

## Public Education Divided by Class and The Failed Nationwide Response to COVID-19

Darrell Sanders  
Pomona College

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### **Public Education Divided By Class and The Failed Nationwide Response to COVID-19**

#### **• How Have We Gotten Here?**

Although the U.S. makes up 4.25% of the global population, the country accounts for almost 20% of COVID-19 cases and 19% of total COVID-19 related deaths (Worldometer, 2020). The U.S. is currently the worst country in the entire world in regards to the intensity of COVID-19. Therefore, the question must be asked of how a country who was predicted to be the world leader in responses to a global pandemic (Richter, 2019), became one of the poorest perceived countries in terms of its handling of the pandemic (Wike, 2020).

In this paper, I analyze the ways in which congress and the wealthy have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, to explain why the U.S. has shown little resilience in its battle against it. At the start of the pandemic, federal congress passed a stimulus bill that gave \$1,200 dollars to each American, but tens of millions of dollars in aid to big businesses (Snell, 2020). As the median salary of congress is \$511,000 dollars per member (Rollcall 2019), I use these figures to discuss how the rich and wealthy prioritize the profits of other rich individuals and big businesses, over the importance of the average American. Therefore, the non-rich are forced to

bear the conditions of the pandemic, due to withheld support from Congress and the rich, which increases the overall exposure of the average American and others to the spread of COVID-19.

I then shift my focus to non-congress members of the rich, who despite making 14 billion dollars in pandemic profits (Stateler, Du, and Kinder, 2020), aren't doing any better than congress in aiding their workers. I use Karl Marx's theory of class conflict to explain this behavior, in which the majority of my paper, I highlight the on-going exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Simply put, the bourgeoisie's main goal are the profits and exploitation that they can gain from the proletariat, not their health. This creates a situation where the bourgeoisie come out unscathed from the pandemic, while the proletariat remains worked without compensation and is put into harm's way of the pandemic.

Émile Durkheim's theory of organic solidarity which emerges within industrialized societies is the main framework I use to analyze the failures of the U.S.' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Durkheim theorized that the education system is what prepared individuals to integrate into society. Therefore, in an educational system like the U.S. that funds a large portion of schools through property taxes (Semuels, 2016), the rich can afford quality education and high-levels of preparedness, while the proletariat lacks the same ability to do so. The inequality of access to educational resources between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, is what I propose is one of the key factors that aided the U.S.' poor response to COVID-19.

Financially privileged members of society go on to use their wealth of educational resources to obtain institutionalized cultural capital in the form of college degrees, a concept founded by Pierre Bourdieu. Institutionalized cultural capital becomes extremely important when accessing current leaders and decision-makers who were responsible in dictating the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The overwhelming majority of Congress and the 400 wealthiest people in the U.S. held a bachelor's degree, with more than half holding graduate degrees (Congressional Research Service, 2019; Cam 2019). Therefore, the rich have a higher chance of obtaining leadership roles, in the future, through access to quality education, so that they can continue in the exploitation of the proletariat and the nepotists assistance of the bourgeoisie.

Lastly, I use Weber's theory of the spirit of capitalism, to describe the quarter of American's which supported the protests to end lock downs and return to work (Willetts, 2020). I combine this with my discussion on the education system, to talk about how the spirit of capitalism is taught within schools to both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, hence their respective behaviors whether it be protesting COVID-19 restrictions or exploiting the proletariat.

- **How Education Shapes The Individual to Integrate: Social Cohesion and Its Class Distinctions**

The key classical theorists I use to analyze the failed response to COVID-19 are Émile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx. I begin with Durkheim's ([1893] 1960) work, *The Division of Labor in Society*, to describe the type of context in which the United States exists in. According to Durkheim ([1893] 1960), industrialized societies such as the United States, exhibit the division of labor, in which occupational jobs become more specialized to the individual. From the division of labor an organic type of social solidarity manifests, which Durkheim refers to as organic solidarity. Durkheim's definition of a society based in organic solidarity arose from the individuation of the individual. Members of an organic society depended upon another, and cooperate through interdependence. Durkheim uses the example of a farmer that produces food for a worker, who in turn, produces the tractor for the farmer. Thus, the farmer and the worker need each other and rely on the livelihood of one another an equal amount. The farmer cannot exist without the worker and vice versa. Durkheim believed society could accomplish more due

to its specialized parts, the same way that the human body has many functions due to the support of its differentiated organs.

Education for Durkheim, was the means for preparing individuals to enter this type of society. In a lecture given by Durkheim, titled *Education and Sociology*, he argued that “Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands.” (1956: 70) Therefore, if an organic society cooperates through occupational interdependence, then education prepares the individual for this task, otherwise known as social cohesion. I use these three theories (organic solidarity, social cohesion, and education as preparing the individual) to analyze the unequal education system within the United States. Durkheim did mention that education was not a monolith, and should vary by different castes groups of societies, in order to meet their needs. For instance, the education of a German should be different than the education of a Canadian, because German society has a different set of needs than Canadian society. Although, Durkheim accounted for variance of content by caste and society, he did not account for variance of *quality*. What type of social cohesion is born, when the means of preparing the individual, is lacking? How effectively can an organ function, if its cells are underdeveloped? Most importantly, how can collective action be achieved, in order to fight a deadly virus, when its members are not properly prepared?

In the United States, quality of education is often associated with wealth or financial class. This is due to the fact that a large portion of schools funding is provided through local taxes (Turner et al., 2016). Therefore, those who can afford to live in a wealthy area, have better access to a higher quality of education. I use Marx’s theory of class conflict and the bourgeoisie, to build upon Durkheim’s concept of organic solidarity. The “bourgeoisie” according to Marx, describes “the exploiting and ruling class”, or the “modern capitalists” ([1848] 2010: 8) who partake in exploitation and class oppression. If only the bourgeoisie can afford a proper education, then only the bourgeoisie can afford to prepare themselves to properly integrate into a society of organic solidarity. Therefore, a distinction upon class becomes apparent in the overall preparedness of the individual within society. If the bourgeoisie’s main goal is to continue the exploit of the working class, otherwise known as the proletariat, then it is only logical that they would use their means of education to carry out this exploitation. This creates a deficit, where the bourgeoisie can use their educational tools to achieve organic harmony and thus achieve a higher functioning of collective action. Although the proletariat is still integrated into society, they can never hope to achieve the level of social cohesion and interdependence that has been achieved by the bourgeoisie, who use their social cohesion to manipulate the proletariat. Despite the lack of preparedness by the proletariat, society continues to be fully functional, but the bourgeoisie remain at the helm of society, leading and shaping it as it pleases.

Next, I transition to Marx’s theory of the social division of labor, in which communities exchange commodities, that they have a competitive or natural advantage in producing. For example, community “A” has a monopoly over a certain product, which community “B” relies on. Community “A” can then withhold production for their own benefit, or to demand a certain amount of exchange value from community “B” ([1867] 2000). In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, a situation arises, where the bourgeoisie have a monopoly over wages. This creates a heavy burden on the proletarian, as now they are forced to make a choice. The proletariat can continue to work for their wages and potentially spread or contract COVID-19, lose their job, or find another job which provides them the same dilemma. If the proletariat has no means to obtaining the bourgeoisie’s monopolistic commodity of labor, then they must give in to their demands and provide labor despite the conditions. Such a situation would only aid in the spread

of COVID-19, as the proletariat is forced to come to work, and put themselves and others at greater exposure to the virus.

I use Weber's idea of the "Spirit of Capitalism", to analyze not the difference of quality of education within the U.S., but the quality of content being taught within schools. Weber describes this idea of the spirit of capitalism as, "the idea of a duty of the individual towards the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end itself." ([1905] 2005) If according to Durkheim, education prepares the individual to enter a society, then the education system within a capitalist society must prepare the individual to either work, or to exploit the worked. Either way, the spirit of capitalism persists within the education system of a society based within capitalism. Whether it's teaching the bourgeoisie how to exploit the proletariat, or teaching the proletariat how to trade their labor power for their means of survival. The spirit of capitalism is strongly existent within the members of a capitalist's society – whether it be during a pandemic, or the most peaceful of times. Weber's theory of the spirit of capitalism only aids in the exploitation of the proletariat for the bourgeoisie, as both parties have been taught that this is the structure of their working society. Therefore, some members of the proletariat are animated by the spirit of capitalism to protests COVID-19 restrictions as they're forced to stay home from work. While members of the bourgeoisie continue to follow the teachings of the spirit of capitalism and exploit the proletariat at flagrantly as possible.

I use Talcott Parsons work, *The School Class as a Social System*, to build further upon Durkheim's idea of education as an "agency of socialization" (Parsons 1959: 298) Parsons' work is used both to enhance Durkheim's theory's that education serves as a system of preparation and occupational selection and allocation. Parsons also adds emphasis to the idea that schools are not the only institution for socialization and preparing the individual for society. Parsons says that "the family, informal "peer groups", churches, and sundry voluntary organizations all play part [in socializing the individual]" (1959: 298). When education fails to properly socialize the individual, other institutions compensate and those values compromise a larger portion of the individual. This creates a situation in which individuals no longer share a basic sense of values in society. Therefore, when something such as a virus hits a society, the overall agenda is different amongst its members in how to deal with the virus. Some turn to religion and choose to pray for their safety, some choose science, and some choose politics -- It rids of the concept of a uniform response to COVID-19.

Lastly, Pierre Bourdieu's work is used to talk about the concept of institutionalized cultural capital. Institutionalized cultural capital comes in the forms of "educational qualifications; and as social capital...which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility" (1986:16). The bourgeoisie have access to a higher quality of education and become the beneficiaries of this form of capital, which they can convert into a "title of nobility" or the occupational jobs which reflect their cultural capital. These are not jobs of the lowly proletariat, but jobs, which reflect their preparedness in society. The politicians, the capitalists, the leaders, the decision-makers. This creates a system where the bourgeoisie, again, are given the tools to access the roles which dictate the national response to COVID-19. The bourgeoisie will use their cultural capital to make decisions that will (1) benefit themselves and the members of their financial class and (2) exploit the proletariat. During a pandemic this translates to a system where the bourgeoisie are safe from the risks of COVID-19 and the proletariat are left to suffer. At the intersection of this theory, we find that an unequal education stratified by financial class leaves a fractured proletariat society. The proletariat suffers a lowered level of collection action, social cohesion, and specialization. The opposite becomes true for the bourgeoisie.

- **“The United States of COVID-19”**

The name ‘United States of COVID-19’ is a fitting name for the U.S. as they go through an unprecedented and terrible battle with COVID-19. As of November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the U.S. ranked number one in the entire world for total amount of COVID-19 cases. As previously mentioned, the U.S. only accounts for 4.25% of the world’s total population, although the country accounts for approximately 20% of COVID-19 cases, and 19% of total COVID-19 deaths around the world (Worldometer, 2020). With 12.4 million cases, the U.S. is the worst place in the world in regards to the intensity of COVID-19. To put this into perspective, India (the second worst country regarding the impact of COVID-19) accounts for 17% of the total global population (1 billion more people than the U.S.), yet still has 3.3 million cases less than the U.S. (Worldometer, 2020). To add, India is classified as a developing country (WESP, 2020) with a population density twelve times higher than the U.S. (Indexmundi, 2020) and is still doing better. To understand how the coronavirus became such a profound crisis in the U.S., one must understand the events which took place in the beginning of the pandemic. From March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 to May 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, all 50 states exercised some version of a “stay-at-home” order to contain the spread of COVID-19 (CDC, 2020). Businesses temporarily closed and workers stayed home. One would imagine that this was the best scenario possible, but as the duration of staying at home increased, people became financially distressed as they were no longer generating or receiving income. Although folks were encouraged to stay home and not come to work – bills, rent, mortgages, and payments were still due. There was temporary relief by the government that came in the form of a one-time payment of \$1200 dollars for those who were eligible. Congress passed a bill, which allotted \$784 billion dollars in aid to the declining finances of Americans, and to give a wider range of unemployment benefits for those who were laid off (Snell, 2020). If we assume that each of the 328 million adult Americans claimed their support from the government, that equates to roughly \$2,300 dollars for each American. This was the *only* amount of federal support that Americans have received during the entire 8-month duration of the pandemic thus far. Along with the bill to aid the public, Congress also passed \$532 billion dollars in aid for big businesses (with > 500 employees). In 2017 there were reported to be 20,139 big businesses (U.S. Census, 2017), which means that big businesses received \$26 million dollars in aid per business, on average. This means that the government aided in the assistance of big business by more than 11,000 times than that of the average American.

If Americans ran out of funds, they had no other choice but to return to work due to lack of governmental support. American’s needed to return to work, some continuing to work from home and others having to work in-person. It doesn’t help that members of U.S. congress are also members of the bourgeoisie, with the median average salary of a U.S. congress member being \$511,000 dollars and its richest member having a net worth of \$500 million dollars (Rollcall, 2019).

To make matters worse, other acting members of the bourgeoisie didn’t do any better than congress in aiding and supporting Americans during the pandemic. Acting members of the bourgeoisie can easily be found when analyzing the CEO’s of the top 10 largest retailers of the U.S. Therefore, let us analyze the ways in which they’ve chosen to support their workers, many of who are unable to work from home. Of these 10 CEO’s, they have a median net worth of 108 million dollars (Investopedia, 2020; Wallmine, 2020), meaning, any one of them can easily be categorized as an acting member of the bourgeoisie. The 10 retailers of these CEO’s combined,

made 61 billion dollars in profits during the first three quarters of 2020 (\$14.2 billion dollars more than 2019), but only 2 of the 10 retailers (Home Depot and Lowe's) provided more financial support than the \$2,300 dollars congress gave Americans (Stateler et al., 2020). On average, the retailers provided \$1,500 dollars per worker in the form of hazard pay or appreciation payments. Amazon and Walmart, the two largest U.S. retailers in terms of number of employees and 2020 profits, could've quadrupled the amount of COVID-19 hazard pay for their workers and still made more profits than 2019 (Stateler et al., 2020). Instead, Walmart has spent a measly \$900 dollars per worker in terms of COVID-19 hazard pay, while Amazon has spent \$1,369 dollars per worker, doing the same (Stateler et al., 2020).

The bourgeoisie have withheld literally billions of dollars of profit from their workers and have syphoned those dollars directly into the pockets of the already wealthy. Of the 84 billion dollars that the top 25 most profitable U.S. businesses made since the start of 2020, 99% of those profits will go to the companies' shareholders. This paints an unfair reality for the proletariat, as the wealthiest 10% of Americans own 87% of all corporate shares, while the bottom half of American's own only 1% (OXFAM, 2020). Therefore, the proletariat or the essential worker will profit next to nothing for their dangerous and hard work, as essential workers earn below the average income for their state, in every single state across the U.S. (McQuarrie, 2020). Consequently, the bourgeoisie will give untold riches to other members of the bourgeoisie. Simply put, both the bourgeoisie and congress have the ability to aid American's so that they can stay home, make ends meet, or be compensated for their greater risk of labor. Despite this ability, the bourgeoisie continue to aid in the exploitation of the proletariat and make them choose between staying home and being safe, or coming to work and exposing themselves and others to the pandemic without compensation.

The bourgeoisie and government aren't only to blame in terms of aiding in the return of workers and the ensuing spread of COVID-19. Among some, the spirit of capitalism was so ripe that they actively took to the streets to protest COVID-19 quarantine restrictions (Leung, 2020). After the stay-at-home orders began to take place in late-March and early-April, Americans began protesting. Protesters cited that the restrictions were infringing on civil liberties and would cause long term damage to local economies (BBC, 2020). A majority of the protests featured protesters who were mask-less, intentionally disobeying social distancing, or bearing firearms (Siegler, 2020; BBC, 2020). Although the majority of Americans opposed the protests, 22% or 72 million Americans supported the protests (Willetts, 2020), while 32% feared that COVID-19 restrictions wouldn't be lifted soon enough. Stations such as Fox news praised the protesters, while one live talk show hosts mentioned how "They [the government] wanted to make sure we [Americans] don't go back to work. They don't get it. The American spirit is too strong" (Ecarma, 2020). Although it isn't the majority of American's who have partook in the protesting of COVID-19 restrictions, almost a quarter of American's are eager to get back to work or ready for others to return to work, so that they no longer have to stay at home.

In comparison to other countries the U.S. has done a poor job in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After countries such as Iceland reached 100 cases per a million residents, it took them one day to reach a daily testing rate of one COVID-19 test per 1,000 residents. Other countries such as Lithuania, Norway and New Zealand reached the same daily testing rate in seven to fourteen days. For the U.S., it took nearly 2 months (Zamarripa, 2020)! To continue, compared to 18 of the most developed and economically rich countries, the U.S. saw a death rate at 50% higher than every one of those countries, after adjusting the numbers to account for population difference (Beaubien, 2020). Lastly, A global survey which had 13 developed and economically rich countries rank other countries responses to COVID-19, saw every single one

of the thirteen countries rank the U.S.'s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in dead last. Only 15% of respondents expressed a favorable opinion towards the U.S.'s response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Wike, 2020).

Even if the U.S. were to begin a better implementation and handling of restrictions for COVID-19, it is difficult to say whether Americans would follow suit. Only 49% of Americans say that they would be willing to stay home for one month if a national lockdown were implemented, with 33% saying they would be very or somewhat unlikely to follow restrictions (Saad, 2020). The trend continues down the line, with 62% of Americans saying that they are partially isolating or not isolating at all and only 47% of American's saying that they are avoiding small social gatherings. Of the questions asking about isolation, social distancing, or following restrictions, not one of the questions saw a majority response from Americans leaning towards safety (Saad, 2020).

Therefore, the failed nationwide response to COVID-19 can be attributed to problems that exist within multiple levels of American society. First it exists within the response of the government, which intentionally chose to aid big business, instead of paying Americans to stay home. Next, it exists within members of the bourgeoisie and owners of big businesses, who have forced their workers to work with little compensation during a pandemic. Lastly it exists within the American, who so blindly feel the spirit of capitalism that they would protest COVID-19 restrictions or just simply oppose restriction suggestions, in general. I propose, that one of the key factors causing widespread dysfunction during the pandemic can be attributed to the unequal quality of education within the U.S.

Education inequality runs rampant in the U.S., due to the fact that the U.S. is one of the only countries in the world that allow its local economies to decide how to fund its schools (Semuels, 2016). In 1973 the supreme court ruled in a 5-4 decision that there was no equal right to school funding under the constitution. Consequently, the education of poor children has suffered, while rich children have flourished. According to the Economic Policy Institute (2017) a child's socioeconomic class was "one of the most significant predictors—if not the single most significant predictor—of their educational success." Rich students from the top fifth percentile scored on average 1.2 and 1.3 standard deviations higher on reading and math than students from the lowest fifth percentile (Garcia and Weiss, 2017). Studies have shown that when public schools are court-ordered to spend more money on low-income students they consistently do better in school (Semuels, 2016). Additionally, a 20% increase in per-pupil spending for poor children can lead to an additional year of completed education (Semuels, 2016). The current reality is that rich children do better than poor children in school, and as of 2012, the richest quarter of school districts spent \$1,500 dollars more per student, than the poorest quarter of school districts (Barshay, 2020).

Federal spending on public education only accounts for 8-9% of a school's financial revenue, which most go to providing free or reduced lunch programs (Semuels, 2016). As I mentioned previously, an average of 36.4% of a school's revenue is to be funded by property taxes; in some states this number reaches as high as 58% (Reschovsky, 2018). As a result, schools are left relatively unequal. Areas with high property taxes are able to afford quality education for their children, while the opposite becomes true for low property valued areas. This creates an education disparity between the children of low-income earners and high-income earners, otherwise known as, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

- **The Bourgeois and The Proletarian, Two Roads Diverged**

As Durkheim theorized, the division of labor is a key feature of an industrialized society, in

which organic solidarity arises. Industrialized societies are connected through interdependence and shared basic values. Currently, the U.S. is the third largest industrialized nation in the world, in terms of annual industrial output by dollars (CIA, 2018). Therefore the U.S. can only depend on interdependence and shared basic values, to be fully functioning. Education is the intermediary for preparing individuals to function within society and when it fails, its individuals cannot achieve total social harmony. One of the reasons for the failed response to the COVID-19 pandemic is the direct consequence of the failure of the preparation of individuals, who were not financially privileged enough to earn a quality education.

Let us then follow two paths, one of the proletariat and one of the bourgeois. The proletariat attends school in a poor urban area in the city of Chicago, where property taxes account for 52% of school revenue (Leone, 2020) but 76% of students qualify for reduced or subsidized school meals (A Better Chicago, 2020). This student has a dream of becoming a state congressman. Due to the low values of houses and general poverty, the area has an incredibly low level of property taxes and thus a low level of school funding. The school that the student attends cannot afford teachers who are highly specialized to properly teach their students. The P.E. teacher may also be the math teacher, who may also be the art teacher. In fact, 1 in 3 Chicago public schools were left without a teacher in at least one of their classes in 2019 (Karp, 2019). Therefore, the student suffers from a lack of resources and doesn't learn at their full capacity. The student doesn't understand the joys of what it means to feel the woes of completing a challenging math problem, only frustration. Their peers and teachers do not have the time or the resources to inspire the student to continue onward with their education. The student looks to other institutions such as the church for social engagement and preparation, to compensate where the school lacks. Despite not being prepared for college, the student won't have enough money to make it through college, even if they could. It's a daunting task for the 76% of students, who qualify for reduced or free lunch programs, to afford the average cost of a four-year institution at \$32,889 dollars per year (Educationdata, 2020). Therefore, the student never earns their bachelor's degree and thus lacks institutionalized cultural capital. In 2016, only 18% of the current Chicago public school's ninth-graders were predicted to earn a bachelor's degree six years after their graduation (UChicago, 2016). When the student applies for internship positions to work for their state capitol, they're declined due to the lack of qualifications. The student feels discouraged and takes a job working as an associate manager at their local fast-food chain near their house. When COVID-19 begins, they're deemed an essential worker.

The bourgeois student experiences a reality quite different than that of the proletariat student. To begin, the bourgeois student does not have a specific career in mind, but only that they wish to become "something". This student attends a highly ranked school in their state, because they live in an extremely wealthy area with great schools. They have the best teachers around who can properly pass their expertise of knowledge on to their students. The students have access to tutors, after school programs, and extra help whenever they need it. These students enjoy the academic program made for them; the science fair is rewarding, their reading programs enhance their overall knowledge of culture and information, and the students enjoying learning. They feel engaged within their school and rely on after-school programs and sports for sense of community and belonging. Due to their learned academic skills, they excel in school and are encouraged to continue with their education at every level. The student does not think twice about the burden of paying for college, simply, because the burden does not exist. The student then enters college and earns their bachelor's degree. On average, 78% of students from the highest quintile of financial class graduate college, as opposed to the lowest quintile, 28% (InsideHigherEd, 2019).

Coincidentally, they decide they want to aspire to become a state congressman after randomly



applying for an internship and easily obtaining the position. After multiple summers of interning as a politician, they go on to earn their master's degree in political science and eventually run for office. When COVID-19 begins, they are the co-authors of a local bill which dictates their community's response to the virus.

As mentioned previously, obtaining a college degree is incredibly important when one aspires to become leader or a decision-maker. Of the 533 members of Congress, 96% had a college education, while 70% held a degree higher than a bachelors (Congressional Research Service, 2019). In addition, of the 400 richest people in the U.S. 84% had a bachelor's degree, 40% held a graduate degree and 23% graduated from an ivy league school (Cam, 2019). If high classed individuals have better access to educational resources and have a higher proportional chance of making it to college, then they inevitably will become the leaders that decide how to respond to events such as a global pandemic. In this sense, we can see how the stratification of education by class shapes the path of the bourgeois, differently than the path of the proletariat. I argue that such stratification results in the following:

- ***A lack of specialization.*** When individuals cannot attain or access a proper education it creates barriers to obtaining cultural capital and proper occupational specialization. Arguably, these tools such as a bachelor's degree (institutionalized cultural capital) or having a firm handle on a wide-range of educational subjects are necessary for shaping an all-around individual. Such an individual is qualified and therefore prepared to enter roles which require high levels of specialization, such as a politician, decision-maker, or a businessman. Therefore, the stratification of education by economic class only allows the rich (bourgeoisie) to access these roles. It's as if the bourgeoisie are allowed access to their own type of special society, which is only inhabited by other specialized individuals who possess the same resources to enter such a society. This allows the bourgeoisie to have a monopoly over leadership roles and positions, and mold society in ways that only benefits other members of the bourgeoisie class. This can explain how U.S. congress can justify giving tens of millions of dollars to big businesses, but a one-time payment of \$1200 to Americans while still collecting bills. This can also explain how the top 25 most profitable U.S. businesses can justify giving 99% of their pandemic profits back to their shareholders. If we were to analyze this example using anatomical terms; the stratification of education by financial class has created a society where the rich can use their means of specialization to "high-jack" the organ. The organ, which was once autonomic, is now being lead and used by the bourgeoisie for their own means. Such an event no longer allows the original function of the organ, instead its function is specialized and tailored only to serve those prepared to use it, the bourgeoisie. Through tactics such as lobbying and political donations, the bourgeoisie continue to repurpose society to the tune of their own financial interests. 2019 saw the second highest amount of political lobbying of the decade, recording over 3.47 billion dollars in corporate lobbying (Statista, 2020). In 2018 Other industries such as oil and gas companies spent almost 200 million dollars in lobbying to delay policies aimed at tackling climate change (The Conversation, 2020). Therefore, the bourgeoisie use their cultural capital, financial wealth, and connections to other members of the bourgeoisie to repurpose society to their own advantage. This is all to say, the failed national COVID-19 response, only failed one organic body of society – the proletariat, which make up almost half of all American's with 44% of American's working "low-wage" jobs (CBS news, 2019). The bourgeoisie used their specialized means, their cultural capital, and their leadership roles to attain

collective action, in order to protect themselves and other bourgeoisie members of society, from the pandemic. Through specialization and interdependence, the bourgeoisie were able to achieve a state of social cohesion amongst themselves and come out untouched or better off during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ***A lack of social cohesion.*** Parsons (1959) viewed education as a chance for the young to enter a universal “mini-society” that was separate from the family. Education allowed room and space for individuals to understand the demands of society, its norms, and its customs. It also gave the individual an idea of where they fit, within this broad picture of society. With the stratification of education by class, this creates a reality in which individuals enter different qualities of these “mini-societies” to prepare themselves. The stratification of education then must translate to the stratification of preparedness by the individual. Those who obtained a lower quality “mini-society” then must be a lower quality functioning member of society. These lesser prepared individuals do not share the same sense of values that society requires, and obtain these values from other institutions such as the church, or the family. This creates multiple fractures within society, that can only be healed with high-quality public education available to all. Otherwise, a lack of social cohesion breeds a higher level of individualism, not rooted within the organic collective. While a high level of individualism can typically aid in the maintenance of a highly industrialized society like the U.S., ill-prepared, uneducated acting members of society, who share different values with high levels of individuality can possibly aid in the spread of a transmissible disease, such as COVID-19. Researchers at the University of Virginia (2020), found that higher local levels of individualism reduced compliance with state lockdowns by 41% and reduced pandemic-related fundraising by 48%. Therefore, the individual finds themselves lost with no tethers to their community. Neither interdependence or connection through shared values can save them. The individual remains baseless and alone in the fight against COVID-19, unsure who to trust, who to listen to, or how to handle their own safety. They are animated by the spirit of capitalism, even during times of danger, and know no other but to follow it. They shrink from their former glory of a collective organ, to a cell amongst others, having no choice but to follow the agenda of the bourgeoisie. The cells are still functional, but only to the extent of which the bourgeoisie demands it. Collective action becomes impossibly unachievable due to the lack of specialization, cultural capital or harmony to exist amongst others highly individualized cells.

- **Free Quality Education for All**

In the famous words of Karl Marx, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” ([1848] 2010: 14). The failed national response to COVID-19, simply reflects the realities of class distinction within U.S. society exacerbated by education inequalities. As we saw, the bourgeoisie are given all the tools that they need to succeed in integrating into the organic harmonies of societies. They use their resources of high-quality education financed by high property taxes to look out for other members of the bourgeoisie, all while continuing to exploit the proletariat. The bourgeoisie maintains a commodity over the proletariat, in terms of wages, institutionalized cultural capital, and leadership positions, in order to demand desired behaviors from the proletariat. The proletariat on the other hand has no other choice but to follow the will of the bourgeoisie, as they now command society. Therefore, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S., the bourgeoisie saw historical increases in profits, while the proletariat

was forced to work with little to no compensation from either the bourgeoisie or congress. This explains both the overwhelming number of bachelors and graduate degrees, as well as the salaries that leaders of the U.S. held. Members of the already privileged, which come from higher-income backgrounds have a disproportionate advantage to other lower-class individuals when it comes to obtaining a college education. Therefore, I believe that the U.S. would've made a more formidable enemy to the COVID-19 pandemic, if more American's could access high quality education and overcome traditional financial barriers within education.

Ideally, the proletariat would be able to obtain the same levels of education as the bourgeoisie, at no expense to the proletariat. A much larger portion of school funding would come in the way of federal support. This would completely diminish the amount of dollars spent per-pupil according to the value of property taxes in different areas. Such a vision, would see Durkheim's theory of organic solidarity truly ensue. The proletariat and the bourgeois alike, would have a higher increase of shared values, occupational specialization, interdependence and social cohesion. Optimistically, there would exist no difference of academic performance between the proletarians and the bourgeois. A domino effect would begin, where the proletariat would begin to earn forms of institutionalized cultural capital at the same levels of the bourgeoisie. There would be an increase of wages, degrees, and leadership roles amongst American's. When something such as the COVID-19 pandemic began, even if the bourgeoisie continued to only look out for other members of the bourgeoisie, it'd be equalized by the newfound resources of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie would no longer own the majority of the economy, and would need to rely on the proletariat to make it out untouched throughout the pandemic. Naturally, a level of interdependence would become inevitable and the return of the autonomic functions of the organ would take place.

Until that dream takes place, the United States will remain COVID-19's least formidable enemy. If the proletariat were given the proper educational means to achieve social cohesion and occupational specialization, the leaders of this country would become more diverse and then the history and trajectory of this pandemic would be a better one. The rich wouldn't just look out for the rich, instead the average American would have somebody to watch their back for the duration of the pandemic and when it came to an end. To begin and to end with Karl Marx, "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains!" ([1848] 2010: 34)

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