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Remembering Haymarket

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Places of Memory

The 2006 AAG session marking the 120th anniversary of the Haymarket events in Chicago gave us the opportunity to think about the intersections of geography, history and memory in contemporary society and, in my experience, how these pertain to education. In this short paper, I will explore these topics to offer comments about making the classroom a place of continual engagement in which students and faculty participate in critical debates about rights and social justice, and past events like Haymarket can be drawn upon to inform the present. I do not intend to offer a theory of critical pedagogy, nor a thorough literature review on the topic. Rather, I will draw on ideas present in debates about pedagogy and popular memory to contextualize a small survey that I conducted in my Earth's Cultural Landscape course, an introduction to human geography, in February 2006. I asked students about the extent to which they "remembered" the Haymarket events of 1886; their comments led me to reflect on what happens or does not happen in classrooms and the varying degrees to which students are engaged or are disengaged with the processes of education. Thus, when it came to "remembering" Haymarket, my intent was to look inside the classroom as place of memory. After all, the classroom is the location where most of us, as academics, conduct much of

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our work. I believe the classroom is a site of praxis where pedagogy intersects with scholarly research and political debate, and is a location where popular memories are produced and discussed. Many geographical assessments of places of memory focus primarily on statues and other markers of historic sites. They examine the contests over the form and function of monuments and their role in constructing cultural landscapes. Arguably the best-known study of such a place of memory is Harvey's (1979: 381) examination of the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur at Montmartre in Paris in which he argues that the monumental cathedral is understood very differently by the political left and right, but cautions:

“The building hides its secrets in sepulchral silence. Only the living, cognizant of this history, who understand the principles of those who struggled for and against the ‘embellishment’ of that spot, can truly disinter the mysteries that lie entombed there and thereby rescue that rich experience from the deathly silence of the tomb and transform it into the noisy beginnings of the cradle.”

Harvey's analysis concludes by asserting that “[a]ll history is, after all, the history of class struggle” (1979: 381). Harvey thus reminds us that monuments can be used as much to stifle discussions of past events as to provoke recollection, rendering them mute in bronze and stone. At Haymarket, the politics of memory and remembering are similarly entwined with “class struggle,” but as at Montmartre, to ensure that the history remains resonant, people need to know about it.

An assessment of the contests over marking the site of the Haymarket incident at the intersection of W. Randolph and N. Desplaines Streets in Chicago would likely prove to be a fascinating study of competing understandings about the event and the differing interpretations offered by those on the political left and right. However, it is an analysis that I am not going to undertake here, other than to give a very brief review. There have been two statues erected on the Haymarket site. The original statue commemorating events was erected in 1889 and depicted a policeman, his arm aloft as if to quell a crowd. Described by James Loewen (2004: 103) as the USA's “most toppled monument,” in 1970 this statue to police heroism was given 24-hour guard, at a cost to city tax-payers of \$67,400 per year, to prevent its defacement by radical activists (Adelman, 1986). It was subsequently relocated to a police academy just over a mile to the southwest and most recently moved further away from the Haymarket site to the city's police headquarters on S. Michigan Avenue, where it was re-dedicated in summer 2007.

Mayor Richard J. Daley had instigated the round the clock security for the police statue at Haymarket. Thirty-four years later his son, Richard M. Daley, was mayor as a new monument was erected on the Haymarket site in 2004. Symbolically celebrating “freedom of speech,” a phrasing agreed upon by Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and local branches of the Fraternal Order of Police and Federation of Labor (see McNamee, 2004; Isaacs, 2004; Kinzer,

2004), the monument could arguably be understood by city authorities to be safer and more acceptable fare for public recognition than labor rights, anarchism or the political alternatives to capitalism for which those present at Haymarket in 1886 were struggling. The new statue depicts half a dozen red-painted faceless human figures climbing onto a flat-bed wagon that is in the process of either being built or destroyed. This ambiguity was the intention of the artist, Mary Brogger, who explained at the unveiling that, “it gives us the duality showing that the truth in any movement is complicated” (quoted in Dardick, 2004: 3). The truth is that those arrested after speaking at Haymarket had their “freedom of speech” rights brutally curtailed, not championed, by the state. They were certainly not free to speak or write about anarchy, radicalism, socialism and opposition to capitalism. Their speeches were used at the trial of the eight prosecuted as evidence that people holding such beliefs were undeserving of clemency: “The jury was inundated with anarchist writings and documents, indicating that what was really on trial was a philosophy, not men charged with specific crimes” (Lens, 1986: 19). Arguably, it is these aspects of Haymarket that make the events of 120 years ago still pertinent both politically and pedagogically.

While important, statues and monuments alone, as Harvey (1979) asserts, cannot function as places of living memory unless people are actively engaged in the act of remembering the events that they commemorate. To be effective, an audience must be reached and the lessons of monuments learned and remembered. With this in mind, I decided to ask my students at DePaul University in Chicago what they “remembered” about Haymarket.

Remembering Haymarket

I knew nothing about Haymarket before moving to reside in Chicago in 2002. Other geographers have since told me that they too were unaware of the events of 1886 prior to the proposed sessions on the subject at the 2006 AAG. How I first heard about Haymarket, I cannot recall, but I do remember learning about Haymarket almost immediately upon arrival in Chicago. Perhaps I was particularly receptive to the topic, being politically liberal and having learned about British struggles for voting and labor rights at high school in Scotland. Asked to teach an urban geography course in my first quarter at DePaul, I set about learning about Chicago from recent publications on the city (e.g. d’Eramo, 2002), which provided me with an introduction to the Haymarket incident. Thereafter, I participated in a November 2005 tour of the key Haymarket sites led by local labor historian William J. Adelman. Adelman ingeniously timed excursions to ensure that the tour group was present at the gallows site at roughly the same time of day as George

Engel, Adolph Fischer, Albert Parsons and August Spies were executed.² We later entered Waldheim Cemetery as dusk fell, the same time as the funeral procession for the four hanged men arrived exactly 118 years previously.

My experience learning about Haymarket and its commemoration had a minor impact inside the classroom. In my introductory urban geography and urban Chicago classes, I talked about the Haymarket events on half a dozen occasions – but each time as a small section, perhaps only a few minutes, of a more general historical overview. In a walking tour, I took twenty students past the Haymarket site, located in the now rapidly gentrifying West Loop neighborhood of the city. Yet, despite the advantage of teaching in a classroom close to the site of the 1886 bombing and police reaction, my utilization of Haymarket as a pedagogical tool for the exploration of urban, historical and labor geographies has been minimal. This was partly because until I completed the classroom survey discussed below, I presumed Haymarket was a topic that other faculty members at my institution in other disciplines and departments were discussing in their classrooms. Furthermore, the way I structured my urban geography courses, with a case study focused on Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, meant that rather than Haymarket my students are asked to reflect on a lesser known 1877 incident called the "Battle of the Viaduct," the site of which is currently unmarked by statue or plaque.³

As Haymarket is often the subject of displays, talks and tours at local institutions such as the Chicago Historical Museum and Newberry Library, and an event that garnered greater public visibility with the new statue by Mary Brogger erected in 2004, I was interested to contrast my nascent knowledge of Haymarket with that of my students. Of the thirty-nine students in my classroom in February 2006, eleven were educated in the city of Chicago, twenty-one in the immediately surrounding suburbs and seven elsewhere. Such a composition is typical of DePaul University's student body. The gender division was pretty much even and the ethnicity of the students, although not formally asked, I would identify as three

² Louis Lingg was also sentenced to death, but committed suicide in his cell, although some reports suggest he was assassinated. The death sentences of Michael Schwab and Samuel Fielden were later commuted to life imprisonment. Oscar Neebe was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. The eight policemen killed either at Haymarket on 4 May 1886 or as a result of the wounds they suffered there, largely, it is believed, caused by the 'friendly fire' of other policemen, were John J. Barrett, Mathias J. Degan, Timothy Flavin, Nels Hansen, George Muller, Thomas Redden, Michael Sheehan and Timothy Sullivan. The number of others who died at Haymarket or as a result of injuries received during the incident is unknown.

³ On 26 July 1877 at 16th and Halsted Streets, around two miles due south of Haymarket, US troops and Chicago police killed at least thirty people, many of them by-standers, after a group of workers had gathered at the location during a series of strikes in the locale (Adelman, 1983).

African-Americans, two Asian-Americans, eight Hispanic-Americans and the rest whites.⁴ The students who completed the brief classroom survey about Haymarket ranged from new freshmen to seniors taking their general education requirements just prior to graduation. My classroom was in Chicago's downtown Loop, about two miles southeast of the Haymarket site. The responses indicated to me both a startling lack of knowledge about Haymarket and, more encouragingly, a desire to know more about it. Yet, the variety of student reactions, both to Haymarket and to the practice of education more generally, suggest a need to ask ourselves about how the classroom can be utilized as a space where informed popular memories can be produced and discussed.

The Classroom Survey

I first asked students to recount whatever they knew about Haymarket. Twenty-eight of the students simply knew nothing. The other eleven suggested a range of possibilities of varying accuracy:

"I remember that they were riots over food. Other than that the details are foggy."

"It was in the 1880s, it was downtown and the protest got many people killed."

"It was a protest over 8 hour shifts."

"I believe it was partly due to the racial tensions of the time."

"I don't remember specifically about what it was. I think it was a riot between Americans and immigrants over jobs. A bombing took place."

"Workers in Pullman were rioting because of a lack of workers' rights and many protesters were killed. It's a significant event in history for communist Americans."

The range of answers here is indicative. Some people did know that labor issues were relevant, anarchists were present and that the status of immigrants was part of the reason for the resulting actions. Note the response of one anonymous student here: these events were of importance to "*communist Americans*" – but not it seems to the United States as a whole, or world labor history.

⁴ Further examination of the relationship between student demographics and survey response are beyond the scope of this article.

The events at Haymarket were initiated by a series of labor protests that were violently repressed by the police. Three days before the Haymarket incident, on 1 May 1886, marchers took to the streets throughout the USA. In Chicago these events passed relatively peacefully, but on 3 May 1886 two strikers were killed by police action at the McCormick Reaper works on the south side of Chicago. Partly as an effort to commemorate these events, 1 May or May Day, has been utilized globally as a worker's holiday. I asked my students what they knew about May Day. This time, thirty-one of the thirty-nine students knew nothing, actually thirty-three knew nothing if we discount the two wits who said they knew it was in May! Of the remainder, two believed it was an event celebrated in the Soviet Union, one said it was a Catholic Church festival and two said it was about labor issues and the length of the working day. Discouragingly, one student noted, "I was taught this in high school but do not remember."

When asked where they had learned about Haymarket and May Day, eight students mentioned high school history classes and two mentioned DePaul University classes. My intent here is not to ridicule the lack of awareness amongst my students, but rather to consider how classrooms can become spaces of praxis where pedagogy intersects with popular memories to produce an informed citizenry. After I explained the events of Haymarket to these students, the response was a desire to learn more about them:

"It sounds interesting with the executions and suicides so I would definitely want to learn more about it."

"My current knowledge of the Haymarket riots was zilch until the telling of this story. I believe it is a major crime that our own government rounded up labor union leaders just to execute them to suppress their influence. I believe it relates to this class as a true example of American culture that is hidden behind a meaningless constitution."

"I would like to learn more about the Haymarket protest because its history is my city. The Haymarket protest sounds interesting because I have not learned much about that and because ...people had died in the protest defending their rights."

I asked the students to reflect on the lack of class knowledge of these events:

"I didn't know anything about it. I couldn't believe nobody else knew any information. I thought a lot of people were going to know a good amount. There must be a reason why it hasn't been taught to us too. Or maybe nobody wants to teach it, I would like to learn more about the riot."

“I think that the fact that no one was familiar with these events is typical. From the brief discussion that we had, it seemed as though the police officers were excessively brutal and biased in who was arrested. In situations like these, there is always a cover up, leading to the lack of common knowledge. I personally would like to learn more about these events.”

“I would definitely be interested in knowing more about this issue. It really doesn’t surprise me that I haven’t learned about this, only because I didn’t grow up in Chicago. I think this should be a topic taught at a university in Chicago.”

Of course, other students were, it seems, less receptive to the idea of education in general:

“My thoughts are that not knowing anything is perfectly fine. I’m almost sure if this was a big deal in Chicago, I would have heard about it someday from my schools I went to.”

“I really don’t know if it’s necessary to learn about it.”

“It is a tragic event that happened, however I can see why so many students did not know much about it. It doesn’t seem that important. There is so much for us to learn. It’d be impossible to know every little story like May Day and Haymarket.”

Other students were more conspiratorial in their reasoning:

“Coming from a history major, I can say that this situation is taught very little in history courses. It seems to be much more important than history tells us. Historians don’t see this as a major event, so many professors over look or don’t teach enough about the riot.”

“It seems that it is another one of those topics that certain people want to erase from our history books.”

“Perhaps some schools don’t want their students knowing much anarchist or labor union history.”

Conclusions

Arguably this brief survey could be read as an indictment of our education system, since these Chicago-based students know little about Haymarket. In another sense, the responses can be questioned as indicating not just a quantitative lack of knowledge, but a qualitative one. Given the importance, as Harvey (1979)

recognized, of keeping class struggle and debate alive and vibrant, how can memories about Haymarket be remade anew for future generations and remain a vital component in popular debates about demands for rights and social justice? In such debates we, as educators, can make classrooms spaces in which we revitalize memories of Haymarket, consider the views of those executed in 1887, and debate the roles of the state and citizens in these events. Our pedagogy can bring forth the contested memories of this and other class struggles from their often silent internment in the buildings, monuments and otherwise unmarked spaces of our world.

Beyond serving as a valuable lesson in political, cultural, historical and other geographies, conducting this survey on Haymarket and incorporating its results into the class learning process serves as an excellent opportunity to encourage students to think about hegemony and to think about themselves as members of particularly constructed social classes. The history of Haymarket is not suppressed in terms of the removal of records or other tactics used to curtail free inquiry, it seems just not to be taught about very much; nor does it seem to dwell in popular American memory. Although these privileged US students are not comparable to the Latin American “peasants” and “urban masses” whose education concerns Paulo Freire (1983), it seems that some students share the assumption of these groups that it is not their place to learn about some subjects, and that there are topics not worth knowing about. If authoritative institutions such as schools and professors are not teaching about Haymarket then, as at least one student felt, the event must not be “a big deal.” Such comments are perhaps indicative of a hegemony apt at downplaying radical activism, rendering it valueless, silencing it through omission.⁵ Yet, the majority of responses that I received after giving a straight-forward review of the known events at Haymarket – the meeting, police reaction, explosion, subsequent trial and executions – suggested there was attraction to the subject. The events of 1886-1887 make for a good story about radicalism, violence and a miscarriage of justice. Beyond this, they provide a narrative that we as educators can use to our advantage in provoking classroom conversations.

Antonio Gramsci (1999 [1971]: 35) reminds us that the “living work of the teacher” is to produce an educated citizenry by bringing our ideas into dialogue with those of students whose views are more generally representative of societal norms. As teachers we can engage in this by using Haymarket to illustrate that from the streets of Chicago in 1886 to the privileged spaces of academia 120 years later, geographies are continuously constructed through class struggles and on-

⁵ Some states do incorporate Haymarket in their curricula guidelines for high school US History classes, and the impact of the event is often used in classroom discussions of free speech in the United States. I would like to thank Mark Bouman for pointing this out to me.

going practices of silencing and reinterpreting, remembering and forgetting. Throughout the world, the struggle for workers' rights and alternatives to capitalism are continuous. They cannot be confined to monument sites or silenced by commemoration in statues. The events of Haymarket in 1886 should not be allowed to ossify: Remembering Haymarket in our classrooms, like other locations where ongoing struggles for citizens' rights and social justice occur, can comprise the "noisy beginnings of the cradle" of our future possible worlds. It is our job as educators to ensure this happens.⁶

Postscript: A Pedagogy of Possibilities

After describing my student reactions at the AAG conference in 2006, and reading the comments made by the ACME reviewers, I reflected on how my teaching about Haymarket has changed in the past eighteen months. I have continued to examine writing pertaining to the incident (e.g. Roediger and Rosemont, 1986) but despite this, I have only slightly increased the time spent on Haymarket in my urban geography class to incorporate illustrations depicting and naming the eight accused men, more out of respect for their memory than as a critical component of the overall course or a pedagogical tool. In the Fall 2007 quarter I am teaching a course that will introduce incoming freshman students to Chicago. We will visit the Haymarket site, look at the monument to "freedom of speech" and examine some introductory articles about the events of 1886 (e.g. *Chicago History*, 1986). Perhaps these discussions will open avenues for my teaching about Haymarket and enable me to stress in the classroom its continued importance to the geographies of politics, memory and education, in order to develop what Grossberg (1994: 18) calls a "pedagogy of possibilities" in which students are empowered to envision their society differently and to "gain some understanding of their own involvement in the world, and in the making of their own future." This is a pedagogy of possibilities which, to invoke Freire (1983) once more, engages students in the realization that they can transform their world, not just react to it, that they can be actors rather than merely passive receptors of the status quo. It means that I need to shape a classroom in which my students and I can debate which rights should be valued, by whom and why; a classroom in which we can discuss how geographies of class operate at the start of the 21st Century; in short, a classroom in which remembering the events of Haymarket 120 years ago still raises critical questions about our society.

⁶ Clayton Rosati suggested to me that given current technological and cultural practices, thinking about *how* this can be achieved was an avenue for future work. In Chicago, interactive web-sites like <http://www.labortrail.org/> and activist groups like AreaChicago <http://areachicago.org/> are beginning this process.

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