

Youth in revolt: Reclaiming a democratic future

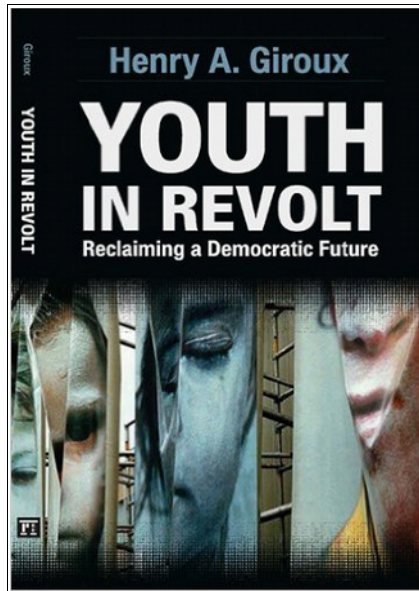
Henry A. Giroux

(Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013. 216 pages.)

Reviewed by—*Jamie Thomas* (Criminology student,
Kwantlen Polytechnic University),
Cloverdale, October 2014

Henry Giroux's book *Youth in Revolt: Reclaiming a Democratic Future* does more than provide an analysis of the Occupy Movements that were predominate in the months following September 2011; Giroux's book carefully situates the Occupy Movements within both the historical structure of American society and the present political context.

In his book, Giroux does not limit the scope of his argument by only discussing the repressive mechanisms used by the State to suppress youthful protesters or, as Giroux calls them, the "new generation of public intellectuals" (p. 132), but he also gives significant attention to the ideological mechanisms used by the State to maintain the status quo which subsequently perpetuates a vast acceptance of neoliberalism by society with little question. Giroux's book takes readers on a journey, as he illustrates the changing political atmosphere of the United States beginning with the terrorist attacks that took place on Septem-



ber 11, 2001. Following his discussion of September 11, 2001, Giroux demonstrates the impact of two of the State's most formidable ideological mechanisms: the media and the education system, and he relates these mechanisms to the cruelty expressed within the greater political context. The journey outlined in Giroux's book ends with an assessment of the sheer lack of democracy in the United States of America, and he questions whether democracy in America will prevail. Although the journey explained in Giroux's book is one of struggle, it should not discourage readers but rather empower them, as it is only them who can reclaim our democratic future.

Given Giroux's experience as both a professor and advocate for radical democracy, it is no surprise his book is written from an alternative globalization perspective, a perspective that denounces the systemic inequalities created by neoliberalism. Giroux clearly aims to provide a critical voice in the depiction of Occupy Movements and the State's response to those movements, as these events are often reduced to simplistic, yet horrifying, media images. The story told in *Youth in Revolt* serves the purpose of addressing the complex interrelationship of historical and contemporary factors that have resulted in America's youth experiencing extreme frustration, as they no longer see a viable future for themselves within the warfare state of America. Giroux's book adds an important layer in the analysis of social movements and the criminalization of dissent, as he carefully assembles a broad framework for understanding the economic and political influences that have endorsed the rise of neoliberalism and the subsequent reduction of civil liberties. Giroux emphasizes it is the lack of critical analysis in education that has allowed neoliberalism to carry on unchallenged and thus an ideological response to the State's repressive attacks on youth is the only way to reinstate true democracy.

Giroux's passion for education and youth come together in chapter four appropriately titled, "Disposable Knowl-

edge, Disposable Bodies.” The title clearly indicates the way in which neoliberalism has written off the next generation as “disposable” (p. 71). Chapter four seems to be especially relevant to readers of Giroux’s book, as it is likely the majority of readers are students, like myself, or individuals who have spent a significant amount of time in educational institutions. Giroux reflects on the “literacy purge” that occurred in Nazi Germany over eighty years ago. Giroux compares the Nazi’s “literacy purge” (p. 72) with Arizona’s elimination of ethnic studies classes and the removal of a number of books that focused on oppression as well as on America’s colonial and racist roots. The parallelism of these two events, for Giroux, indicates the “silencing of dissent” (p. 88) is not isolated in history, as often suggested by authoritarian governments and educational curriculum, but a permeating factor in contemporary capitalist societies. It is the awareness of oppression that poses the biggest threat to neoliberal conservatives, as the oppressed become empowered through knowledge and engagement. Giroux explains these informed citizens can then use their education to participate in critical conversations about the power structures that effect their lives and thus present a threat to the status quo. Rather than empowering minority groups, education in authoritarian societies, such as the United States, function to “mobilize fear, self-interest, and political conformity” amongst students. In its goal of creating complacency among citizens, the American government makes it clear the “war on youth” (p. 88) is a war on education and in this war the targets are the institutions and professionals determined to instill a critical voice in the next generation.

Henry Giroux’s book *Youth in Revolt: Reclaiming a Democratic Future* offers a comprehensive analysis of the Occupy Movements and perhaps more importantly an examination of the historical underpinnings that have permitted the erosion of democracy within the American state. I would recommend Giroux’s book to anyone, young or old, who wishes to gain a critical understanding

of the criminalization of dissent that is becoming ever more prevalent in today's society. However I would suggest, this may not be the book for capitalist nationals or neoliberal supporters, unless of course they wish to open their eyes to the rampant inequality that spans across the United States of America. I must also mention that although Giroux's book focuses primarily on the United States, the themes discussed in *Youth in Revolt* apply to other authoritarian nations where similar forms of dissent have emerged just to be silenced by state sanctioned repressive force and, in a broader context, state control over ideological mechanisms such as the media and education. My critique of Giroux's book is a matter of perspective; I cannot help but question if democracy in its true sense, or what Giroux would explain as radical democracy, could ever re-emerge. Throughout Giroux's book it seems he is calling for a revolution, yet he continuously reverts back to the hope of restructuring "American democracy" (p. xxxiii). I cannot help but consider Giroux's emphasis on revolution and restructuring as a paradox. I believe the idea of anarchy, a society free from government control, may be the only way to truly regain equality and freedom from state oppression. Nonetheless, Giroux's book is critical food for thought and a tool of empowerment for the 99% who will no longer be silenced.