

HEGEMONY INTO THE MILLENNIUM

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What dilemma most threatens our schools? The same dilemma threatening our culture--corporate hegemony. The last twenty years have seen the "real government" begin to come out of the shadows and colonize more and more of America's mind space. Ads are everywhere and countless of our children have created identities for themselves that are extensions of corporate imaging.

Nike is no longer just a fashion statement, it has become an identity, a haircut or tattoo for many. When working with a group of at-risk 3rd grade girls, my girlfriend asked them to draw a logo to represent who they are. Half the group drew the Nike swastika. When she asked what Nike's logo had to do with them, the girls just kept pointing to it.

The concentration of mass communication systems into the hands of a small group of corporate illuminati is near complete. Particularly appalling to me is how our duly elected political lackeys have given their blessing to this unprecedented concentration of power. When I visited the Philippines a year after Corey Aquino lead a revolution unseating Ferdinand Marcos, I had the chance to speak with several of the military commanders executing the revolt. I asked them why they concentrated their battles around taking control and defending the television stations. They just looked at me like I was an idiot. Forget the air strips and armories, the fight for the Philippines took place under television towers.

Our schools are the greatest hegemic force inculturating our children that is still largely non-profit. This is an important distinction to note, since profit taking institutions tend to promulgate a hegemony deifying profit, especially for their own institutions. In a sense, schools have become the last bastion corporate America has not officially colonized.

Whether or not schools become a another corporate marketing tool is the biggest dilemma they face. Community service has been replaced by event sponsorship. Corporate gifts now come with the strings of mandatory exposure of students to advertising. Whole districts are selling their loyalty and access to their students' value systems for enough money run the schools for a couple of hours.

What solutions are available? Any do-gooder can tell you--more money to the schools, better rules about advertising in schools, removing the tax deductions we give to corporations for advertising, etc. But these are only cosmetic. A more sweeping change would be to follow the lead of Ralph Nader and the Green Party. They advocated removing all the privileges corporations in America have, holding their board and owners accountable for their actions, and making sure that ordinary citizens have as many, if not more rights than the legal Frankensteins we call corporate charters.

The real solution is even bigger--revolution. Is America going to stop treating children as a target market? Are we going to value them as the prize of what we become? Media literacy can help move us towards this hegemic confrontation. If we do win the revolution over how value is expressed through media, it will be won because places like schools have resisted becoming clearinghouses for corporate ideology.