

# Introduction to Radical Education

## Theme intro

Bill Blank

In *Deschooling Society*, sociologist Ivan Illich explains how “school either keeps people for life or makes sure that they will fit into some institution.” In our special section on “Unschooling the World,” the *Fifth Estate* maps alternatives to this institutionalized reality; the following avalanche of articles attempts to sort out the conflicts and contradictions for a radical transformation of schooling—and subsequently, revolutionary social change.

While many of our contributors (and readers) are directly involved with various educational institutions, almost all of us are inextricably linked to traditional schooling, however far we are able to run from its tentacles of indoctrination, from our own histories with the traditional three R’s of Repression, Rigidity, and Ritalin. Interestingly, the school has gradually replaced the factory as the most likely locus for revolutionary action, even as the state further promotes factory schooling and social stratification through high-stakes testing, increased competition and related forms of de facto segregation.

Indeed, new battle-lines for dramatic educational change have intensified with the congressional passing of the presumptuous No Child Left Behind (Untested) Act, combined with the post-9/11 mechanics of patriotic subjugation. I remember running into a former political science professor a week after 9/11, who complained how recent events were interrupting his lesson plans, how students were going “off-task” by suddenly questioning his (teacher-centered) curriculum. It is this emerging, often student-led rebellion against apathy and resignation that helps feed this unschooling issue.

We have loosely divided our presentation into five related and overlapping sections: a brief history and theory of radical and anarchist education, radical education within public schools and universities, critiques of disturbing trends within public education, and finally, a discussion of actual free schools and home schooling alternatives. These perspectives do not all agree on how to significantly “unschool”; they differ, in part, over the “fight or flight” mechanisms commonly triggered by the effects of schooling. Still, they all present an elevated urgency, a code red alert, for educating against empires.

—Bill Blank, August 2004

*Editor’s note:* We received a healthy and diverse batch of articles that attempted to examine the practical application of unschooling theories. While we cannot confirm by any first-hand experience what any of the authors say in the four subsequent pieces (“Forget about theories, learn about the practice”, “Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn,” “Learning, Unlearning, Defining, Redefining,” “Adventures with the Audubon Expedition Institute”), they represent a sample of the best essays we received that attempted to “live the critique.” Many in our collective were humbled and inspired by the examples offered from so many different cultures.

### **The Fifth Estate**

Detroit Collective / Subscription Office  
P.O. Box 201016

Ferndale, MI 48220  
**Tennessee Collective / Editorial Office**  
P.O. Box 6  
Liberty, TN 37095  
(615) 536-5999  
FifthEstate@pumkinhollow.net

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