Toward Liberating Education
Not Merely Liberal, but Liberating

Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

-Karl Marx

The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter ... the way ... people look at reality, then you can change it.

-James, Baldwin

Current institutions and dominant world views are failing to solve critical problems or improve our society, culture, or quality of life.

Liberating education should empower the student to look at the world in a different way.
Elements of Liberating Education

- *Deep* critical thinking
- *Broad* knowledge base acquired via a rich (and never-ending) intellectual journey

Deep critical thinking means more than recognizing invalid arguments, constructing valid ones, and solving problems using established principles (even if with novel methods).

Deep critical thinking means critiquing and potentially rejecting fundamental premises on which arguments and methods are based and about which problems are to be solved – what Thomas Kuhn called the *paradigm* and Joseph Schumpeter called the *pre-analytic vision*.

To do this, the student must engage with thought as it was conceived, not the condensed “*Reader’s Digest*” version, and no thinker is too dangerous to be off limits.
A Salient Example: Economic Theory

Some fundamental thinkers: Smith, Ricardo, Marx, Keynes, Polanyi, Hayek, Georgescu-Roegen, Daley, Arrow, Debreu, Sen, Arthur, Harvey, . . . . Some fundamental issues:

▶ value, including the value contributed by ecological systems and processes, and the optimization of outcomes
▶ reciprocity vs. market exchange
▶ externalities and transaction costs
▶ the process by which decisions are made
▶ the role of private power and state power
▶ exploitation, alienation, and commodification
▶ rent
▶ feedback and emergent systemic behavior
▶ growth & its limits, including the role of thermodynamics
▶ social welfare
A Journey, not a Package, or
Don’t Try to Find Your Passion, You Must Develop It

A liberating education in economics would engage students with the full spectrum of these issues.

No one can know it all: education is not a package but a journey, in which paths will diverge, converge, and intersect.

As ideas pique one’s interest and one explores intellectual paths, one develops passion. It is not out there to be found – it must be developed.
Expect More of Students

Liberating study requires great rigor and involves much more than “skill” and “training.”

In mathematics, for example, not only axioms, definitions, and theorems must be understood, not only computational methods mastered, but also the motivation, aesthetics, and purpose that underlie them, the structure and process of mathematical thought.

Too often we teach little more than computational methods or, when we do strive to teach more, students hear only the methods.

Thus, a change in our culture is needed. The goal is to produce people who are fully alive.
Finally, Who Are We Teaching

A story.
A liberating education is, by its very nature, threatening to those with power and the structures that support their power.