

Higher Education Under Siege: Implications for Public Intellectuals

by Henry A. Giroux

What is the task of educators at a time when mainstream American culture is increasingly characterized by a declining interest in and misgiving about national politics? How one answers this question will have a grave impact not only on higher education but on the future of democratic public life. There are no simple solutions. Hence it becomes crucial for educators at all levels of schooling to provide alternative democratic conceptions of the meaning and purpose of both politics and education. In what follows, I want to argue that one of the primary tasks facing educators, students, community activists, and others in the 21st century should center around developing political projects that can challenge the ascendancy of cynicism and anti-democratic tendencies in the United States by defending the institutions and mechanisms that provide the pedagogical conditions for critical and engaged citizenship. Crucial to such a challenge is the role that higher education can play in reclaiming the links between education and democracy, knowledge and public service, and learning and democratic social change.

While the demand for college education is swelling among the nation's youth, schooling as an avenue for social and economic advancement is declining. In fact, "no more than 30 percent of jobs in the United States currently and for the foreseeable future, will require a college degree."¹ Moreover, as college costs and tuition skyrocket along with student debt, the poor and working classes are less likely to

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attend college, while those students who are getting a college education are less likely to choose careers dedicated to public service.² But if higher education increasingly fails as the major mechanism for economic and social mobility, as well as for preparing students to confront “the needs of a troubled world,”³ then it is all the more crucial to consider the role of higher education as a democratic public sphere and as a public good.

Given the current assault on critical education by various right-wing groups, the increasing corporatization of the university, and the growing influence of the national security state, it is increasingly important that higher education be

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defended as a democratic public sphere and that academics be seen and see themselves as public intellectuals who provide an indispensable service to the nation. Such a view must be based not on a recycled conception of professionalism but on the civic obligations and duties performed by such intellectuals.

Unfortunately, too many academics retreat into narrow specialisms, allow themselves to become adjuncts of the corporation, or align themselves with dominant interests that serve largely to consolidate authority rather than to critique its abuses. Refusing to take positions on controversial issues or to examine the role they might play in lessening human suffering, such academics become models of moral indifference and examples of what it means to disconnect learning from public life. This is a form of education, as Howard Zinn notes, where scholars “publish while others perish.”⁴ Even many leftist and liberal academics have retreated into arcane discourses that offer them the safe ground of the professional recluse. Such academics seem unconcerned about writing for a larger public and inhabit a world populated by concepts that both remove them from public access and subject them to the dictates of a narrow theoretical fetishism.⁵ Making almost no connections to audiences outside of the academy or to the issues that bear down on their lives, such academics have become largely irrelevant. This is not to suggest that they do not publish or speak at symposiums, but that they often do so to very limited audiences and in a language that is overly abstract, highly aestheticized, rarely takes an overt political position, and seems mostly indifferent to broader public issues.

Theory increasingly seems to be “measured by the degree with which responsibilities can be escaped.”⁶ Treated less as a resource to inform public debate, address the demands of civic engagement, and expand the critical capacities of stu-

dents to become social agents, theory degenerates into a performance for a small coterie of academics happily ensconced in a professionalized, gated community marked by linguistic privatization, indifference to translating private issues into public concerns, and a refusal to connect the acquisition of theoretical skills to the exercise of social power.⁷ This retreat from public engagement on the part of many academics is increasingly lamentable as the space of official politics seems to grow more and more corrupt, inhabited by ideologues and a deep disdain for debate, dialogue, and democracy itself.

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The crisis in American democracy has been heralded and exacerbated by the nation's increasing skepticism—or even overt hostility—towards the educational system, if not critical thought itself, a view that fewer and fewer academics seem willing to oppose by either challenging the right-wing assault or offering positive alternatives. Cynicism about politics and skepticism about education have become mutually reinforcing tendencies that to be understood must be analyzed in tandem. Many educators, if not the public itself, seem to have lost the language for linking schooling to democracy, convinced that education is now about job training and competitive market advantage. With democracy emptied of any substantial content, individuals are unable to translate their privately suffered misery into broadly shared public concerns and collective action. Needless to say, as Frank Furedi points out, “The devaluation of the status of the intellectual and the authority of knowledge has important implications for the conduct of public life.”⁸

Against this cynicism, we need to pay attention to engaged intellectuals such as Arundhati Roy, Noam Chomsky, Toni Morrison, Zygmunt Bauman, Stanley Aronowitz, and Cornel West as well as the late Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, and Edward Said, all of whom have offered models for academics as committed public intellectuals. Zinn, for instance, deriding those professional intellectuals for whom irony, cleverness, and a disdain for political engagement appear to be the last refuge, defends the link between scholarship and commitment, and has written eloquently about the kind of work that scholars can do “in deliberate unneutral pursuit of a more livable world [and] reconsider the rules by which they have worked, and begin to turn their intellectual energies to the urgent problems of our time.”⁹ Similarly, Noam Chomsky argues that “the social and intellectual role of the university should be subversive in a healthy society... [and that] individuals and society at large benefit to the extent that these liberatory ideals extend

throughout the educational system—in fact, far beyond.”¹⁰ Edward Said took a similar position and argued that academics should engage in ongoing forms of permanent critique of all abuses of power and authority, “to enter into sustained and vigorous exchange with the outside world,” as part of a larger project of helping “to create the social conditions for the collective production of realist utopias.”¹¹

In this article, after outlining some of the major challenges facing educators in this age of diminishing freedoms, I will argue that it is imperative that public intellectuals within and outside of the university defend higher education as a democratic public sphere, connect academic work to public life, and advance a notion of pedagogy that provides students with modes of individual and social agency that enable them to be both engaged citizens and active participants in the struggle for global democracy. Following Howard Zinn, Zygmunt Bauman, and others, I believe that intellectuals who inhabit our nation’s universities should represent the conscience of American society because they not only shape the conditions under which future generations learn about themselves and their relations to others and the outside world, but also because they engage pedagogical practices that are by their very nature moral and political rather than simply technical. Pedagogy in this instance works to shift how students think about the issues affecting their lives and the world at large, potentially energizing them to seize such moments as possibilities for acting on the world and for engaging it as a matter of politics, power, and social justice. The appeal here is not merely to an individual’s sense of ethics; it is also an appeal to collectively address material inequities involving resources, accessibility, and power in both education and the broader global society while viewing the struggle for power as generative and crucial to any viable notion of individual and social agency.



If the liberal Left seems particularly disheveled and ineffectual at this point in history, then the conservatives, by contrast, appear to be masters of persuasion and organization. Working for decades at grassroots organizing, they have taken both pedagogy and politics deadly seriously. The conservative assault on education at all levels began in the 1970s, following the white working- and middle-class backlash against civil rights-era programs such as affirmative action and busing. Schooling was increasingly reconfigured as a private rather than a public good. And with the shift away from public considerations to private concerns, “privatization” and “choice” became the catch phrases dominating educational reform for the next few

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decades. The attack on all things public was accompanied by attempts to empty the public treasury, and education became one of the first targets of neoliberals, neoconservatives, religious extremists, and fundamentalists advocating market interests over social needs and democratic values. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the Reagan administration gave the green light to pass spending cuts in education—cuts that have been obligatory for each administration to follow. Reconceived as a “big government monopoly,” public schooling was derided as bureaucratic, inefficient, and ineffectual, generating a product (dim-witted students) that was singularly incapable of competing in the global marketplace. In short, schools had committed “an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament,” the report accused.¹² Schools were to blame for increased joblessness and insecurity—not the rapacious greed of corporations eager to circumvent U.S. minimum wage laws, federal taxes, and environmental regulations, while breaking the back of unions at home.

Similarly, higher education was accused of harboring a hot-bed of leftist academics and promoting culture wars that derided Western civilization. Higher education was portrayed as the center of a class and race war in which the dreams of the white working class were under attack because of the ideological residue of professors tainted by the legacy of radical ’60s politics. The division and distrust between “elitist liberals” and the white working class were now complete and utterly secure. Employing a mobile army of metaphors drawn from Cold War rhetoric, the Right succeeded in a propaganda campaign to turn the popular tide against higher education. After 9/11, the trend continued at an accelerated rate as academics and educators who voiced dissent against government policies increasingly faced retaliatory accusations that equated their views with treason. The most

important casualty of this attack on education was democracy itself.¹³

Unfortunately, the university offers no escape and little resistance. As theorists as diverse as W.E.B. Dubois, John Dewey, Hannah Arendt, Vaclav Havel, and Cornelius Castoriadis have pointed out, a substantive democracy simply cannot exist without educated citizens. But today, the humanistic knowledge and values of the university are being excised as higher education becomes increasingly corporatized and stripped of its democratic functions. As market ideals take precedence over democratic values, and individual rights outweigh collective concerns, the university is increasingly being transformed into a training ground for the cor-

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porate workforce. 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 “CEOs” 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. In the corporate university, academics are now valued according to the grant money they attract rather than the quality of education they offer to students.¹⁴ As the university is annexed by defense, corporate, and national security interests, critical scholarship is replaced by research for either weapons technology or commercial profits, just as the private intellectual now replaces the public intellectual, and the public relations intellectual supplants the engaged intellectual in the wider culture.

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 have more control over 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 some university presidents even argue that professors be labeled as “academic entre-

preneurs.”¹⁵ 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 or an appendage of the national security state. What was once the hidden curriculum of many universities—the subordination of higher education to capital—has

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now become an open and much celebrated policy of both public and private higher education.¹⁶

The language of market fundamentalism and the emerging corporate university radically alter the vocabulary available for appraising the meaning of citizenship, agency, and civic virtue. Within this discourse, everything is for sale, and what is not has no value as a public good or practice. The traditional academic imperative to publish or perish is now supplemented with the neoliberal mantra “privatize or perish” as everyone in the university is transformed into an entrepreneur, customer, or client, and every relationship is ultimately judged in bottom-line, cost-effective terms. It is in the spirit of such a critique and act of resistance that educators, according to Pierre Bourdieu, need to break with the “new faith in the historical inevitability professed by the theorists of [neo] liberalism [in order] to invent new forms of collective political work” capable of confronting the march of corporate power.¹⁷ At stake here is the need to question and reject those economic models so fashionable among the academic managers that seek to emancipate economic activity from any consideration except the dictates of profitability.

It is important to note that attacks on higher education in the United States come not only from a market-based ideology that reduces education to training and redefines schools as investment opportunities; they also come from conservative Christian organizations such as the American Family Association, conservative politicians, and right-wing think tanks, all of whom have launched an insidious attack on peace studies, women’s studies, Middle Eastern studies, critical pedagogy, and any field that “generates critical inquiry and thought often in opposition to the aims of the United States” and the Bush regime.¹⁸

The frontal nature of such attacks against both dissent and critical education

can also be seen in attempts by conservative legislators in Ohio and a number of other states to pass bills such as the “Academic Bill of Rights,” which argues that academics should be hired on the basis of their ideology in order not only to balance out faculties dominated by left-wing professors but also to control what students are taught with the purpose of protecting conservative students against ideas that might challenge their ideological comfort zones.¹⁹ The board of trustees at Utah Valley State College went so far as to insist that the faculty take into consideration conservative political ideologies as part of a new general education requirement for students.²⁰ Professors who address in their classrooms critical issues that

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unsettle any assumption that favors right-wing ideology are condemned for teaching propaganda. For instance, U.S. congressman Anthony Weiner from New York called for the firing of Joseph Massad, a Columbia University professor who was critical of Israeli policies against Palestinians. Of course, such attacks are not only by academics. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman called upon the State Department to draw up a blacklist of those critics he calls “excuse makers,” which included those who believe that U.S. actions are at the root cause of violence. According to Friedman, “These excuse makers are just one notch less despicable than the terrorists and also deserve to be exposed.”²¹ This kind of McCarthyite babble has become so commonplace in the United States that it is championed by a famous columnist in one of the world’s leading newspapers. As if to prove the point, some universities in Ohio are bringing back the McCarthy-like loyalty oath, requiring that faculty “fill out a form declaring that [they] have no ties to any terrorist groups listed by the U.S. State Department.”²²

Higher education has also been attacked by right-wing ideologues such as David Horowitz and Lynne Cheney who view it as the “weak link” in the war against terror and a potential fifth column.²³ Horowitz, in particular, acts as the figurehead for various well-funded and orchestrated conservative student groups such as the Young Americans and College Republicans, which perform the groundwork for his “Academic Bill of Rights” policy efforts that seek out juicy but rare instances of “political bias”—whatever that is or however it might be defined—in college classrooms.²⁴ These efforts have resulted in considerable sums of public money being devoted to hearings in multiple state legislatures, in addition to helping impose, as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* put it, a “chilly climate” of self-policing in the academy and in the classroom.²⁵ At the University of California, Los Angeles, the Bruin Alumni Association has posted on its Web site an article called “The Dirty Thirty” in which it targets what it calls the universi-

ty's "most radical professors" and states as its mission the task of exposing and combating "an exploding crisis of political radicalism on campus."²⁶ Of course, this has less to do with protesting genuine demagoguery than it does with attacking any professor who might raise critical questions about the status quo or hold the narratives of power accountable.

In spite of their present embattled status and the inroads made by corporate power, the defense industries, and the neoconservative Right, universities and colleges remain uniquely placed to prepare students both to understand and to influence the larger educational forces that shape their lives. As Edward Said observed,

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"It is still very fortunately the case, however, that the American university remains the one public space available to real alternative intellectual practices: no institution like it on such a scale exists anywhere else in the world today."²⁷ Such institutions, by virtue of their privileged position, division of labor, and alleged dedication to freedom and democracy, have an obligation to draw upon those traditions and resources capable of providing a critical, liberal, and humanistic education to all students in order to prepare them not only for a society in which information and power have taken on new and potent dimensions but also for confronting the rise of a disturbing number of anti-democratic tendencies in the most powerful country in the world and elsewhere across the globe.

Part of such a challenge means that educators, artists, students, and others need to rethink and affirm the important presuppositions that higher education is integral to fostering the imperatives of an inclusive democracy and that the crisis of higher education must be understood as part of the wider crisis of politics, power, and culture. Jacques Derrida argued that democracy contains a promise of what is to come and that it is precisely in the tension between the dream and the reality of democracy that a space of agency, critique, and education opens up and signals both the normative and political character of democracy.²⁸ But democracy also demands a pedagogical intervention organized around the need to create the conditions for educating citizens who have the knowledge and skills to participate in public life, question institutional authority, and engage the contradiction between the reality and promise of a global democracy. Democracy must do more than contain the structure of a promise; it must also be nurtured in those public spaces in which "the unconditional freedom to question" becomes central to any viable definition of individual and social agency.²⁹ At stake here is the recognition that if democracy is to become vital, then it needs to create citizens who are criti-

cal, interrogate authority, hold existing institutions accountable for their actions, and assume public responsibility through the very process of governing.³⁰ What I am suggesting is that higher education is one of the few public spaces left in which unconditional resistance can be both produced and subjected to critical analysis. That is, the university should be “a place in which nothing is beyond question, not even the current and determined figure of democracy, and not even the traditional idea of critique.”³¹ The role of the university in this instance, and particularly the humanities, should be to create a culture of questioning and resistance aimed at those ideologies, institutions, social practices, and “powers that limit democracy to

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come.”³² The idea of the university as democratic public sphere raises important questions about not only the purpose of higher education but also the kinds of strategies needed for academics to address what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls “taking responsibility for our responsibility.”³³

Part of the struggle for the university as a democratic public sphere and as a site of resistance against the growing forces of militarism, corporatism, neoconservatism, and the religious fundamentalism of the Christian Right demands a new understanding of what it means to be a public intellectual, which in turn suggests a new language for politics itself. Central to such a challenge is the necessity to define intellectual practice “as part of an intricate web of morality, rigor and responsibility” that enables academics to speak with conviction, enter the public sphere in order to address important social problems, and demonstrate alternative models for what it means to bridge the gap between higher education and the broader society.³⁴ This is a notion of intellectual practice that refuses the instrumentality and privileged isolation of the academy while affirming a broader vision of learning that links knowledge to the power of self-definition and to the capacities of administrators, academics, students, and artists to expand the scope of democratic freedoms, particularly as they address the crisis of the social as part and parcel of the crisis of democracy itself. This is the kind of intellectual practice that is attentive to the suffering of others and “will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep.”³⁵

Given the seriousness of the current attack on higher education by an alliance of diverse right-wing forces, it is difficult to understand why liberals, progressives, and left-oriented educators have been relatively silent in the face of this assault. There is much more at stake than the issue of academic freedom. First and fore-

most is the concerted attempt by right-wing extremists and corporate interests to strip the professoriate of any authority, render critical pedagogy as merely an instrumental task, eliminate tenure as a protection for teacher authority, and remove critical reason from any vestige of civic courage, engaged citizenship, and social responsibility. The three academic unions have a combined membership of almost 200,000, including graduate students and adjuncts, and yet they have barely stirred. In part, faculty are quiet because they are under the illusion that tenure will protect them, or they believe the assault on higher education has little to do with how they perform their academic labor. They are wrong on both counts, and

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unless the unions and progressives mobilize to protect the institutionalized relationships between democracy and pedagogy, teacher authority and classroom autonomy, they will be at the mercy of a right wing that views democracy as an excess and the university as a threat. Democracy demands urgency. Of course, urgency entails not only responding to the crisis of the present—increasingly shaped by the anonymous presence of neoliberal capitalism and a number of other anti-democratic tendencies—but also connecting to the future that we make available to the next generation of young people. How much longer can we allow the promise of democracy to be tainted by its reality? Making pedagogy and education central to the political tasks of reclaiming public space, rekindling the importance of public connectedness, and infusing civic life with the importance of a democratic worldly vision is at the heart of opposing the new authoritarianism.

Democracy cannot work if citizens are not autonomous, self-judging, and independent—qualities that are indispensable for students if they are going to make vital judgments and choices about participating in and shaping decisions that affect everyday life, institutional reform, and governmental policy. Pedagogy, in this instance, is put in the service of providing the conditions for students to invest in a robust and critical form of agency, one that takes seriously their responsibility to others, public life, and global democracy. Hence, pedagogy becomes the cornerstone of democracy in that it provides the very foundation for students to learn not merely how to be governed but also how to be capable of governing. Cornel West has argued that we need to analyze the ominous forces shutting down democracy, yet “we also need to be very clear about the vision that lures us toward hope and the sources of that vision.”³⁶ In taking up this challenge, engaged public intellectuals need to emerge as central players in a wide range of social and educa-

tional institutions. If higher education is to be a crucial sphere for creating citizens equipped to understand others, exercise their freedoms, and ask questions regarding the basic assumptions that govern democratic political life, academics will have to assume their responsibility as citizen-scholars, take critical positions, relate their work to larger social issues, offer students knowledge, debate, and dialogue about pressing social problems, and provide the conditions for students to have hope and believe that civic life not only matters but that they can make a difference in shaping it. The engaged public intellectual, according to Edward Said, must function within institutions, in part, as an exile, “whose place it is publicly to raise embar-

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rassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to refuse to be easily co-opted by governments or corporations.”³⁷

This politically charged notion of the oppositional intellectual as homeless—in exile and living on the border, occupying an unsutured, shifting, and fractured social space in which critique, difference, and a utopian potentiality can endure—provides the conceptual framework for educators to fight against the deadly instrumentalism and reactionary ideologies that shape dominant educational models.³⁸ Public intellectuals need to resist the seductions of a narrow understanding of academic labor with its specialized languages, its neutralization of ideology and politics through a bogus claim to objectivism, and its sham elitism and expertise rooted in all the obvious gender, racial, and class-specific hierarchies. Falsely secure in their professed status as specialists and experts, many full-time academics retreat into narrow modes of scholarship that display little interest in how power is used in institutions and social life to include and exclude, provide the narratives of the past and present, and secure the authority to define the future.³⁹ Higher education is one of the few places where scholars can be educated for life in a global democracy by becoming multi-literate in ways that not only allow them access to new information and technologies but also enable them to be border crossers capable of engaging, learning from, understanding, and being tolerant of and responsible to matters of inclusiveness, meaningful difference, and otherness.

Two of the most challenging issues facing the academy today are grasping what we mean by the political and theorizing a politics of and for the 21st century. Academics should enter into a dialogue with colleagues and students about politics and the knowledge we seek to produce together, and connect such knowledge to broader public spheres and issues while heeding Hannah Arendt’s warning that

“Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance.”⁴⁰ The role of engaged intellectuals is not to consolidate authority but to understand, interpret, and question it.⁴¹ Social criticism has to be coupled with a vibrant self-criticism and the willingness to take up critical positions without becoming dogmatic or intractable. Critical education links knowledge and learning to the performative and worldly space of action and engagement, energizing people not only to think critically about the world around them but also to use their capacities as social agents to intervene in the larger social order and confront the myriad forms of symbolic, institutional, and material relations of

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power that shape their lives. These connections between pedagogy and agency, knowledge and power, and thought and action must be mobilized in order to confront the current crisis of authoritarianism looming so large in the United States and elsewhere around the globe today.

Individuals and collectivities have to be regarded as potential agents and not simply as victims or ineffectual dreamers. It is this legacy of critique and possibility, and of resistance that infuses intellectual work with concrete hope and offers a wealth of resources to people within the academy and other public spheres who struggle on multiple fronts against the rising forces of authoritarianism. Hannah Arendt recognized that any viable democratic politics must address the totality of public life and refuse to withdraw from such a challenge in the face of totalitarian violence that legitimates itself through appeals to safety, fear, and the threat of terrorism.⁴² Against this stripped down legitimation of authority is the promise of public spheres that in their diverse forms, sites, and content offer pedagogical and political possibilities for strengthening the social bonds of democracy and for cultivating both critical modes of individual and social agency and crucial opportunities to form alliances in the collective struggle for a biopolitics that affirms life, hopeful vision, the operations of democracy, and a range of democratic institutions—that is, a biopolitics that fights against the terror of totalitarianism.

In a complex and rapidly changing global world, public intellectuals have the important task of taking back control over the conditions of intellectual production in a variety of venues in which the educational force of the culture takes root and holds a powerful grip over the stories, images, and sounds that shape people’s lives around the globe. Such sites constitute what I call “new spheres of public pedagogy” and represent crucial locations for a cultural politics designed to wrest the

arena of public debate within the field of global power away from those dangerous forces that endlessly commodify intellectual autonomy and critical thought while appropriating or undercutting any viable work done through the collective action of critical intellectuals. Such spheres are about more than legal rights guaranteeing freedom of speech; they are also sites that demand a certain kind of citizen whose education provides the essential conditions for democratic public spheres to flourish. Cornelius Castoriadis, the great philosopher of democracy, argues that if public space is not to be experienced as a private affair but instead as a vibrant sphere in which people experience and learn how to participate in and shape public life, then it must be shaped through an education that provides the decisive traits of courage, responsibility, and shame, all of which connect the fate of each individual to the fate of others, the planet, and global democracy.⁴³ Artists, cultural workers, youth, and educators need to create new discourses of understanding and criticism and offer up a vision of hope that fosters the conditions for multiple global struggles that refuse to use politics as an act of war or markets as the measure of democracy.

The challenge posed by the current regime of religious extremism, market fundamentalism, state-sponsored terrorism, and the incursion of corporate power into higher education presents difficult problems for educators and demands a profoundly committed sense of individual and collective resistance if all of those who believe in a vibrant democracy are going to fight for a future that does not endlessly repeat the present. At the current moment, higher education faces a legitimation crisis—one that opens a political and theoretical space for educators to redefine the relationship between higher education, the public good, and democracy. Higher education represents one of the most important sites over which the battle for democracy is being waged. It is the site where the promise of a better future emerges out of those visions and pedagogical practices that combine hope and moral responsibility as part of a broader emancipatory discourse. Far from hopelessly utopian, such a task echoes an insight by the French philosopher Alain Badiou that famously captures a starting point for reclaiming higher education as a democratic public sphere: “In fact, it’s an immense task to try to propose a few possibilities, in the plural—a few possibilities other than what we are told is possible. It is a matter of showing how the space of the possible is larger than the one assigned—that something else is possible, but not that everything is possible.”⁴⁴ 

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Stuart Tannock, “Higher Education, Inequality, and the Public Good,” *Dissent* 53:2 (Spring 2006), 45.
- ² See Jeffrey J. Williams, “Debt Education: Bad for the Young, Bad for America,” *Dissent* 53:3 (Summer 2006), 53–59.
- ³ Howard Zinn, *On History* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 178.

- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ I have taken up this issue in Henry A. Giroux, *Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2000) and in Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education: Race, Youth, and the Crisis of Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).
- ⁶ Zygmunt Bauman cited in Nicholas Fearn, "Profile: Zygmunt Bauman," *New Statesman* (January 16, 2006), 32.
- ⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (New York: Verso, 2003), 68; I have taken up this issue in a number of books: Henry A. Giroux, *Impure Acts* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Henry A. Giroux, *Public Spaces/Private Lives: Democracy Beyond 9/11* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).
- ⁸ Frank Furedi, *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 72.
- ⁹ Howard Zinn, *On History*, 186.
- ¹⁰ Noam Chomsky, "Paths Taken, Tasks Ahead," *Profession* (2000), 35.
- ¹¹ Edward Said, "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals," *The Nation* (October 1, 2001), 4.
- ¹² See the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk* (April 1983). Online: www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html.
- ¹³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).
- ¹⁴ See Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).
- ¹⁵ See Henry A. Giroux, "Academic Entrepreneurs: The Corporate Takeover of Higher Education," *Tikkun* (March/April 2005), 18–22, 28.
- ¹⁶ Stanley Aronowitz, "The New Corporate University," *Dollars and Sense* (March/April 1998), 32.
- ¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance* (New York: New Press, 1999), 26.
- ¹⁸ A. Naomi Paik, "Education and Empire, Old and New," unpublished paper (January 8, 2005), 38.
- ¹⁹ See Henry A. Giroux, *Against the New Authoritarianism* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2005).
- ²⁰ Rob Capriccioso, "Walking on Eggshells," *Inside Higher Education* (August 15, 2006). Available online: <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/08/15/utah>.
- ²¹ Thomas Friedman, "Giving the Hatemongers No Place to Hide," *New York Times* (July 22, 2005). Online: www.nytimes.com/2005/07/22/opinion/22friedman.html?ex=1279684800&en=17fb5beb19b09d86&ci=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss.
- ²² Scott Jaschik, "Are You Now or Have You Ever..." *Inside Higher Education* (August 15, 2006). Available online: <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/08/15/oath>.
- ²³ This charge comes from a report issued by the conservative group, American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), founded by Lynne Cheney (spouse of Vice President Dick Cheney) and Joseph Lieberman (Democratic senator). See Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It* (November 2001), p. 1. Available online: www.la.utexas.edu/~chenry/2001LynnCheneyjsg01ax1.pdf. This statement was deleted from the revised February 2002 version of the report available on the ACTA Web site: www.goacta.org/publications/Reports/defciv.pdf. ACTA also posted on its Web site a list of 115 statements made by allegedly "un-American Professors."
- ²⁴ David Horowitz's book trades in racially charged accusations, the ongoing claim that almost anyone who criticizes the Bush administration hates America, and accuses critics of the Iraq war of getting Americans killed in Iraq. His latest book, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (New York: Regnery, 2006), purports to name and expose those left-wing

professors who hate America, the military, and give comfort to terrorists.

- ²⁵ See “Forum: A Chilly Climate on the Campuses,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 9, 2005), B7–B13.
- ²⁶ See “The Dirty Thirty.” Online: www.uclaprofs.com/articles/dirtythirty.html.
- ²⁷ Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 72–73.
- ²⁸ Jacques Derrida, “The Future of the Profession or the Unconditional University,” in *Derrida Down Under*, ed. Laurence Simmons and Heather Worth (Auckland, New Zealand: Dunmarra Press, 2001), 253.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.
- ³⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime,” *Constellations* 4:1 (1997), 10.
- ³¹ Jacques Derrida, “The Future of the Profession,” 253.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 233.
- ³³ Cited in Madeline Bunting, “Passion and Pessimism,” *The Guardian* (April 5, 2003). Available online: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4640858,00.html>.
- ³⁴ Arundhati Roy, *Power Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2001), 6.
- ³⁵ Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 143.
- ³⁶ Cornel West, “Finding Hope in Dark Times,” *Tikkun* 19:4 (2004), 18.
- ³⁷ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 8–9.
- ³⁸ See Henry A. Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- ³⁹ Stanley Aronowitz, *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 53.
- ⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 149.
- ⁴¹ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 8–9.
- ⁴² Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism: Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 162.
- ⁴³ See, especially, Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy,” *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81–123.
- ⁴⁴ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 1998), 115–116.