001; MacLeod, 1987). Admittedly, because they are rational in judging their life circumstances, working-class and poor children and their parents have lower expectations for educational and occupational attainment (Brantlinger, 1986a). They cannot afford private supplementary advantages during their K-12 education or the expenses of higher education (Orfield, 1992; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). Because they rarely benefit from it, the competitive school structure does not play the same motivating role for them as for middle-class students (Brandau & Collins, 1994). Class advantage may be invisible to those who benefit, but subordinates are acutely aware of barriers to opportunity (Delpit, 1995). And, past struggles either alienate students from school or leave them resigned to the likelihood of future unfavorable circumstances (Brantlinger, 1985a, 1993); that is systemic bias has a cumulative effect on morale (Mickelson, 1993). Some oppressed students protest bias and resist domination by engaging in opposition to school authority (Ogbu, 1995; Willis, 1977). Creating counteridentities to oppose stereotypes and discrimination may sometimes be advantageous; (Fraser, 1989; Mehan, 1992, 1995), however, refusal to conform often results in retaliation by those in charge, which worsens students' chances relative to mainstream school agendas (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977).

The most salient reason for school achievement disparities is that poor, working-class, immigrant, inner-city, and minority children are hampered by the character and quality of their schools (Burton, 1999; Fields & Feinberg, 2001; Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Jencks, 1972; Kozol, 1967, 1991, 2001; Ludwig & Bassi, 1999; Orfield, 2000; Seiler & Tobin, 2000; Sexton, 1961; Wilson & Corbett, 2001) and inadequate family income (Bales, 1999; Polakow, 1992; Rubin, 1976; Ryan, 1969; Weis, 1990; Wildman, 1996; Wilson, 1987, 1996). Local control of school finance means that along with better life conditions, students from wealthier families receive a better education. Yet inequities are rarely addressed by politicians, the media, or scholars. Although not legitimate in a wealthy country that could revise the tax base and resource distribution, given the local property tax-based funding of public schools, quality differences between districts might be expected. But disparities are also common within districts. Lipman (2002) notes extreme differences within the Chicago Public School System and claims they result from three levels of policy implementation: (1) *Rules* seem fair to all (2) but are *enacted* distinctively according to each school's student (class) composition; and (3) at the *symbolic* level, students, parents, and school personnel react to rules from their class positions. Powerful parents insist on the best resources for their children's education (Wildman, 1996). Less influential parents have similar hopes for their children's schools, but their wishes go unrealized (Brantlinger, 1985c; Harry, 1992; Lareau, 1989). Although school personnel might be responsive if poor people were more assertive, because

subordinates are resigned to life's disparities, they tend to expect school inequities and do not feel entitled to make demands (Brantlinger, 1985a, b).

Lower-income people do not choose inadequate schools (Lauder et al., 1999; Lee, 1993, 1995; Lee, Croninger, & Smith 1996; Thrupp, 1998), but policy failure at various levels means they have little control over school quality (Anyon, 1997; Apple, 2001; Orfield, 2000). They also do not have the power of the pocketbook to buy houses in neighborhoods known for good schools (Schneider et al., 2000). Even when they attend heterogeneous schools, tracking results in students of different classes not having the same opportunities for learning (Ansalone, 2001; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Ryan, 1981; Sexton, 1961; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Wells, 2002). Because of the intersection of social class status and race/ethnicity, children of color are overrepresented in lowstatus classes and underrepresented in high-status ones (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Barton & Oliver, 1997; Brantlinger, 1986b, 1993; Connor & Boskin, 2001; Harry, 1992,1994; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Patton, 1998; Tomlinson, 1982, 1999). Teachers select Eurocentric middle-class-oriented curriculum, which, when combined with the messages taught through the stratified school structure, causes poor children and children of color to believe that they are not as smart and deserving as their middle-class white counterparts (Brantlinger, 1993; Carlson, 1999, 2002; Dibos, 2002; Graue, Kroeger, & Prager, 2001). Some are so alienated that they give up on the biased system before they reach high school (Brantlinger, 1993; MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977).

If working-class and low-income people value an enriched curriculum and social class-inclusive classes and schools, and if they do better in mixed and enhanced circumstances, citizens—especially educational scholars—must ask why segregating practices exist and why curriculum and pedagogy vary according to social class status. Because I was convinced that discrimination and social class, ethnic, and racial apartheid were not unintended, I designed studies of educated parents and school personnel to shed light on these issues. However, before I turn to the findings of my ethnographic work, it is important to connect ideas about the educated middle class to the broader context of national and international politics in which people and schools in communities such as Hillsdale are situated.

## **GLOBALIZED CAPITALISM, NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY, AND SCHOOLING**

In thinking about modern society, the idea of drift captures how globalized capitalism<sup>25</sup> evolves without conscious planning or rational deliberation on the part of a broad base of citizens (Glendon, 1991; Hamilton, 1998; Wolfe, 1998). People naively believe that expanding markets and production automatically result in improved material and social conditions (Childs, 2000; Gupta, 2000; Hall, 1983; Harvey, 2001). As Bourdieu (1998) puts it, people “collectively, in the mode of consensus, have an atavistic faith in the historical inevitability of productive forces” and “utter a fatalistic discourse which transforms economic tendencies into destiny” (p. 18). Carlson and Apple (1998) build on

Gramsci's theory that in advanced capitalist societies (in a Fordism era of mass production), consumerism drives industrialization, human thinking, and the organization of public institutions (pp. 6–7).<sup>26</sup> Challenging the idea that the spread of capitalism is progress, Weil (1999) claims:

Postmodern capitalism, with all its emphasis on material acquisition at the expense of human sovereignty and dignity, has created a society whereby heroes and heroines have been replaced by celebrities, artists replaced by producers, and citizens replaced by consumers. It is a society marked by insipid individualism, rabid consumption, material acquisition, and a collective loss of reason and historicity, (p. 91)

Similarly, Kincheloe (1999b) writes that “even conservative analysts have come to understand the negative psychological impact of market-driven capitalism with its commodification of desire and its decimation of community” (p. 5). Yet, even if negative effects are in view, if the United States resembles France, the public chooses “political candidates according to narrow-minded, regressive, security-minded, protectionist, conservative xenophobia” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 18).

Jones (2000) reports on how the organization of economic activity transcends national borders and jurisdictions with globalized capitalism; thus, transnational corporations (TNCs) avoid the taxation and regulatory discipline that conventionally has been the concern and responsibility of national governments. Acknowledging this trend, Stromquist and Monkman (2000) claim that not only are TNCs the primary agents of globalization but they are its major beneficiaries. Hirst and Thompson (1996) believe that corporate leaders and the free-trade liberals<sup>27</sup> who support them feel that politicians have no other task than to protect unfettered worldwide trading. Calling the federal deficit a “license to steal, because it lets the upper class manipulate accounting procedures and transfer funds to themselves without changing taxes,” transferring “the burden to future generations,” Kalra (1995) elaborates on the consequences of neoliberalism:

The function of (the myth of the free market) ideology is to divert the attention of the sheep from reality. This is done by repeating shibboleths like free markets, free trade, performance, double taxation, capital formation, and jobs like a mantra over and over again. The idea is that the sheep will believe what they are told and blame one another for the travails, (p. 147)

Worsham and Olson (1999) concur that “the neo-conservative right has mastered the logic of hegemony in recent years” (p. 130).

Ahmad (1992) argues that the modern time period has witnessed an unprecedented growth of capitalist technological power—a “global triumph of colonialism” in “an imperialized world” (p. 17) that has a great impact on local cultures and civil relations within and between national borders.<sup>28</sup> Yet, curiously, while capitalism expands globally, its influence goes unnoticed. Americans do not call themselves capitalists (Kailin, 2000). The United States is the largest imperial power in history, yet this is rarely mentioned.<sup>29</sup> When global capitalism is brought up within the neoliberal enlightenment discourse, it is

not framed as imperialism but rather as freedom and progress (Sleeter, 2000).

Bourdieu (1998) claims that neoliberalism succeeds in presenting itself as self-evident because nothing is put forward to oppose it. Others warn that the problem with counteracting corporate control of public thought rests mainly with the media (Scatamburlo, 1998). Whereas in the first part of the 20th century newspapers and radio stations were locally owned by citizens of a variety of political persuasions, currently the small number of large communication networks are owned by fewer than two dozen enormous profit-making corporations (McChesney, 1997). Messages supporting corporations and bureaucratic institutions have worldwide circulation (McChesney, 1999; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Viswanath & Demers, 1999). Regardless of general knowledge that workers are exploited, the rationality of the market and the importance of entrepreneurs taking advantage of economic opportunity are touted (Glendon, 1991; Harvey, 1996, 2000, 2001; Huntington, 1996). The media ignores or negatively portrays anyone who protests the system (Glasser & Bowers, 1999).

Another tactic to distract the public from concerns they should have about poor conditions for workers and corporations' colonization of land and people (Martin & Schumann, 1997; Sleeter, 2000) is to focus news on crimes and Hollywood, and keep the public entertained with soap operas and sitcoms. Instead of reporting the poor conditions in American schools, which reveal the need for public expenditures or tax increases (Carnoy, 2000; Natriello, 1996; Neill, 2000), the media focuses on inferior students, teachers, and workers (Mortimore & Mortimore, 1999). Britzman (1992) calls the highly publicized idea of declining teacher quality (and similar media messages) an "arranged, slippery history that hides its interestedness and politics of selection" (p. 73). Educational coverage consistently recommends business-oriented measures to correct the problems they identify (Metcalf, 2002). The ideological messages connected with globalization refute scholars' claims that school funding and quality do matter in terms of student outcomes (Krueger, 2000). Corporate intervention in school governance encourages technical and test-oriented schools that reproduce and aggravate the current social class and wage structure (Neill, 2000). Economic globalization discourses are not unique to the United States but frame educational policies the world over (Ball, 1993, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Hatcher, 1998a, b; Medovoi, 2002; Mintrom, 2000; Morley & Rassool, 1999; Reay, 1998; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997).

One message that has dominated the media is the supposed decline of schools. This hype may have been generated to fill the vacuum left when the communist threat was no longer a sensation.<sup>30</sup> Certainly a cold war logic infuses the anxiety about inadequate workers and risk of losing in global markets or in high-tech battlegrounds. Pronouncements of pending doom are not unique to the United States; hyperbolic concern about lacks in functional literacy tied to fears of national vulnerability is evident in England (Ball, Kenny, & Gardiner, 1990) and Australia (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). Nevertheless, informed critics provide statistics to refute the validity of claims that literacy is declining (Baron, 2000; Bracey, 1997; Rothstein, 1999) or that economic troubles are due to ill-prepared workers (Berliner, 2000; Kenway, 1998; Noddings, 1995).

Berliner and Biddle (1995) call the agitation about academic decline and the United

States losing ground compared to other nations a “manufactured crisis.” Smyth and Schacklock (1998) reject the position that schools can or should be engines for economic restoration. Apprehension about the scarcity of competent graduates in technical fields (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, 1991) is contradicted by the evidence of high unemployment rates among graduates with advanced degrees in mathematics, science, and technology (Boutwell, 1997; Noddings, 1994; O’Brien, 1998). Furthermore, the actual high educational attainment rates in the United States have not prevented jobs with sustainable salaries from disappearing (Wilson, 1996). Even if achievement were declining, it is unlikely that tougher standards for student performance would effectively improve schools or the economy (Kohn, 1998; Kozol, 2001; Meier, 2000; Ohanian, 1999; Starratt, 1994).

Members of the educated middle class probably do not consider themselves imperialists, capitalists, or even advantaged; nevertheless, they are enthusiastic consumers of material culture and cherish the commodified credentials that enable them to manage public affairs. Sleeter (2000) argues that elites increasingly call the shots about education and legislate social controls that bind students to the existing social order. Kalra (1995) concurs: “the upper class has an institutional monopoly” and “the electoral system ensures that no matter who wins, upper class control of the government remains unaffected” (p. xi). Wells (2000) documents a free market rationale for those who support school choice (e.g., charter schools, public vouchers for private schools), which she sees as a backlash against redistributive reforms aimed at decreasing disparities in education and society.

Lykes, Banuazizi, Liem, and Morris (1996) warn that a sharp conservative turn in U.S. politics in the mid-1990s promises to undo progressive social politics that were fought for and won in the 1960s and 1970s because “an ideological crusade by the neo-conservatives has sought to persuade the middle and working classes that their own stagnant economic position is not due to unfair advantages accorded to privileged groups but to the slothfulness of ‘welfare mothers,’ the overburdening of our schools and social service agencies by immigrants, and the undue advantages enjoyed by those who have been helped by affirmative action programs” (p. 8). Piven and Cloward (1996) call welfare bashing an easy political strategy that is integral to “the new class war.” As corporate officials condemn the undeserving poor for putting a drain on the economy (Gans, 1996) and use scare tactics about recessions that would come from businesses folding, they relocate their companies to third-world countries without wage and environmental regulations, or, for that matter, compulsory education. Mean-while, TNCs make huge profits and colonize citizens of rich and poor nations (Sleeter, 2000). Ahmad (1992) claims that “economic realities surround and saturate us” (p. 70), so “corporate repressions and an expanding compliant, affluent bourgeoisie [professional and managerial class] are interrelated” (p. 36).

While the workings of capitalism have remained invisible and social inequalities have been reluctantly acknowledged (O’Brien, 1998), the income gap between classes has widened. Referring to the material losses of the working class as a “pauperization of wages,” Anyon (2000) observes that globalization has meant a concentration of extreme wealth in relatively few international families and increasing poverty and hopelessness

among large sectors of society.<sup>31</sup> In England, Garmarnikow and Green (2000) report poverty at 33% with increasing class polarization. As social classes are polarized financially and divided spatially, whether due to false consciousness of class interest or misperception of the enemy, the struggle over limited resources is more often within classes than between them. Desperate economic conditions pit weaker citizens against each other<sup>32</sup> while elites com-pete for high-paying or high-status positions (Lasch, 1993). Some project that while the middle class may benefit temporarily from the hierarchies they create,<sup>33</sup> a political equality in which each person influences the political process through elections and other means is central to democracy. So, when inequalities escalate, democracy is under threat internally (Lasch, 1995; Miller, 1996; Osbourne, 1996; Rorty, 1998). The decline of social responsibility among elites (Lukas, 1998) and feelings of powerlessness in subordinates (Lukacs, 2000) generally result in alienation and political passivity among American citizens (Eliasoph, 1998).<sup>34</sup>

The impact of global politics on schools is not the focus of this book; however, it must be acknowledged that the attitudes and behaviors of the various middle-class people in my studies do evolve in a polarized social world in which there are disproportionate benefits and injuries from capitalism and class standing (Piven & Cloward, 1979, 1996) and that the social, political, and economic climate shapes human thinking and actions. As Anijar (1999) points out, “individual enterprises [her example is slavery] exist in an ‘all encompassing economic system’” (p. 56). Ahmad (1992) claims that economic realities surround and saturate us (p. 70), so corporate repressions and the rise of a compliant and affluent bourgeoisie (college-educated professional and managerial class) are interrelated (p. 36).

The spectacle made of education in the political arena and the media has caused state and national legislation (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 1983, 1991) demanding student and teacher performance on a narrow range of measures (Anderson, 2002). Education is turned into a ritual performance rather than being an authentically meaningful experience (McLaren, 1986). Corporate messages inculcate an orientation that only technical knowledge that contributes to the market is of value (Brock, 1999; Gelberg, 1997; Harvey, 2000; King, 1995; Lukacs, 2000; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000; Weil, 1999). This technical expedience mentality impacts what students learn or do not learn (Fairtest 1999–2000a, b; Hatton, 1997; McNeil, 1995, 2000a, b). Hinchey (1999) claims that “instrumental rationality turns learning into a mechanistic, depersonalized activity” (p. 128). Leistyna (1999) adds that teachers are reduced “to passive, objective, and efficient distributors of technical information” (p. 7). Similarly, by emphasizing distinctions between types of learners and specialized instructional techniques, teacher education is a conservative determinant of teacher practice (Brantlinger, 1996; Britzman, 1991, 1997). Once on the job, external pressures for students to score well on standardized tests inevitably intensify teachers’ job demands, causing teaching to seem like meaningless busyness (Hall & Harding, 2002). Some teachers are so anxious about the negative repercussions of their students getting below-average scores that they resort to cheating (Associated Press, 2000, June 8).

Most educators admit that the accountability and standards movement embedded in this technocratic educational milieu results in certain students’ failure. But Carlson and

Apple (1998) warn of the negative effects of this kind of schooling on the identity formation of successful students. All pay a price for excessive competition, strict focus on credentialing, and knowledge packaged into measurable pieces. In *Competitive Ethos and Democratic Education*, Nicholls (1989) claims success is defined as superiority over others. He regrets that losing diminishes students' feelings of accomplishment and winning exacerbates egotism. Those who excel have a sense of superiority and entitlement (Brantlinger, 1993) or an "individualistic and narcissistic orientation" (Anyon, 1980, p. 74). Americans are dominated by "the egoistic conception of equality as equality of opportunity to compete for society's prizes" rather than a "noncompetitive conviction that all people are equally and uniquely valuable, and have the same claim on the respect of their fellows and the benefits of the society" (Watt, 1994, p. 227). Saavedra's (2000) claims that opulent people's demand for commodification of knowledge damages all students.

Regarding the themes of this book, corporate notions of inferior workers correspond to the ideas of the educated middle class about the inferiority of other people's children. Perhaps because they gain from the market economy (Dale, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000), affluent professionals find global capitalists' perspectives credible. Privileges and wealth are concentrated in these classes, so both subscribe to the neoliberal optimism that progress is tied to market development—what Harvey (2000) calls the teleological inevitability of global capitalism (p. 13). The neoliberal ideology that translates democracy into individual rights and freedoms provides the justification for unrestrained competition on the economic front as well as in classrooms (Gutmann, 1996; Koggel, 1998; Lamont, 1992). Monopolizing the best neighborhoods, schools, and courses is legitimated by a market mentality. Consumption and expansion are the order of the day. Queries about whether this mentality amounts to progress are discouraged. Referring to the extensive use of cars and tremendous growth in house size and suburbs reported in Census 2000, Kunstler (2000) tallies the huge economic, social, environmental, and spiritual costs that America pays for its consumer-crazed lifestyle.

## WHAT IS STUDIED AND SAID; WHAT IS IGNORED OR SILENCED

Although the public continuously hears about low-achieving students, there is a remarkable silence in scholarly journals and the media about the nature and worth of current achievement goals, the prevalence of practices that advantage some children, and the impact that privileging systems have on the persistence of social rankings. Instead, educational scholars, political theorists, politicians, and media pundits reiterate a multitude of theories about flaws in the disadvantaged to explain the correspondence between social class and school outcomes. Because everything is political and ideological (Zizek, 1994)—and actions are purposeful—it is reasonable to assume that what gets studied and announced or hidden and silenced is a product of influential groups' intentions and is based on their desire to sustain their own personal (class) interests (Thompson, 1984, 1990). In analyzing the trends in discourse and practice, it is important to keep in mind that dominant groups are constantly energized to come up with new

theories to support their hegemony (Gramsci, 1929–1935/1971). Although subordinate groups are not content with the consequences of the current social class dynamics, dominant groups not only are satisfied but they take the social class divisions in society for granted and are motivated to further entrench and expand them. Most scholars do not conjecture about the class structure, recent intensification of social class distinctions, or proliferation of tools designed to solidify and reify distinctions. They do spend time trying to explain the class-correlated differential educational outcomes in ways that are not attributed to their own desires or actions.

This chapter has provided a summary of theories relevant to the nature of social hierarchies, the position of the educated and credentialed middle class relative to global capitalism, and the function of ideologies in creating and sustaining hierarchies. Though cursory, it is hoped that this overview has clarified my ideas about social life, thus providing the grounding for the studies of educated middle-class individuals included in this book.

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