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The University and "Military Metaphysics": An Essay Review

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Of all the enemies of public liberty war is perhaps the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other... No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

~James Madison, "Political Observations" 1795

God is pro-war
~Jerry Falwell, 2004

The ways in which a stark and dreadful militarization permeates and impacts US and global culture is evidenced by even a cursory examination of recent news reports and events. For example, the film "300," a xenophobic celebration of hyper-masculine militarized mass killing and brutality, was the number one DVD rental for the first week of August 2007; "The Bourne Ultimatum," a film rooted in CIA torture, deceit, assassination and espionage, was last week's top grossing box-office film; *Congressional Research Reports for the People* estimates Congress has approved roughly \$610 billion for the military operations instituted since 9/11; the House approved a \$459.6 billion Pentagon budget for 2008 (not including supplemental spending on Iraq and

Afghanistan or nuclear weapons programs through the DOE that would push the figure well-beyond \$600 billion. The “real Pentagon budget,” as reviewed by James Cypher is closer to \$1 trillion dollars per year when one includes all Military Related Expenditures such as nuclear weapons, State Department international affairs, science and space research and development, Veterans Administration, interest payments on debt accumulated from past wars, Homeland Security, military retirements expenditures, and intelligence agencies); *Just Foreign Policy* reported one million Iraqis killed (as of August 11, 2007) as a consequence of the US aggression initiated in March 2003; *The New Yorker*'s most read online article last week was “The Black Sites: A rare look inside the C.I.A.'s secret interrogation program”; the Air Force announced that “hunter-killer” unmanned drones “loaded” with “a ton and a half of guided missiles and bombs, known as “The Reaper,” will soon be headed to the grim killing fields in Iraq and Afghanistan; “Operation Straight Up,” a right-wing apocalyptic Christian evangelical troupe, will embark on a Defense Department endorsed “Military Crusade in Iraq,” to push “End Times theology” on US troops and deliver “an encouraging word from God to press on to victory; the Bush Administration proposed to send \$63 billion in military aid and weapons to the most volatile region in the world, the Middle East; the Senate passed an enhanced surveillance bill that includes few safeguards to protect US citizens from spying while oversight is placed into the hands of Bush Administration henchmen Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell, and sycophant Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, etc.



Henry Giroux

This creeping militarization across economics, religion, politics and culture functions as a form of public pedagogy that conditions and directs our values, attitudes, beliefs, desires, allegiances, identities and identifications and is thus a matter of serious interest for those concerned about public education, the direction of knowledge, and meaningful democratic politics in their wider applications. The penetration of matters military into all corners of our social and cultural lives C. Wright Mills referred to as “military metaphysics—the cast of mind that defines...reality as basically military.”

When our reality and “cast of mind” is essentially defined militarily, how, we might ask, are we impacted as political, social, intellectual and cultural beings? How can we engage this “military metaphysics” in ways that aid us in developing tools for thinking critically about the causes, agents and effects of militarism, and the concomitant forces of capitalist corporatism, and, more importantly, how can we use that critical

understanding in collective work that will transform the institutions responsible for the militarization and corporatization of US politics and culture? That militarization and corporatism will impact our political and personal lives in multiple ways, perhaps critical, is a stark and inescapable reality that must be confronted, sooner rather than later, with all of our intellectual, moral, and political energy.

These issues and questions, and much more, are at the core of Henry Giroux's latest book *The University in Chains*, a rigorous interrogation and relentless critique of the corporate, military and right-wing forces assaulting the academy (and beyond) in the United States, as well as an insightful and imaginative explication of how we might take on the challenge of developing a meaningful democratic political culture and substantive democratic public spheres as part of a larger collective project dedicated to transforming the conditions and institutions that currently dominate so much, and threaten so many, of our lives.

Many readers will find it surprising that what they consider a bastion of free inquiry, objective thought and unbiased research, i.e. the university system, is a key institution in US culture in which this "military metaphysics" is increasingly present and influential; it is becoming, in John Armitage's apt phrase, a "hypermodern militarized knowledge factory" (p. 18). The militarizing factory system of university education not only includes "150 military education institutions in the United States" but also hundreds of university sites in which richly Pentagon-funded and directed research and development is pursued, military personnel (and others) develop the values and tools of the "warfare state," and students undertake programs of study in preparation for service to "departments and agencies" of the warrior state (p. 18).

The Association of American Universities has argued, "The nation must cultivate young talent and orient national economic, political, and education systems" to achieve the mutually linked goals of expanding global markets for US corporations and for victory in the war on terrorism (p. 19). That this pursuit of military superiority and corporate domination through the university system of research and development goes largely unchallenged by academics, as well as society in general, should be a source of profound concern and pointed critique.

The militarization of the university is present in many guises. For example, former CIA director and president of Texas A&M, and current Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, is just one small indicator of how the US security state (a nexus of political, military and corporate power and interests) is penetrating the university system. Giroux shares a telling anecdote from Cary Nelson who was asked by the UCSD provost, a former CIA employee, during an evaluation of the English Department, "if

it were true the literature department would only hire communist faculty?" (p. 20). The question was not a joke! Nor is it a joke, as noted by the *Wall Street Journal*, that the CIA has become a "growing force on campus," (p. 20) or that FBI director Robert Mueller has a desire "to foster exchanges between academia and the FBI," (p. 21) or, how "the secrecy imposed on scholars working for the CIA" sabotages interrogation of prevailing notions, critiques of conventional wisdom, and challenges to power and authority and thus is "antithetical to the notion of the university as a democratic sphere" dedicated to critical debate, discussion and dialogue (p. 70).

But why is it a problem if professors and universities are in league with US intelligence agencies and the militarized state? Should not the university be disciplined in a post 9/11 world to produce a public discourse in support of US domination of the globe through military might, the eradication of a socialist leaning New Deal society, and encourage a blurring between church and state, all in the name of freedom of inquiry and the spread of democracy? While some do believe the university should "be disciplined" in these directions (witness ACTA – the right-wing "American Council of Trustees" – and their denunciation of the academy as a "weak link" in the war on terror, the recent firing of Ward Churchill, or, the Senate Committee bill passed in Arizona that calls for a \$500 fine if professors are caught "advocating one side of a social, political, or cultural issue that is a matter of partisan controversy," etc.) (Ch. 3), Giroux describes how this marriage between the academy and the militarized state surrenders "the idea of the university as a site of critical dialogue and debate, public service and socially responsible research" to the pursuit of military aggression, profit enhancement, right-wing ideologies, and global political and economic power (Introduction).

In short, the university as an institution potentially dedicated to a substantive democratic culture, critical inquiry and the public good is transmogrified into a repressive sycophant "complicit with a larger set of institutional...commitments to war, violence, fear, surveillance, and the erosion of civic society..." (p 22). Given, in Itsvan Mezsaros's challenging phrase, this "clash of imperatives," we should consider "what the role of higher education might be [or should be]" when, as Dave Price notes, "the government has a free hand to do whatever it wants in the name of national security," and reflect on how we might guard intellectual and moral integrity (p. 69).

President Eisenhower's oft-cited 1961 warning that "we must guard against...the military-industrial complex [...because] the disastrous rise of misplaced power...will...endanger our liberties [and] democratic processes," also included a call to protect the universities from the stark evils of militarization. Eisenhower feared

that war and violence would become the organizing principle of society and thus threaten not only democracy but the very idea of, and occasion for, politics. If politics, in brief, is defined as the way we organize ourselves in society around matters of human life, but we develop a society rooted in "military metaphysics" that is dominated by and organized around militarization, i.e., a dreadful structural machine that functions largely to produce profits, death, and destruction, we undermine our possibilities for enhancing and protecting human life and thus destroy the possibility of real politics.

Before delivery, Eisenhower excised the phrase "military-industrial-academic complex" from his speech, but still warned that "the free university...free ideas and scientific discovery" as well as "intellectual curiosity" were threatened by "the power of money" working in the interest of the militarization of US society and profits for the arms industry. Senator William Fulbright retrieved the excised phrase later in the 1960s, at the height of the US attack on Vietnam, and noted how "the university fails its higher purpose" if it surrenders to the federal government's pursuit of militarization and the corporate pursuit of profits. "The fundamentally anti-democratic nature of the military-industrial-complex," about which Eisenhower and Fulbright warned has, unfortunately, continued to penetrate all corners of US culture, including the academy. Higher education has become an institution "that actively embrace[s] multiple constituencies and forms of patronage provided by the federal government, military, and corporate interests," three essentially authoritarian structures subversive of democracy (pp. 13-16).

While it seems clear that values promoting substantive democratic practices and structures along with a democratic public spirit should be at the core of university and public education, "few in power," in Andrew Bacevich's words, "have openly considered whether...cultivating permanent global military superiority might be at odds with American principles" (p. 17) One suspects those in power have other interests to occupy their time. Those other interests include producing an authoritarian politics, privatizing the economy, and employing and expanding an aggressive military machine thus developing ever greater control and influence over who lives and who dies, and who wins and who loses, along with increased powers to exclude or include, to eviscerate civil rights, and to subvert democratic social values. Giroux argues persuasively that totalitarian power is becoming the norm in the US "as life is more ruthlessly regulated and increasingly placed in the hands of military and state power" (p. 25)

One consequence of this accelerated militarization is a dual politics of disposability molded by the forces of profits and empire, witnessed on the one hand in "legalized"

abuse, torture, rendition, secret prisons and murder, and on the other hand in the impunity from punishment enjoyed by those responsible for these brutal policies. In short, power brings impunity, and impunity protects power.

Under conditions in which militarism and war serve as structuring forces in society, violence, militarization and aggression, at least for the rulers, function as a source of celebration and pride rather than denunciation and concern. We should consider the impact on the rest of us when, in Michael Geyer's words, "civil society organizes itself for the production of violence" (p. 74). Across US culture, in multiple representational forms ranging from video games, to Internet sites, to films, to television programs, to advertisements, Giroux notes, "hyper-violence provides the organizing optic...while legitimating the fascistic assumption that violence is the only reasonable solution to all...problems" (p. 41). A culture so rich in death tends to treat life very cheaply, as perversely seen in the horrible treatment of injured US soldiers returning from Iraq "with one or two or three limbs missing" who are kept in rooms that include "mold, rot, mice and cockroaches" and grimly in what Bob Herbert calls "the apocalypse in Baghdad" (p. 44).

A number of questions arise: How do we work through the tension between public opinions and attitudes that are generally opposed to military aggression, torture and mass violence, and the increasing militarization of "values, practices, ideologies, social relations and cultural representations" that works to not only merge politics and violence, but recode our memories and direct our experiences? How do we reverse the transition from the "welfare state," that at least recognizes some notion of a social contract in which we are responsible for one another, to the "warfare state," that thwarts dissent, debilitates public debate, enforces moral absolutes, celebrates aggression, and thus undermines participatory democracy? How do we overcome the capacity of the militarized state to both create "a disconnected hardening of individuals to suffering," and to erase from view the massive trauma, brutality and barbaric destruction imposed by the US machine of death abroad (p. 41)? What is the proper response among academics when dissent is seen as unpatriotic and critical citizenship is considered treasonous under conditions in which militarism conditions and directs not only our perceptions of reality but the ways in which we relate with that reality?

These and other questions, offered or intimated by Giroux, must be critically engaged during a historic period in which the United States spends more on the military than the rest of the world combined, is the world's greatest purveyor of deadly arms, is dedicated to illegal military aggression against anyone, anytime and anywhere, and is "enthralled with [a] military power [that] has become central to our national identity,"

while our massive arsenal of highly destructive weapons signifies “who we are and what we stand for.” (p. 36)

Nick Turse reports that roughly “350 colleges and universities conduct Pentagon funded research.” The Pentagon’s economic and ideological power “can often dictate the sorts of research that get undertaken and the sorts that don’t.” Giroux refers to the enormous power and burgeoning budget of the Pentagon’s military apparatus as possessing a “powerful arm-twisting ability capable of bending higher education to its will,” that is an “ominous and largely ignored disaster in the making...” In short, because of Pentagon power within the academy there is a dedication toward “delivering science and technology solutions to the warfighter.” For example, in 2003 Pennsylvania State University received \$149 million from “the military war machine,” for research and development, while the University of Texas at Austin received \$87 million, and Carnegie Mellon \$60 million partially to support research in space-based weapons systems, including “microwave guns, space-based lasers, electromagnetic guns, and holographic decoys,” and Future Combat Systems such as “electric tanks, electro-thermal chemical cannons, [and] unmanned platforms.” (pp. 53-54)

Giroux suggests that those working in the “hypermodern militarized knowledge factories” (p. 74) should ask a number of critical and “uncomfortable” questions: “What role do intellectuals play in the conditions that allow theory and knowledge to be appropriated [...in ways that] produce lethal weapons, fuel an arms race...and corrupt ethical standards...and what can they do politically to prevent [...their work] from being militarized...?” And crucially, how do opposition and resistance to militarization in the academy “connect to [public intellectual] work and extend [students’ and teachers’] sense of social and political responsibility to the world outside of the academy?” One vital task for intellectuals is to employ critical pedagogical practices that promote ethical citizenship, encourage a willingness to take risks and responsibilities for a more substantive democracy, and “connect knowledge and power in the interests of social responsibility and justice.” (pp. 57-58)

Giroux’s *The University in Chains*, is an intellectually rigorous and politically challenging contribution to our understanding of US culture, US politics and US education in our increasingly (and dangerously) militarized society and world, and a careful examination of the ways in which the capitalist market, the Pentagon-system, and right-wing fundamentalism corrupt and condition the academy and culture. *The University in Chains* is a stunning tour-de-force that meticulously examines how the multi-tiered and interpenetrating military, corporate, and right-wing assaults on the university undermine higher education as a potentially and necessary democratic public sphere in which students and teachers could, and should, develop a sense of individual and

social agency in the context of experiencing meaningful democratic social relations while identifying, critiquing, and working to overcome authoritarian forms of power and authority.

Giroux writes with a clarity and urgency that is riveting and engaging. He operates from a fundamental recognition that “the academy and democracy are in peril,” and from a decisive question: “What is the task of educators at a time when the forces of democracy appear to be in retreat and the emerging ideologies and practices of militarization, corporatism, and political fundamentalism bear down on every aspect of individual and collective experience?” (p. 1). In other words, what are the responsibilities of public intellectuals during a period in which critical thought, rational considerations, radical qualities of character, and a culture of questioning—all necessary to authentic higher education and intellectual creativity—are under assault by corporate, religious, ideological and economic forces opposed to any form of substantive democratic politics and pedagogy? What role can public intellectuals, whether professors or students, perform in opening up the democratic potential of the university through “raising important questions about the mutually informing relationship among higher education, critical pedagogical practices, and the promise of a substantive democracy”? (p. 6).

While “contestation and struggle” still exist (often in isolation) in the academy, the university’s role as a “counterinstitution,” willing to question assumptions, interrogate prevailing notions, critique conventional wisdom, and, importantly, challenge and expose power, has been considerably undermined by militarization, corporatism, and right-wing “patriotically correct” fundamentalism. As such, teachers, students, and citizens must take on the individual and social responsibility founded in the links between both critical thought and critical intervention, and rigorous intellectual work and deliberate political engagement, to invigorate the academy and “reclaim higher education as a democratic public sphere and counterinstitution” in which civic responsibility, a culture of critique, and a commitment to social engagement are rooted in a critical democratic politics and pedagogy. (p. 2) A question attends these insights: in whose interest, in what direction, with what goals, and with what likely consequences should pedagogical work be carried out, inside and outside higher education?

Giroux argues that higher education must move beyond the academy in ways that connect projects in higher education to the “enabling and development of social movements, public spheres, and groups of critical citizens” who recognize that in a globally interconnected and interdependent world we can no longer refuse to confront injustice, aggression, dogma and exploitation because no one is immune from the

harmful, and potentially catastrophic political, personal and social consequences of militarization, corporatism, and right-wing fundamentalism. (Ch.4)

As part of a pressing process of “demilitarizing knowledge, social relations, and values,” intellectuals, students, cultural workers and citizens must move beyond the simple “consumption of knowledge” and embark on projects in oppositional and resistance pedagogy dedicated to knowledge “production for peaceful and socially just ends.” In brief, Giroux suggests, any form of peace-producing and substantive democratic education, inside and outside the academy, must work to link knowledge to commitment, learning to social change, understanding to political engagement, consciousness to empowerment and collective resistance, and the classroom to those larger social forces and public discourses that bear down on our lives in multiple contexts.

Such resistance, we can add, must be accomplished while working through the tensions between patience and urgency. (pp. 179-186) We must have the patience to think rationally, reflect critically, deliberate meaningfully, and free ourselves from illusions during a period in which, as Gabriel Kolko points out, “our choices are increasingly linked to their implications for human survival.”

Consequently, critically reflective patience, though important, cannot be pursued at the expense of social engagement rooted in meaningful participation and effective shaping of decisions directed toward the mobilization of collective resistance to those forces intent on increasing social calamities and human suffering. In other words, we must work to ensure that we do not lose the future in the present, or the present in the future. Our safest path under these conditions is to oppose and resist the “death dealing ideology [and practices] of militarization,” capitalist corporatism, and dogmatism wherever they exist and whenever we confront them by engaging and expanding pedagogical practices that extend “notions of agency, empowerment, and responsibility that operate in the service of life, democratic struggles, and the expansion of human rights” (p. 78).

There is no longer a question about whether we should resist and oppose military aggression, ideological narrowness, and corporate profit-seeking inside or outside the universities, but rather the question is how we can best express our resistance and opposition over the short and long-term, inside and outside the academy. Corporatism, militarism, and fundamentalism operate in manifold ways to shut down hopes and possibilities, not least of which is their capacity to debilitate dreams. The subversion of our capacity to imagine sabotages our reality to live. A reality without

dreams is barbarism, a barbarism witnessed each day in the stark and dreadful consequences of US imperial pursuits.

Here is where Giroux's notion of "a pedagogy of hope," as it links to critical thought and imagination and critical intervention and citizenship, is vital and informative. The growing culture of fear and paranoia, the constantly invoked threats of terror, the intensifying cinema of hyper-violence and mutilation, the creeping right-wing dogmatism, the silencing, marginalizing and firing of dissidents in the academy, coupled with an absence of meaningful democratic public options produce forms of demoralization, cynicism and despair that undermine hopes and possibilities for engaged citizenship, social commitments, and fighting back. Addressing this "crisis of agency" is at the heart of creating conditions for believing that a substantive democratic politics and pedagogy toward critical citizenship is possible and recognizing they are necessary. Giroux offers, "...hope is a precondition not only for merging matters of agency and social responsibility, but also for imagining a future that does not repeat the present" (p. 79). He notes elsewhere, in an interview with the Media Education Foundation, "If we continue to reproduce the present we may be reproducing a present that eliminates the future." In addition, we might add, if we permit the present to crush our dreams, we lose the future. Hence, there is his call for an ethical and political vision, commitment, and practice that works not only rigorously to negotiate and understand the complexities of history, and resolutely engage and change, so as not to suffer, the present, but importantly "to take students beyond the world they already know," to one in which we not only "believe that democracy is desirable and possible," but necessary. At its best, Giroux reminds us, "Pedagogy does not avoid commitment, it makes [commitment] possible!" (p. 183)

In the end, one is deeply inspired by Giroux's impassioned concern for human rights, meaningful democracy and the future, and empowered by his critical insights into how we can break the chains and transform the university into a substantive democratic public space committed to providing students and global citizens with tools and skills to address our most urgent crises, to critically understand how economic, ideological and military power works and circulates through multiple sites of cultural production, distribution and consumption, and, to intervene as empowered and self-critical agents in the world in ways that expand and ensure the pursuit of greater and better conditions of social justice and democracy.

The University in Chains should be essential reading for everyone inside and outside the academy concerned with the increasing and foreboding militarization of the world, the corporate takeover of every corner of human life, and the narrowing ideological impositions of right-wing super-patriot fundamentalists. The book moves crucially

from critique to a call for intervention and is therefore indispensable for those attentive to the need for fighting back, as well as those interested in matters of public pedagogy, public education, social justice, human rights, and producing a meaningful democratic vision, culture and practice.

At a time in human history when the perils resulting from silence and passivity in the face of destructive power and institutional malevolence soon promise to outweigh the perils of confronting that power and evil, Giroux's call for a pedagogy of critical conviction, political engagement and social intervention is imperative in the continuing struggle to overcome practical political powerlessness, reclaim public space as a democratic sphere, and break the chains of injustice and oppression.

The perpetuation of a highly destructive and potentially terminal US militarism across so many spheres of our existence, in culture, politics, ideology, economics and academia, part of the large-scale "process by which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence," (p. 31) all captured so forcefully in Giroux's *The University in Chains*, calls to mind a "clash of imperatives" noted in the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto: "Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?"

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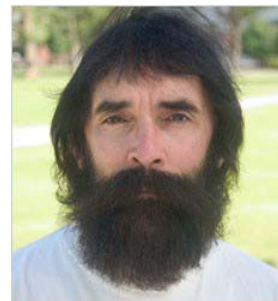
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