



Putting Youth Back into the Future: Reclaiming Education and Hope in Dark Times

—Henry A. Giroux

Introduction from Canada

As someone who has recently relocated from the United States to Canada, I am deeply concerned that Canada not emulate the domestic and foreign policies that have been unleashed by the deeply reactionary presidency of George W. Bush. Many Canadians are distrustful, if not appalled, by “the public religiosity” of a right-wing regime in Washington, which appears not only “under the control of Christian *ihadists* confronting Islamist *ihadists*,” but is also waging a war on any vestige of the public good, especially the social contract and the welfare state, two elements of Canadian society that are central to its commitment to social justice and democracy (Whitaker 5). Similarly, most Canadians refuse to endorse Bush’s failed war in Iraq, his ruinous economic policies, his fraudulent case for a missile defence system, or his “outsourcing of torture.”¹ But, as skeptical and critically thoughtful as Canadians are of Bush’s foreign and domestic policies, I think

Canadian academics, politicians, journalists, and other intellectuals should give more attention to the degree to which the Bush administration increasingly wages an assault against young people in the United States and, in doing so, loses all semblance of moral and political credibility. Of course, many people are aware of how U.S. policies have drastically affected the lives of children in other countries—such as Iraq before and after the recent invasion—but there appears to be less known about the war being waged at home against youth. In this article, I focus on what it might mean in a democracy to take children seriously as a moral referent, not only in order to gauge the health of children in a democratic society, but also to define our obligations to future generations of young people. Children constitute a powerful referent for addressing war, poverty, education, and a host of other important social issues. As a symbol of the future, children provide adults with an important moral compass to assess what Jacques Derrida calls

the promises of a “democracy to come” (253). While the context from which I explore these matters is rooted in the U.S. society I recently left, I believe that the issues I speak to regarding the connection between the crisis of youth and the crisis of democracy have important implications for how Canadians address their own concerns about the interface among politics, ethics, and youth. This is particularly the case because of the power the U.S. exercises throughout the world and the threat that it poses both to the very idea of social justice and the possibilities of expanding and deepening global democracy in the twenty-first century.

We live at a time in which the loss of American standing in the world is related directly to the U.S.’s ill-fated war in Iraq, its reckless free-market triumphalism deciding the fate of most nations of the world, and its increasing support at the highest levels of government for domestic Christian right-wing groups. What is often ignored by many critics with their singular fixation on the war abroad is the war that is also being waged on the home front.² This war can be seen not only in the crushing assault on unions and civil liberties, but also in the restructuring of the tax system to benefit the rich and drain resources from the poor and the middle class. The war at home has been exacerbated by the ascendancy of neo-liberal corporate culture into every aspect of American life. Neo-liberalism consolidates econom-

ic power in the hands of the few, aggressively attempts to destroy the welfare state, subordinates the needs of society to the dictates of corporate power, views misfortune as a weakness, and deems public services and goods an unconscionable luxury.³ With few exceptions, the project of democratizing public goods, redistributing resources, and addressing important social problems has fallen into disrepute in the popular imagination as the logic of the market undermines the most basic social solidarities. The consequences include not only a weakened social state, but also a growing sense of insecurity, cynicism, and political retreat on the part of the general public. The incessant calls for self-reliance that now dominate public discourse betray an eviscerated and refigured state that neither provides adequate safety nets for its populace, especially those who are young, poor, or racially marginalized, nor gives any indication that it will serve the interests of its citizens in spite of constitutional guarantees. In fact, as the state is being reconfigured, it is increasingly becoming a punitive state more concerned with punishing and policing than with nurturing and investing in the public good. In short, private interests trump social needs, economic growth becomes more important than social justice, and the militarization and commercialization of public space now define what counts as the public sphere.

This dystopian recognition points to dire politi-

cal, social and economic consequences for young people and for the very nature of democracy itself. Democracy increasingly appears damaged, if not fatally wounded, as those who are young, poor, immigrants, or people of colour are excluded from the operations of power, the realm of politics, and crucial social provisions.

For over a century, Americans have embraced as a defining feature of politics the idea that all levels of government would assume a large measure of responsibility for providing the resources, social provisions, and modes of education that enabled young people to be prepared for a present that would offer them a better future while expanding the meaning and depth of an inclusive democracy. Taking the social contract seriously, American society exhibited a willingness to fight for the rights of children, enact reforms that invested in their future, and provided the educational conditions necessary for them to be critical citizens. Within such a modernist project, democracy was linked to the well-being of youth, while the status of how a society imagined democracy and its future was contingent on how it viewed its responsibility towards future generations.

But the category of youth did more than affirm modernity's social contract rooted in a conception

of the future in which adult commitment was articulated as a vital public service. It also affirmed those vocabularies, values, and social relations central to a politics capable of defending vital institutions as a public good and contributing to the quality of public life. Such a vocabulary was particularly important for

public and higher education, which often defined and addressed its highest ideals through the recognition that how it educated youth was connected to both the democratic future it hoped for and its claim as an important public sphere.

But, just as education has been separated from any viable notion of politics, youth have been separated from the discourse of either the social

contract or any ethical notion of what it might mean for society to provide young people with the prospects of a decent and democratic future. Youth increasingly have come to be seen as a problem rather than as a resource for investing in the future. Framed largely as a generation of suspects, they are now treated as either a disposable population, fodder for a barbaric war in Iraq, or the source of most of society's problems. Youth now constitute a crisis that has less to do with improving the future than with denying it. Punishment and fear have replaced compassion and the social investment as the most



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No longer “viewed as a privileged sign and embodiment of the future” (Grossberg 133), youth are now demonized by the popular media and derided by politicians looking for quick-fix solutions to crime. Bestselling authors such as Lt. Col. Dave Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano argue in their *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill* that young people are more violent than ever before because of what they learn in popular culture and, by default, the authors suggest that young people need to be subjected to more extended disciplinary measures. Hollywood movies consistently represent youth as either dangerous, utterly brainless, or simply without merit. The marketplace only imagines students either as consumers or as billboards wearing branded clothes, accessories, and other items in order to sell sexuality, beauty, music, sports, clothes, and a host of other consumer products. Market relation executives are now gloating over their discovery that eight to fourteen-year-olds constitute a new market for “sexy” fashions such as the La Senza Girl bra, heavy make-up and magazines like *Twist*, *J-14*, *Teen Vogue*, and *M* that read like an adult fashion magazine. At the same time, in a society deeply troubled by their presence, youth prompt in the public imagination a rhetoric of fear, control, and surveillance as well as laws and policies that threaten to fine youth for wearing baggy

pants, subject youth to anti-gang laws that punish kids for violating certain dress codes, and offer them schools that implement zero tolerance policies modelled after prisons. In the case of the latter, federal laws now provide financial incentives to schools that implement zero tolerance policies, in spite of their proven racial and class biases; drug-sniffing dogs and cameras have become a common feature in schools and administrators willingly comply with federal laws that give military recruiters the right to access the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of students in both public schools and institutions of higher education. Trust and respect now give way to fear, disdain, and suspicion. Children have fewer rights than almost any other group and fewer institutions protecting these rights. For instance, while young children need their parents’ permission to get a tattoo or abortion in many states, they can be convicted of a serious crime and put to death long before their eighteenth birthday. The U.S. is one of the few countries in the world that sentences minors to death while spending “three times more on each incarcerated citizen than on each public school pupil” (Wokusck). As Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund, points out,

Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education* and 40 years after President Johnson declared a War

on Poverty, many minority and lower income children still lack a fair chance to live, learn, thrive and contribute in America. The great unfinished business of our nation in this first decade of the 21st century is to open wide the doors of equal education and economic opportunity to every child in America. It's time to build a powerful 21st century movement to emancipate our children from racial injustice and poverty. We must summon the moral, political, and financial courage to make sure that we truly leave no child behind.

And, yet, the Bush administration seems intent on pursuing a "war [in Iraq] whose central feature is the government's consistent, disastrous denial of reality" (Willis 113), just as it drains the public treasury of billions of dollars through tax cuts for the rich and appropriations for a bloated military budget. The idea, not to mention the reality, of justice seems dead on arrival, as the Bush regime consistently and aggressively attempts to generate retrograde policies that seem intent on increasing corporate power, expanding the reach of its empire, and wasting billions of dollars on a rapacious empire-building agenda. Justice seems to take a back seat in Bush's 2006 budget proposal. For instance, the Bush administration proposes to eliminate Upward Bound and Talent Search, two programs that benefit disadvantaged students while at the same time it has allocated

\$127 billion to the Pentagon to build a robot army (Selingo). According to a representative from the U.S. Joint Forces Research Center, the virtue of the robot army is that there "are no prohibitions against robots making life-or-death decisions" (Ford). All of this may be good news for those die-hard members of the Christian right, free-market fundamentalists, and power-hungry neo-conservatives who are doing everything they can, not only to render democracy irrelevant, but also to disempower an entire generation of children whose future is being mortgaged to the vagaries of corporate power, war, and religious fanaticism. Instead of providing a decent critical education to poor young people, President Bush and his cohorts serve them more standardized tests (Kornblut 26), enforce abstinence programs instead of sex education, hand out bibles, inculcate right-wing Christian values, and advocate creationism at the expense of reason and freedom.⁴ Youth who are poor fare even worse and often find themselves in classes that are overcrowded, lack basic resources, and are subject to policies largely designed to warehouse young people rather than to educate them with even minimal basic literacy skills. Instead of providing young people with vibrant public spheres, the Bush government offers them a commercialized culture in which consumerism is the only condition of citizenship. But the hard currency of human suffering that has an impact on children can also be seen in some

astounding statistics that suggest a profound moral and political contradiction at the heart of one of the richest democracies in the world: over one-third of those in poverty are children, boosting the number of children who are poor to 12.9 million. Similarly, 9.3 million children lack health insurance and millions lack affordable child care and decent early-childhood education; in many states more money is being spent on prison construction than on higher education; and the infant mortality rate in the United States is the highest of any industrialized nation. In some urban areas, such as the District of Columbia, the child poverty rate is as high as 45 percent.⁵ Bush's answer to the plight of children in America can be seen in his proposed 2.5 trillion budget for 2006. Laura Flanders defines Bush's budget as a hit list targeting teens and kids because it

calls for cuts in emergency medical services for children, cuts in K-12 education funding, cuts in vocational education and cuts in programs like Head Start. There are food-stamp cuts and a five-year freeze on child care. A \$41 million college loan program is eliminated. The whole National Youth Sports Program which has provided athletics for low income kids is cut, as in cut out.

The hypocrisy underlying these cuts becomes more obvious when cuts in education are examined,

especially since Bush's compassionate conservatism defines itself largely through Bush's educational reforms. In fact, of the 150 programs designed to be radically cut back, "one out of every three of the targeted programs concerns education...[including] \$2.2 billion for high school programs..., \$440 million in Safe and Drug-Free School grants, \$500 million in education technology state grants, \$225 million for the Even Start literacy program, [and] \$280 million for Upward Bound programs for inner-city youths" (Allen and Baker 101).

Paul Krugman calls Bush's latest budget projections a form of class warfare since he "takes food from the mouths of babes and gives the proceeds to his millionaire friends" (A23). In his 2006 budget proposals, Bush calls for terminating aid for over 300,000 people receiving food stamps and denies childcare assistance to over 300,000 children from working-class families while at the same time phasing out a limit on tax exemptions for high-income families that would give taxpayers with incomes over \$1 million an average tax cut of more than \$19,000 (Krugman A23). In this case, savage cuts in education, nutritional assistance for impoverished mothers, veterans' medical care, and basic scientific research would help fund tax cuts for the inordinately rich.

How might youth fare in the midst of such a crisis, particularly around their need for decent schools, qualified teachers, and a critically informed educa-

tion? Rather than invest in young people, the Bush administration either punishes them through retrograde policies or simply ignores their needs. One example of how the Bush administration views the education of young people is a recent incident in which the newly appointed Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, announced on the second day of her job a public attack against the children's television show, *Postcards from Buster* (McCall 1). The show is about a rabbit who travels all over America visiting families of various and diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, according to Spellings, the show was no longer fit to be aired because, in one of the episodes, one of the families visited consisted of children of a lesbian couple. This does not simply suggest an inept public official who would like to teach children that tolerance rather than bigotry is the enemy of democracy. It reveals a powerful representative of the Bush administration whose disregard for children is evident in her undemocratic embrace of censorship and her politically inspired tirades and threats to decrease funding for PBS, another obviously left-wing public service that poses a threat to free market fundamentalism. Ms. Spellings' actions inspired Frank Rich, a writer for the New York Times, to claim that "Ms. Spellings' threats against PBS are only the latest chapter in a continuing saga at an education department that increasingly resembles an authoritarian government's ministry of information" (AR1), one

that clearly has little regard for young people.

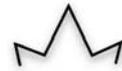
Youth has become one of the most visible symbols onto which class and racial anxieties are projected. The very presence of young people represents the broken promises of capitalism in the age of outsourcing, contract work, deindustrialization, and deregulation. It also represents a collective fear of the consequences wrought by systemic class inequalities, racism, and a culture of downsizing and deficits that has created a generation of unskilled and displaced youth who have been expelled from shrinking markets, blue-collar jobs, and any viable hope in the future. Indeed, more than five million youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four are out of school, work, and hope. In the inner cities, youth hopelessness is increasingly matched with a mix of violence, drug trafficking, and an exaggerated tough-guy masculinity. But as Earl Ofari Hutchinson points out,

It's not just drugs and hopelessness that drive young men, especially young Black men, to kill and dodge bullets. The huge state and federal cutbacks in job training and skills programs, the brutal competition for low and semi skilled service and retail jobs from immigrants [along with] the high number of miserably failing inner-city public schools...have turned thousands of Blacks into education cripples. These students are desperately

unequipped to handle their rapidly evolving and demanding technical and professional skills in the public sector and the business world of the 21st century.

In the degraded economic, political, and cultural geography of neo-liberal capitalism, youth occupy a “dead zone” in which the spectacle of commodification exists side by side with the imposing threat of the prison-industrial complex and the elimination of basic civil liberties. As market fundamentalism frees itself from political power, it disassociates economics from its social costs and “the political state has become the corporate state” (Hertz 11). Under such circumstances, the state does not disappear but, as Pierre Bourdieu has brilliantly reminded us,⁶ is refigured as its role in providing social provisions, intervening on behalf of public welfare, and regulating corporate plunder is weakened. The neo-liberal state no longer invests in solving social problems, it now punishes those who are caught in the downward spiral of its economic policies. Punishment, incarceration, control, and surveillance represent the face of the new expanded state. One consequence is that the implied contract between the state and citizens is broken and

social guarantees for youth, as well as civic obligations to the future, vanish from the agenda of public concern. Similarly, as market values supplant civic values, it becomes increasingly difficult “to translate private worries into public issues and, conversely, to discern public issues in private troubles” (Bau-



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man 2). Alcoholism, homelessness, poverty, and illiteracy, among other issues, are seen not as social but as individual problems—matters of character, individual fortitude, and personal responsibility. Ardent consumers and disengaged citizens provide fodder for a growing cynicism and depoliticization of public life at a time when there is an increasing awareness not just of corporate corruption, financial mismanagement, and systemic greed, but also of the recognition that a democracy of critical citizens is being

replaced quickly by a democracy of consumers. The desire to protect market freedoms and wage a war against terrorism has, ironically, not only ushered in a culture of fear but has also dealt a lethal blow to civil freedoms. At the heart of this contradiction is both the fate of democracy and the civic health and future of a generation of children and young people.

For many young people and adults today, the private sphere has become the only space in which to

imagine any sense of hope, pleasure, or possibility. Culture as an activity in which young people actually produce the conditions of their own agency through dialogue, community participation, public stories, and political struggle is being eroded. In its place we are increasingly surrounded by a “climate of cultural and linguistic privatization” (Klein 177) in which culture becomes something you consume and the only kind of speech that is acceptable is that of the fast-paced shopper. The war against youth can be understood, in part, within those central values and practices that characterize a market fundamentalism, which emphasizes market forces and profit margins while narrowing the legitimacy of the public sphere by redefining it around the related issues of privatization, deregulation, consumption, and safety. In spite of neo-conservative and neo-liberal claims that economic growth will cure social ills, the market has no way of dealing with poverty, social inequality, or civil rights issues. It has no vocabulary for addressing respect, compassion, decency, and ethics or, for that matter, what it means to recognize anti-democratic forms of power. These are political issues, not merely economic concerns. In contrast, a political system based on democratic principles of inclusiveness and non-repression can and does provide citizens with the critical tools necessary for them to participate in investing public life with vibrancy while expanding the foundations of freedom and justice.

The current state of youth bears heavily on both public and higher education. Childhood as a core referent for a vibrant democracy and an embrace of social justice appears to be disappearing in a society that not only rejects the promise of youth, but the future itself “as an affective investment” (Grossberg 133). But the crisis of youth not only signals a dangerous state of affairs for the future, it also portends a crisis in the very idea of the political and ethical constitution of the social and the possibility of articulating the relevance of democracy itself. In what follows, I want to argue that youth as a referent does not only refer to young children, but also to those youth who inhabit the institutions of higher learning where many readers of *CCL/LCJ* teach, posed to become adults by virtue of the knowledge, capacities, and skills they learn as critical citizens, workers, and intellectuals.

Higher Education and the Crisis of the Social

Within the last two decades, a widespread pessimism about public life and politics has developed in the United States. Individual rights now outweigh collective concerns as market ideals have taken precedence over democratic values. In the vocabulary of neo-liberalism, the public collapses into the personal, the personal becomes “the only politics there is, the only politics with a tangible referent or emotional valence” (Comaroff 305-06), and it is

within such an utterly personal discourse that human actions are shaped and agency is privatized. Under neo-liberalism, hope becomes dystopian as the public sphere disappears and, as Peter Beilharz argues, “politics becomes banal, for there is not only an absence of citizenship but a striking absence of agency” (160).

As economic and financial power is increasingly separated from the specificity of traditional politics and public obligations, corporations are less subject to the control of the state and “there is a strong impulse to displace political sovereignty with the sovereignty of the market, as if the latter has a mind and morality of its own” (Comaroff 332). Under the auspices of neo-liberalism, the language of the social is either devalued or ignored, as public life is reduced to a form of pathology and all dreams of the future are now modelled around the narcissistic, privatized, and self-indulgent needs of consumer culture and the dictates of the alleged free market. Samuel Weber has suggested that, what seems to be involved in such a transformation, is “a fundamental and political redefinition of the social value of public services in general, and of universities and education in particular” (qtd. in Simon 47-48).

Within this impoverished sense of politics and public life, the university is increasingly being transformed into a training ground for the corporate workforce, with the loss of any notion of the future that

views higher education as a crucial public sphere in which critical citizens and democratic agents are formed. Anyone who spends any time on a college campus in the United States these days cannot miss how higher education is changing. Strapped for money and increasingly defined in the language of corporate culture, many universities seem less interested in higher learning than in becoming licensed storefronts for brand-name corporations—selling off space, buildings, and endowed chairs to rich corporate donors. College presidents are now called C.E.O.s and are known less for their intellectual leadership than for their role as fundraisers and their ability to bridge the world of academe and business. Venture capitalists now scour colleges and universities in search of the big profits to be made through licensing agreements, the control of intellectual property rights, and investing in university spinoff companies. In the age of money and profit, academic subjects gain stature almost exclusively through their exchange value on the market. This is all the more so as the Bush Administration attempts to privatize higher education, cut student aid, plunder public services and push states to the brink of financial disaster. As higher education increasingly becomes a privilege rather than a right, many working-class students either find it impossible financially to enter college or, because of increased costs, have to drop out. Those students who have the resources to stay in

school are feeling the tight pressures of the job market and rush to take courses and receive professional credentials in business and the bio-sciences as the humanities lose majors and downsize. Not surprisingly, students are now referred to as “customers,” while faculty are rewarded less for their scholarship than their ability to secure funds and generate grants from foundations, corporations, and other external sources. Rather than being rewarded for critically inventive teaching and rigorous research, faculty are now valued as multinational operatives, even as the majority of their colleagues are increasingly reduced to contract employees. Some university presidents even argue that professors should be labelled as “academic entrepreneurs.”⁷

Under the reign of neo-liberalism and corporate culture, the boundaries between commercial culture and public culture become blurred as universities rush to embrace the logic of industrial management while simultaneously forfeiting those broader values central to a democracy and capable of limiting the excesses of corporate power. Although the university has never been free of the market, there is a new intimacy between higher education and corporate culture, characterized by what Larry Hanley calls a “new, quickened symbiosis” (qtd. in Aronowitz, “Conference” 103). The result is “not a fundamental or abrupt change perhaps, but still an unmistakable radical reduction of [higher education’s] public and

critical role” (Miyoshi 263). What was once the hidden curriculum of many universities—the subordination of higher education to capital—has now become an open and much celebrated policy of both public and private higher education (Aronowitz, “New” 32).

As higher education is corporatized, young people find themselves on campuses that look more like malls and they are increasingly taught by professors who are hired on a contractual basis, have obscene work loads, and can barely make enough money to pay the loans for their cars. Tenured faculty are now called upon to generate grants, establish close partnerships with corporations, and teach courses that have practical value in the marketplace. There is little in this vision of the university that imagines young people as anything other than fodder for the corporation.

Educated Hope in Dark Times

In opposition to the corporatization of higher education and the devaluing of the capacities of young people, there is a prominent educational tradition in the United States extending from Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey in which the future of the university is premised on the recognition that, in order for freedom to flourish in the worldly space of the public realm, citizens have to be formed, educated, and socialized. John Dewey, for example, argued that

higher education should provide the conditions for people to involve themselves in the deepest problems of society, to acquire the knowledge, skills, and ethical responsibility necessary for “reasoned participation in democratically organized publics.”⁸ C. Wright Mills challenged schooling as a form of corporate training and called for fashioning higher education within a public philosophy committed to a radical conception of citizenship, civic engagement, and public wisdom. Education in this context was linked to public life through democratic values such as equality, liberty, and freedom, rather than as an adjunct of the corporation whose knowledge and values were defined largely through the prism of commercial interests. Education was crucial to a notion of individual agency and public citizenship, integral to defending the relationship between an autonomous society—rooted in an ever-expanding process of self-examination, critique, and reform—and autonomous individuals, for whom critical inquiry is propelled by the need to engage in an ongoing pursuit of ethics and justice as a matter of public good. In many ways, higher education has been faithful, at least in theory, to a project of modern politics, in which its purpose is to create citizens capable of defining and implementing universal goals such as freedom, equality, and justice as part of a broader attempt to deepen the relationship between an expanded notion of the social and the enabling ground

of a vibrant democracy.

If the rise of the corporate university is to be challenged and education is to become a meaningful site for educating youth for a democratic future, educators and others need to reclaim the meaning and purpose of higher education as an ethical and political response to the demise of democratic public life. At stake here is the need to insist on the role of the university as a public sphere committed to deepening and expanding the possibilities of democratic identities, values, and relations. This approach suggests new models of leadership based on the understanding that the real purpose of higher education is to encourage people to think beyond the task of simply getting a lucrative job. Beyond this ever-narrowing instrumental justification there is the more relevant goal of opening higher education to all groups, creating a critical citizenry, providing specialized work skills for jobs that really require them, democratizing relations of governance among administrators, faculty, and students, and taking seriously the imperative to disseminate an intellectual and artistic culture. Higher education may be one of the few sites left in which students can learn how to mediate critically between democratic values and the demands of corporate power, between identities founded on democratic principles and identities steeped in forms of competitive, unbridled individualism that celebrate self-interest, profit-making, and

greed. This view suggests, once again, that higher education be defended through intellectual work that self-consciously recalls the tension between the democratic imperatives and possibilities of public institutions and their everyday realization within a society dominated by a market fundamentalism. Higher education should be defended as a space of critical education where teachers and students have the chance to resist those modes of pedagogy, time, and rationality that refuse to include questions of judgment and issues of responsibility. Understood as such, higher education should be viewed exclusively as neither a consumer-driven product nor as a form of training and career preparation, but as a mode of learning that renders all individuals fit “to participate in power...to the greatest extent possible, to participate in a common government” (Castoriadis, “Nature” 140), to be capable, as Aristotle reminds us, of both governing and being governed. Addressing education as a democratic endeavour begins with the recognition that higher education is more than an investment opportunity, citizenship is about more than consuming, learning is about more than preparing for a job, and democracy is about more than making choices at the local mall.

Reclaiming higher education as a public sphere begins with the crucial project of challenging corporate ideology and its preference of market time over public time. Market time fosters a narrow sense of

leadership, agency, and public values, and is largely indifferent to those concerns that are critical to a just society, but are not commercial in nature. The values of hierarchy, materialism, competition, and excessive individualism are enshrined under market time and play a defining role in how it allocates space, manages the production of particular forms of knowledge, guides research, and regulates pedagogical relations. Market time accentuates privatized and competitive modes of intellectual activity, largely removed from public obligations and social responsibilities. Public time, on the other hand, rejects the fever-pitch appeals of “just in time” or “speed time,” demands often made within the context of “ever faster technological transformation and exchange” (Bind 52), and buttressed by corporate capital’s golden rule: “time is money.” Public time slows time down, not as a simple refusal of technological change or a rejection of all calls for efficiency, but as an attempt to create the institutional and ideological conditions that promote long-term analyses, historical reflection, and deliberations over what our collective actions might mean for shaping the future. Rejecting an instrumentality that evacuates questions of history, ethics, and justice, public time fosters dialogue, thoughtfulness, and critical exchange. Public time offers room for knowledge that contributes to society’s self-understanding, that enables it to question itself, and that seeks to legitimate intellectual practices that are not

only collective and non-instrumental, but deepen democratic values while encouraging pedagogical relations that question the future in terms that are political, ethical, and social. At stake here is the important task of redefining higher education as a democratic public sphere not only to assert the importance of public time, but also to reconfigure it so that “economic interests cease to be the dominant factor in shaping attitudes” about the social as a realm devoid of politics and democratic possibilities (Castoriadis, “Greek” 112). Higher education is a hard-won democratic achievement and it is time that parents, faculty, students, college alumni and concerned citizens reclaim it as a fundamental public good rather than merely a training ground for corporate interests, values, and profits. Education is not only about issues of work and economics, but also about questions of justice, social freedom, and the capacity for democratic agency, action, and change, as well as the related issues of power, exclusion, and citizenship. These are educational and political issues and should be addressed as part of a broader concern for renewing the struggle for social justice and democracy.



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Academics and Public Life

Institutions of higher education must be seen as deeply moral and political spaces in which intellectuals assert themselves not merely as professional academics, but as citizens whose knowledge and actions presuppose specific visions of public life, community, and moral accountability. This view suggests that higher education be defended not as an adjunct of the corporation but as a vital public sphere in its own right, one that has deeply moral and educative dimensions that directly impact on civic life. This defence must be maintained by academics redefining their roles as public intellectuals who can move between academic institutions and other public spheres in which knowledge, values, and social identities are produced.

If the university is to remain a site of critical thinking, collective work, and public service, educators will have to redefine the knowledge, skills, research, and intellectual practices currently being favoured in the university. Central to such a challenge is the necessity to define intellectual practice “as part of an intricate web of morality, rigor and responsibility” (Roy 6) that enables academics to speak with conviction, enter the public sphere in order to address im-

portant social problems, and demonstrate alternative models for what it means to bridge the gap between higher education and the broader society. Under such conditions, it is crucial to construct intellectual practices that are collegial rather than competitive, refuse the instrumentality and privileged isolation of the academy, link critical thought to a profound impatience with the status quo, and connect human agency to the idea of social responsibility.

Increasingly, as universities are shaped by a culture of fear in which dissent is equated with treason, the call to being objective and impartial can easily echo what George Orwell called the official truth or the establishment point of view, however unconscious or unintentioned. Lacking a self-conscious democratic political project, the role of the university intellectual is often reduced to that of a technician or functionary engaged in formalistic rituals and unconcerned with the disturbing and urgent problems that confront the larger society. In opposition to this view, I will argue that public intellectuals—and perhaps especially those concerned with research into aspects of childhood and youth—should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen. This suggests finding ways to connect the practice of classroom teaching to the operation of power in the larger society. I think Edward Said is on target when he argues that the public intellectual must function within institutions, in part, as an exile,

as someone whose “place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma, to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations” (“Representations” 11). In this perspective, the educator as public intellectual becomes responsible for linking the diverse experiences that produce knowledge, identities, and social values in the university to the quality of moral and political life in the wider society. Vaclav Havel captures this sentiment in arguing that intellectuals have a responsibility to engage in practical politics, to see “things in more global terms...build people-to-people solidarity...foster tolerance, struggle against evil and violence, promote human rights, and argue for their indivisibility” (37).

I think that these concerns about the responsibility of academics as public intellectuals is especially important regarding the implications that teaching young people in education programs might have on how the latter educate and nurture people younger than themselves. One of the ways in which university teachers can reach out to influence the future is to make it clear to their own students that they bear a responsibility to educate critically the students they will be interacting with once they graduate from college. The importance of such an educational challenge and project can be seen in a recent survey conducted by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation which found that 36% of U.S. high school students believed

that “newspapers should get government approval of stories before publishing” (Toppo). Clearly, it is precisely the lack of education about student rights, the First Amendment freedoms, and the meaning of a substantive democracy that provides the conditions for views that are much closer to fascism than to what it means to be a critical citizen in a democracy. Moreover, this type of political illiteracy and historical amnesia poses as much of a threat to Canadian children as it does to American youth.⁹ Education cannot be decoupled from political democracy and such education should take place at all levels of schooling, but it must gain its momentum in those colleges and universities among students who will go back to the schools, churches, synagogues, and business world in order to produce new ideas, concepts, and critical ways of understanding the world in which young people live.

Intellectuals who feel an increased sense of responsibility for humanity may not be able to and do not necessarily have to explain the problems of the world in terms that purport to be absolute or all-encompassing. They also should not limit their responsibility to the university or the media. On the contrary, public intellectuals need to approach social issues with humility, mindful of the multiple connections and issues that tie humanity together; but they need to do so as border intellectuals moving within and across diverse sites of learning as part

of an engaged and practical politics that recognizes the importance of “asking questions, making distinctions, restoring to memory all those things that tend to be overlooked or walked past in the rush to collective judgment and action” (“Representations” 52–53). Within this discourse, the experiences that constitute the production of knowledge, identities, and social values in the university are inextricably linked to the quality of moral and political life of the wider society.

If educators are to function as public intellectuals, they need to provide the opportunities for students to learn that the relationship between knowledge and power can be emancipatory, that their histories and experiences matter, and that what they say and do counts in their struggle to unlearn dominating privileges, productively reconstruct their relations with others, and transform, when necessary, the world around them. More specifically, such educators need to argue for forms of pedagogy that close the gap between the university and everyday life. Their curriculum needs to be organized around knowledge of communities, cultures, and traditions that give students a sense of history, identity and place. Edward Said is again helpful. Said urges academics and students to accept the demands of “worldliness,” which implies “lifting complex ideas into the public space,” recognizing human injury outside of the academy, and using theory as a form of criti-

cism to change things (“Scholarship” 7). Worldliness requires not being afraid of controversy, making connections that are otherwise hidden, deflating the claims of triumphalism, bridging intellectual work and the operation of politics. It means combining rigour and clarity, on the one hand, and civic courage and political commitment, on the other. Following Said, I am calling for the transgressing of the often rigid division between academic culture and popular culture as well as between disciplines; and for expanding pedagogical practice as a form of cultural politics by making all knowledge subject to serious analysis and interrogation, and in so doing, making visible the operations of power that connect such knowledge to specific views of authority, cultural practice, and the larger world.

Educators need to construct pedagogical approaches that do more than make learning context-specific; in effect, they need to challenge the content of established canons, and similarly, to expand the range of cultural texts that count as “really useful knowledge.” As public intellectuals, university teachers must begin to use those electronically-mediated knowledge forms that constitute the terrain of mass and popular culture. I am referring to the world of media texts—

videos, films, music, and other mechanisms of popular culture that operate through a combination of visual and print culture. What I am suggesting is that educators challenge the traditional definition and site of pedagogy by widening the application and sites of pedagogy to a variety of cultural locations and, in doing so, alert students to how public pedagogy operates through the educational force of the culture at large.



The content of the curriculum should affirm and critically enrich the meaning, language, and knowledge forms that students actually use to negotiate and inform their lives.

The content of the curriculum should affirm and critically enrich the meaning, language, and knowledge forms that students actually use to negotiate and inform their lives. Academics can in part exercise their role as public intellectuals via such curricula by giving students the opportunity to understand how

power is organized through the enormous number of “popular” cultural spheres that range from libraries, movie theatres, and schools to high-tech media conglomerates that circulate signs and meanings through newspapers, magazines, advertisements, new information technologies, machines, films, and television programs. University intellectuals must draw a lesson from cultural studies in extending the historical and relational definition of cultural texts while redefining, in Toni Morrison’s terms, how “knowledge, however

mundane and utilitarian, plays about in linguistic images and forms cultural practices" (49-50). Needless to say, this position challenges Roger Kimball's claim that "[p]opular culture is a tradition essential to uneducated Americans" (qtd. in Levine 19). Of course, what is at stake is not only important questions about how knowledge is produced and taken up, but what it means to provide the conditions for students to become competent and critically versed in a variety of literacies, while at the same time expanding the conditions and options for the roles they might play as cultural producers (as opposed to simply teaching them to be critical readers).

Although it is critical for university teachers to enlarge the curriculum to reflect the richness and diversity of the students they actually teach, they also need to decentre the curriculum. That is, as Stanley Aronowitz points out, students should be actively involved in governance, "including setting learning goals, selecting courses, and having their own, autonomous organizations, including a free press" ("Different" 34). Not only does the distribution of power among teachers, students, and administrators provide the conditions for students to become agents in their learning process, it also provides the basis for collective learning, civic action, and ethical responsibility. Moreover, student agency emerges from a pedagogy of lived experience and struggle, not from mere formalistic mastery of an academic subject.

I have suggested that educators need to become provocateurs. They need to take a stand while refusing to be involved in either a cynical relativism or doctrinaire politics. This suggests that central to intellectual life is the pedagogical and political imperative that academics engage in rigorous social criticism while becoming a stubborn force that can challenge false prophets, fight against the imposed silence of normalized power, "refuse to allow conscience to look away or fall asleep," and critically engage all those social relations that promote material and symbolic violence (Said, 142). At the same time, such intellectuals must be deeply critical of their own authority and how it structures classroom relations and cultural practices. In this way, the authority they legitimate in the classroom (as well as in other public spheres) would become both an object of self-critique and a critical referent for expressing a more "fundamental dispute with authority itself" (Radhakrishnan).

Central to my argument is the need for educators to define themselves less as narrow specialists, classroom managers, or mouthpieces for corporate culture than as engaged public intellectuals willing to address those economic, political, and social problems that must be overcome if both young people and adults are going to take seriously a future that opens up rather than closes down the promises of a viable and substantive democracy. There is a lot of

talk among social theorists about the death of politics and the inability of human beings to imagine a more equitable and just world in order to make it better. I would hope that, of all groups, educators would be the most vocal and militant in challenging this assumption by making it clear that at the heart of any form of critical education is the assumption that learning should be used to expand the public good and promote democratic social change, especially for young people. Public and higher education may be one of the few spheres left where the promise of youth can be linked to the promise of democracy. Education in this instance becomes both an ethical and political referent in that it not only furnishes an opportunity for adults to provide the conditions for young people to become critically engaged social agents, but also offers the symbols of a future in which democracy creates the conditions for each generation of youth to struggle anew to sustain the promise of a democracy that has no endpoint but must be continuously expanded into a world of new possibilities and opportunities for keeping justice

and hope alive.

In concluding, I want to suggest that struggles over how we view, represent, and treat young people must be understood as part of a larger public dialogue about how to imagine a future linked to the creation of a strong inclusive democracy while simultaneously articulating a new vocabulary, set of theoretical tools, and social possibilities for re-visioning civic engagement and social transformation. We have entered a period in which the war against youth, especially poor youth of colour, offers no apologies because it is too arrogant and ruthless to imagine any resistance. But the collective need and potential struggle for justice should never be underestimated even in the darkest of times. I realize this sounds a bit utopian, but we have few choices if we are going to fight for a future that enables teachers, parents, students, and others to work diligently and tirelessly in order to make hope practical for all members of society, but especially for young people, who deserve a future that does a great deal more than endlessly repeat the present.

Notes

¹ The outsourcing of torture refers to the U.S. program known as extraordinary rendition, defined as the policy of seizing individuals and taking them to authoritarian regimes where they can be tortured outside any semblance of the law. The tragic and outrageous effects of this program have been revealed by Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen who was born in Syria but has lived in Canada since it was a teenager. He was seized by the U.S. government on September 26, 2002 and eventually interned and tortured in Amman, Jordan. See Bob Herbert, "Torture, American Style," *New York Times* (February 11, 2005), A23. For an extensive and damning analysis of the US outsourcing torture, see Jane Mayer, "Outsourcing Torture: The Battle Over 'Extraordinary Rendition,'" *The New Yorker* (February 14 & 21, 2005): 106–123.

² See Francis Fox Ivan, *The War at Home: The Domestic Costs of Bush's Militarism* (New York: The New Press, 2004).

³ I analyze neo-liberalism in great detail in Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Press, 2004).

⁴ I have taken up this critique in great detail in Henry A. Giroux, *The Abandoned Generation* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

⁵ These figures are taken from *Childhood Poverty Research Brief 2*, "Child Poverty in the States: Levels and Trends From 1979 to 1998." Available online at <<http://www.nccp.org>>. While the United States ranks first in military technology, military exports,

defense expenditures and the number of millionaires and billionaires, it is ranked 18th in the gap between rich and poor children, 12th in the percentage of children in poverty, 17th in the efforts to lift children out of poverty, and 23rd in infant mortality. These figures largely come from Children's Defense Fund, *The State of Children in America's Union: A 2004 Action Guide to Leave No Child Behind* (Washington, D.C.: Children's Defense Fund Publication, 2004), pp. iv-v, 13.

⁶ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: The New Press, 1998); Pierre Bourdieu, et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁷ See Henry A. Giroux, "Academic Entrepreneurs: The Corporate Takeover of Higher Education," *Tikkun* (in press).

⁸ Cited in Frank Hearn, *Reason and Freedom in Sociological Thought* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1985), p. 175. The classic statements by Dewey on this subject can be found in John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), reprint edition—original 1916; See also, John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1954).

⁹ I am indebted to Perry Nodelman for this insight about the wider pedagogical influences our students can have on younger students.

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Henry A. Giroux holds the Global TV Network Chair in Communications at McMaster University in Canada. His most recent books include: *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear* (Palgrave 2003), co-authored with Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education: Race, Youth and the Crisis of Democracy in the Post Civil Rights Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), *The Terror of Neoliberalism* (Paradigm, 2004), *Border Crossings* (Routledge, 2005), *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2005) and *Against the New Authoritarianism* (Arbeiter Ring, 2005).