

Woke Moralism: #DisruptTexts And The Abrogation of Literature

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Destroy the Four Olds, 1966.

April 1, 2021 John Coleman

Introduction

In the spring of 1966, before the violence of the Cultural Revolution washed over China, the CCP initiated a campaign against the “Four Olds.” This project aimed to eradicate Chinese culture in order to protect Chinese culture. “Sweep Away All Monsters And Demons,” enjoined the Party’s print organ. What followed was a violent “cancel culture.” As then, so now.

In 2018 the #DisruptTexts group was founded by Lorena German. Much like Black Lives Matters and AltRight, #DisruptTexts marshalled decades of critique into a single legal entity. Why the advocates of these edgy ideas are so intent on handing over their work to the

Bar Association system is beyond me, but much as we speak of the AltRight and BLM, when I speak of #DisruptTexts I will be referring to the movement in general and not the fictional entity. So sue me.

This essay argues two points concerning the approach of #DisruptTexts. Insofar as this movement is principally a pedagogical effort, my first points concern the way we in the general public understand literature. The approach of #DisruptTexts is inappropriate because (1) American society is too unstable at present to dismantle narratives as we have too little to work with as is, and (2) their powerful observation of social dynamics, even the conscious inclusion of Critical Race Theory, is being taught to students who do not have the intellectual matrix to responsibly digest these ideas. As we consider #DisruptTexts in the context of the mass education crisis, and while I will address theoretical errors which exist in their approach, we need to realize how our own individual and social sloppiness exacerbates these woke errors. There is plenty of blame to go around, and #DisruptTexts is but one factor of several.

Concerning my second point, #DisruptTexts is problematic (how's that for a Leftist word!) because of its inability to contribute towards the construction of a social order. There is on the Left too much breaking down, not enough building up. The racial genie has bewitched the partisans of #DisruptTexts and there is no end to the deconstruction road. And not to put too sharp a point on it, for people who are hip to what is called "race," they should respect the white culture of America as much as the Indian culture of the Subcontinent, or anywhere else.

Orientation & House Rules

From the start I ought to say that #DisruptTexts is not especially alarming to me. It is one of a conga line of educational fads which regularly burn through my vocational field. In fact, as it lacks coordinated state patronage it is a few clicks less pressing than No Child Left Behind or Common Core, recent foci of educational wariness. It is always important to remember the frequency of these sorts of fads before emotionally reacting to them.

As I wrote in my late series on We The People, I assert that there is no day to day racism in America. It is an insult to both the dead generations of Americans who suffered actual racism, as well as those of our day who suffer like discrimination across the world. The tribulations of the Tutsi, the Uighurs, and the Rohingya are a damn sight more serious than the pettyfogging gripes of American academics. #DisruptTexts, Black Lives Matter, et al. represent one of a number of divide and conquer tactics which the American ruling class excels in implementing. Keeping the ethnic groups annoyed with each other distracts from the track-trace-database system Mr. Schwab and his eponyms are building; it distracts from the endless Pentagon wars and the thousand-front looting of the American working class.

What racism there is exists in institutions which are in an adversarial relationship to the population they rule over, and their crimes literally have nothing to do with subject Americans. #DisruptTexts is right in saying there is profound and systemic racism in social institutions, most outstandingly via subsidiary state corporations like their military branches, police departments, and prisons. However, the U.S. Federal and state governments, and the business/legal system of which the state is a product, have officially existed in a state of war against the American people since the 37th Congress (March 1860). Charges of racism in those arenas have nothing whatsoever to do with flesh and blood Americans. Deconstructing all the books in all the canons of the world will not do one thing to affect the guilty entities. I wish these racial critics well as they make the governments and their hirelings confront their racial errors. However, insofar as the American government is foreign to the population it claims rulership over, I as an uninvolved party wish to be left alone by #DisruptTexts.

The Concept

#DisruptTexts aims to reconsider the ways literature is taught and experienced in American schools. Where this immediately draws popular attention, as it eventually will from us, is in the specific choices of books assigned in class. However, their reconsideration only begins by challenging the canon. To focus primarily on their book selections is to miss the deeper point. Most educational critique does this, it gets caught up on the superficial externals with little grasp of the principles at play.

Now when we speak of “the canon” we mean the group of texts more or less taught throughout the country. Its advocates are aware, in ways most men are not, of “literature” being larger study than a simply a litany of stories. #DisruptTexts’ proponents are sensitive to dynamics such as intertextuality, discourse, and identities of all sorts, and their relationship to literature. In this they are to be praised.

The Canon

#DisruptTexts is not altogether without praise. In the interest of graciousness, and towards an honest understanding of their approach, I should want to continue my analysis on this note. For one, #DisruptTexts’ proponents are aware of both “the canon” and what was once called the “Great Conversation.” By the canon they mean those go-to books which form the core of American lit classes country-wide.

From sea to shining sea I’d bet Americans mucking about in their 20s through their 40s are more or less familiar with *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (1993), S.E. Hinton’s *Outsiders* (1967), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* written by Zora Neale Hurston (1937), and *Streetcar Named Desire* from the pen of Tennessee Williams (1947). This is the canon. It can change, it inevitably does change. Usually this happens during that unicorn of a department shakeup when old timers have been pensioned off and newer energetic teachers haven’t burned out and moved onto other avocations. In other words, the literary canon does change, but it does

so only slowly, locally, and insofar as even the spunkiest of teachers can only take so much before other saner work beckons, the canon changes only temporarily before the old go-tos are back.

The Great Conversation

The “Great Conversation” is more abstract than the canon. It is the concept that authors are in a sense in a dialogue with each other over the centuries. That specific label comes from Robert Hutchins’ and Mortimer Adler’s essays of the same name which used to lead off the University of Chicago’s Great Books series. Ah, talk about changed reading habits! Just two or three generations back encyclopedia salesmen were a thing. Encyclopedia men fought with colleagues hawking *The Story of Civilization* and the *Great Books of the Western World*. More remarkable still, everyone had work. As a testament to our present contempt of knowledge, as of this article’s composition the entire 54-volume Great Books series is retailing on eBay for about \$20 (and that’s \$20 in devalued 2021 fiat dollars, mind you).

The Great Conversation is a thrilling concept. Just think, Plato and Bede and Renan and 10,000 other greats were all part of the same work. And mirabile dictu, that work was not a dead thing. No matter how mundane the world might see one, the Great Conversation held the promise of a millenia-long discourse anybody can plug into as soon as they can open the nearest book or pick up the closest pen. To familiarize yourself with the Great Conversation, if Adler doesn’t float your boat you might read Dean Swift’s delightful *Battle of the Books* tale for a humorous treatment of the same idea.

The Great Conversation is also a powerful concept. I’ll never forget when I came across the idea as a young teacher. It doubtless enriches one’s appreciation of literature as a discipline. It is a simple idea, a powerful one, and a democratic one. Like moveable type, phonetic alphabets, or chord notation, simplifications of existing technologies which greatly increased common access, the popularization of the slim and trim Great Conversation can do much to move the general public toward a consciousness that literature is more than a collection of subjectively good or bad entertainment, more than mental popcorn. Though they do not use the specific term, #DisruptTexts is right to popularize the idea of the Great Conversation.

Narrative

It is to the credit of the Left that as a general rule that they’ve a sharper sense of sociological dynamics than your regular John Q normie or—heaven forbid—your local conservative. During the preliminary stages of the 2020 Biden coup, during that hot summer of racial rent-a-mob riots, I’ll never forget the anchors of one conservative U.S. outfit. Throwing their papers on the desk they begged, “Please, we just want to live regular lives.” Clueless. They were seemingly unaware of the purpose of direct action.

Likewise, five solid years into the Left's weaponization of gender dysphoria and most of your "black pill" sorts, people who have "seen through the matrix" and flatter themselves in knowing all the backroom deals and agendas, don't seem to have grasped that the academic Left has made a simple but adamantine distinction between gender and sex. Much less do they know how to respond to such a thesis. Ah masha, if it were raining soup your conservatives would be out and about with folks. But b'times Leftists lay off Twitter and they do read books. When they do, they learn things and they observe, and this wouldn't serve any of us badly. One area of observation which undergirds #DistruptTexts is the idea of narrative.

Narratives are stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. They link the amalgam of experiences we as individuals and communities encounter into a manageable story. Without narratives we're left with a nearly infinite blob of facts with no rhyme or reason to them. As John Gaddis writes in *The Landscape of History*, narrative makers are like map makers. For a map to be intelligible, just like the discipline of literature, those involved must include some things and they must leave out (most) others. If they didn't the map would be 20 square miles, and literature would collapse into endless and random stories. Narratives are necessary. They are similar to worldviews, a concept which received widespread dissemination a decade or so ago, but they have more of communal quality to them because they explain who we are as a people.

Narratives are profoundly human. It is man's fondness for narrative which will forever place the simple but story-filled Bible higher than the eloquent but pedantic Quran in the hearts of men. And in the grand sweep of things the lack of narrative thus will happily banish the tiring politio-religio-techo tracts of the modern West from the minds (to say nothing of the hearts) of later generations. The advocates of #DistruptTexts grasp the power of narrative, and they shudder at the profundity of it. We all must.

Critique, The First

With the duties of graciousness seen to, we turn to our critiques of #DistruptTexts. As we come to grips with the movement we must first appraise the state of the public. In this I do not mean the reading public, for such a thing does not exist. There are men, and they read; sometimes they read books; sometimes many people read many books. However we cannot speak of a reading public (or more magisterially, the reading public) in the manner people of a century ago did. Time moves apace. As it does the literacy of c.1750-1950 will be seen as the peculiarity it was. The public is alliterate at present. It can read but chooses not to. The Great Conversation is less and less a lived experience for Americans.

Because the Great Conversation is a fading memory, because it is a reality less men are participating in, it is taking its effect on society. The decline of religiosity can be pegged to the inability of Western men to envision abstract concepts, this is an ability which is kept in good form by reading. Religiosity in illiterate societies can be explained because, while illiteracy is more common, those skins often enjoy something deracinated Westerners do not, a cultural

matrix which encourages the abstractions of faith. It seems that religion can carry on alright with either a strong reading population or a strong lived culture, ideally religion would do best with both, but if neither are available faith is doomed. The absolute thrall which the mainstream media is able to hold the country in, a spell which explains both Coronavirus saga and Mr. Biden's outrageous yet effortless installation, are nearer examples of what readingless brains will tolerate.

When a movement such as #DisruptText comes along, a movement predicated on the reading habits of a century ago, it encounters men who read menus and cell phones and BuzzFeed. Powerful ideas are proposed to men whose sloth has not prepared them for serious ideas. It is like giving retarded people rocket launchers. Nothing but damage will result.

As a mighty tyranny comes into focus, it is ill advised to spread #DisruptTexts' critique of literature. Until there is a substantive culture to work with, a substantive reading culture, a culture which will be strong enough to shove back the statist and technocrats, a culture which is powerful enough to keep its boot on the throat of commerce and legalism and the humorless crew now in the ascent, there is no sense in deconstructing anything. We must knit together the wisps of society into serviceable culture once again. This is not the time for #DisruptTexts. Until common agency, identity, and community are built into a bulwark against The Agenda, spreading #DisruptTexts' ideas are a liability. There will be no books, woke or otherwise, down on Bill Gates' plantation.

Critique, The Second

Continuing with our look at the people #DisruptTexts means to influence, I assert that their approach is inappropriate given the dynamics of modern pedagogy. As each year goes by the incompetence of our educational system comes more to the fore. By "educational system" I do not mean the bureaucratic structures of education, which is usually the meaning of that term when used. I mean the DNA of industrial learning, the structure of knowledge dissemination, the assumptions and daily rhythm of the classroom.

School is overburdened as is. There are too many demands, too many specializations, too much going on but yet the same amount of hours in the day. Like Madison Avenue's ideal teenagehood, things like the after school job, the driver's ed classes, SAT classes, social life, sports, band, modern education finds itself doing too much too often, and none of it well. Six or seven specialties are proposed to be taught, and all the Federal testing, and all the State Of testing, and all the mental health practices, and anti-bullying efforts, and, and, and... Busyness is the predominant fault of modern education.

Into this activity, into this clamor for hours and minutes, #DisruptTexts wishes to introduce an academic sophistication which cannot possibly be digested properly. In this, like with my above point, this is not the fault of the advocates of #DisruptTexts. It is the failure of

American society and of our ridiculously overburdened school system. As stated above, there are actual strong points to #DisruptTexts, particularly their ideas of literature being in dialogue and their point about the canon being stale and largely being perpetuated because of laziness. However, at present #DisruptTexts is not realistic given the sorry state of pedagogy.

Let us embrace the seriousness which #DisruptTexts promises to bring to literature education, let us embrace the opportunity to change our pedagogical format to include, if not the specific sociological outlook they propose, at least their more substantive appreciation of letters. However, until this is systematically done—and this will not be done because the masters of this society do not want an erudite population of any political affiliation—#DisruptTexts will produce whining from all sides but little of academic substance.

Critique, The Third

Until now I have kept my analysis of #DisruptTexts confined to the larger milieu they mean to operate in. This is sensible insofar as a good many problems of education have more to do with the sorry intellectual condition we tolerate in our own individual lives, in our “real world” non-school society, than they have to do with plots to manipulate society. Plots there be, but all the Rockefellers and Nixons and NEAs don’t explain why I didn’t read a book last month. Charity begins at home, and so does criticism. But there are problems proper to #DisruptTexts, and to these we turn.

Ethnic Exaggeration

“White” is as clumsy an ethnic designation as “black,” and I pray that people stop using the labels which the merciless rulers of this society propose. There are no “white” people mentioned in Genesis’ Table of Nations, and it’s a great oversight that the same people who tear Darwinism to shreds are the same people who cleave so fondly to Charles’ ethnic designations. But for brevity’s sake #DisruptTexts is plainly anti-white.

There is nothing wrong with being of European stock, and #DisruptTexts’ assertion to the contrary is an error. I want little Arab children to be steeped in Arab culture, I want little African children to be steeped in African culture, and it frankly annoys me to see what is considered American culture holding the allegiance of non-American peoples the world over. However there is nothing wrong with American culture being taught to Americans, and there is nothing wrong in acknowledging that that culture is largely associated with people men call “white.” There are robust ethnic literatures which the American school canon, however musty and dated, already factors in. Indeed, so-called minorities may have a statistically larger place on the canon than their numbers warrant. The constant deconstruction of #DisruptTexts ignores the voice of whites in this country.

It has always been in the favor of reading that the activity puts the user’s life and circumstances in perspective. Broadcast media of various sorts does not have this quality; things are at once too dated and too fast. For example, a film on television invites the viewer

to bog down in superficial details from the time of its production, and the tale will doubtless soon be interrupted by a commercial. This does not happen with literature. There are temporal aspects to the expression, of course. *Les Miserables* cannot be divorced from the 19th Century Republicanism which so inspired Hugo any more than the Bible can be split off from the time and culture of the ancient Hebrew.

The role of history on a specific text's composition is as delicious a study as any, it's analogous to historiography's relationship to history, and it provides one of the great "Easter egg" surprises devoted readers may stumble upon. Nevertheless, literature of any lasting quality, and no small amount which has slipped the mind of the latest generation, transcends time.

#DisruptTexts will sever this multi-generational boon of art. Recent authors, indeed authors who for the most part may still be living on this earth, will crowd out the pens of past generations. Seen in the grand scope of things the dearest concerns of any given generation appear to those removed from that time and place as trifles.

Herein lies more than an irony of #DisruptTexts, but also a hole in its approach. In seeking to include the greatest number of voices (provided they're "woke" and located on a relatively narrow bandwidth of the political spectrum) #DisruptTexts excludes the voice of the most ignored, maligned, and agentically-deprived group on the planet, the dead. Though they comprise a supermajority of humanity, the dead will receive no representation from the woke ones.

White man, black man, yellow man, Left, Right, and Center, we need to realize that authentic American culture has been sabotaged by this country's ruling class. The advocates of #DisruptTexts ought to be on guard against their ideas being used to further this policy. Go read some books from the 1880s and '90s, listen to music from that time. You will see there was as true as true can be distinct American culture coming into focus at that time.

Evolution may be bunk in the biological order but in the cultural realm one culture certainly can morph into something its very own. That was absolutely happening by the late-19th Century. And just as true as true can be, this new specie was purposefully disassembled into the deracinated consumer which has gobbled up the last century of North American existence. Regardless of its intention, #DisruptTexts will contribute to this trend. Until the larger strata of culture can be improved and matured #DisruptTexts will be a danger.

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The featured image shows a Chinese communist poster from ca. 1966, which says, “Destroy the Four Olds [old ideas, old customs, old habits, old culture].” The banner reads, “Disruption is justified!”