



Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education

Giroux, Henry A.
Haymarket Books, 2014

Book Review

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Henry Giroux's well-researched *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* is an unapologetic reminder of what is at stake for institutions of higher education and the academy: "Privatization, commodification, militarization, and deregulation are the new guiding categories through which schools, teachers, pedagogy, and students are defined" (36). Giroux reminds us that education is not politically neutral and that neoliberal ideas are driving how and what professors are allowed to teach. According to Giroux, "This pedagogy of market-driven illiteracy has eviscerated the notion of freedom, turning it largely into the desire to consume and invest exclusively in relationships that serve only one's individual interests. Losing one's individuality is now tantamount to losing one's ability to consume. . . . Shallow consumerism coupled with an indifference to the needs and suffering of others has produced a politics of disengagement and a culture of moral irresponsibility" (6). Giroux's concern is that institutions of higher education have moved away from being places of intellectual and civic development and instead have become market-driven businesses. Students and professors are no longer allowed to engage in the art of democracy and ideas, rather students have come to be seen as consumers and professors as cheap labor. According to Giroux, "What is particularly troubling in US society is the absence of the vital formative cultures necessary to construct questioning persons who are capable of seeing through the consumer come-ons, who can dissent and act collectively in an increasingly imperiled democracy" (70).

This book should be read by anyone dedicated to higher education, but it is especially useful for those teaching in the humanities. Many faculty in the humanities have been forced to sell themselves and their programs in business language to deans and presidents who are under constant stress to find funding, some going as far as finding corporate or wealthy sponsors to fund departments. In such an environment, disciplines such as philosophy, religious studies,

and theological studies can be seen as irrelevant and unnecessary. Giroux's response is to develop critical pedagogies and to encourage faculty to reclaim their roles as public intellectuals. "[A]cademics have an ethical and pedagogical responsibility not only to unsettle and oppose all orthodoxies, to make problematic the commonsense assumptions that often shape students' lives and their understanding of the world, but also to energize them to come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents" (99). Faculty must model this behavior in their teaching and intellectual endeavors and become "border-crossers"(101). For those teaching in religion, theology, and philosophy, Giroux's book is important because contemporary higher education classes are where students ask critical questions. Many of their questions are moral and ethical and have political implications. Contemporary humanities classrooms may be one of the only places on campus where students are not told what to memorize or the regulations needed to become better pre-professionals. Giroux forces teachers to think about how they teach and why they teach. For him, teachers have the responsibility to ask students to think and act differently for shaping the world. Giroux's hope is that teachers will raise up a generation of democratically-minded and justice-oriented citizens.

Henry Giroux's *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* is a welcome resource for faculty facing retrenchment, a loss of democratic value-based curricula, or who want to better understand how policies, politics, and the economy are connected to the future of higher education. The author provides examples of how faculty and students have responded to neoliberalism and a corporate model of higher education.

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