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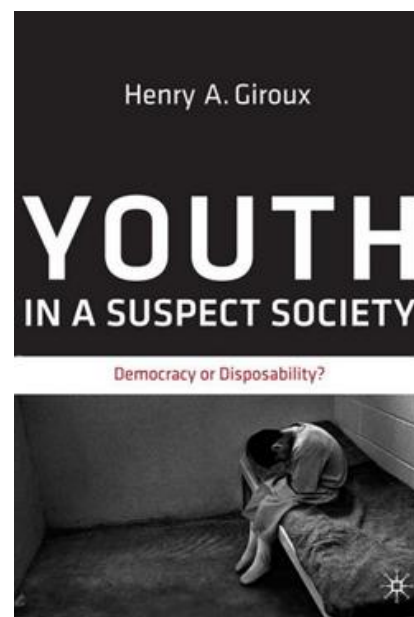
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Henry Giroux's *Youth in a Suspect Society* furnishes an entirely new lens with which to view the past, present, and future of our children and schools. Giroux examines the effects that subversive commodification, education policy, and political reform have on youth. Giroux describes the biopolitics of neoliberalism in terms the Foucauldian sense of power and investigates a generation of suspect youth. Neoliberalism or "free-market fundamentalism" is apparent when "social problems become utterly privatized and removed from public consideration" (p. 2). This concept is analyzed under biopolitics which is "the politics that determine the life and death of human beings" (p. 9).



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Youth in a Suspect Society provides a wide array of fact and theoretical sources to go beyond traditional critical theory. Giroux's factual and theoretical research is masterfully orchestrated to all audiences, but especially those within a neoliberal order. However, the study offers application to those in the field of social education; it will provide their discourse with an entirely new lens for understanding the current state and direction of America's youth.

Giroux synthesizes Foucault's biopolitics with his own concepts regarding Neoliberalism. He supports his claims with the works of Zygmunt Bauman (cited frequently), Jacques Derrida, and Nobel Prize laureate Paul Krugman. Giroux is well versed in theoretical discourse and engages the audience in a discussion of youth under attack. He claims that children no longer are an investment in the Deweyan sense, but are "defined through market-driven ideas, social relations, and values that are predatory in nature and punishing in their consequences, leaving a generation of young people with damaged lives, impoverished spirits, and bankrupt hopes" (p. xiii). Giroux explains how neoliberalism has adapted invasive control to become a virtual neo-neoliberalism. Not only will government be directed by the free-market under neoliberal order, but everyday lives, rationalities, identities, and social experiences become mediated by technologies of biopolitics. He demonstrates that we can no longer ascribe subversion and coercion solely to governmental force, but to agencies outside our conventional view of power. Institutions such as prisons, schools, and mental hospitals are reaffirming power with Foucault's definition of "governmentality." In this scheme, our youth are being socialized, disposed of, and commodified. The reader should not feel intimidated by esoteric theoretical concepts while in the process of understanding biopolitical neoliberalism. The point of departure from traditional critical theory lies in the Giroux's synthesis and application. The synthesis of biopolitics and neoliberalism has never been so explicitly stated as to create a lens to understand the American youth experience. In addition, to apply this lens offers critical theory another lens for understanding the world children in which children grow up.

Giroux presents a great deal of statistical data to buttress his assertions. The data suggest that entire generations of youth



Henry Giroux is an American cultural critic. One of the founding theorists of critical pedagogy in the United States, he is best known for his pioneering work in public pedagogy, cultural studies, youth studies, higher education, media studies, and critical theory. Giroux has held positions at Boston University, Miami University, and Penn State University. In 2005, Giroux assumed the Global TV Network Chair in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. He has published more than 35 books and 300 academic articles. A recent work is *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*.

have and are being commodified. Statistical research on children creating identities through brand names and gender stereo-typed exploitation supports unnerving conclusions. One particular subchapter, “The Business of Commodifying Kids” describes how young girls are sexually exploited through marketing strategists. These children are made to associate an “adult version of sexuality” with a type of brand or product (p. 44). An example of this is given with Abercrombie & Fitch’s clothing line for young people. Giroux observes that “catalogues filled with promotional ads of scantily clad kids and its over-the-top sexual advice columns for teens and preteens” where in one catalogue featured sexually provocative sayings on undergarments. Girls are further socialized through television programs such as *Gossip Girls*, a program that glorifies superficial values. Giroux aptly titles his main chapter “Pedagogy of Commodification.” In this section, he discusses how the commodification of youth has become established pedagogy. The business sector uses youth as a resource to sell products or a social image. According to Giroux, “Branding shifts the loyalties of children away from their parents toward corporations” (p. 58). Through the biopolitical lens, the manner in which children identify with brands is psychologically detrimental to the child as well as the political system in which they participate. Children associate their identities with a type of brand. With this identity, youth then “translate the act of citizenship into the art of consuming” (p. 58). Agency is removed and children become pseudo- ghouls to what Giroux calls “legion of corporate vampires.” Any child or family that is aberrational is inevitably marginalized. An example of this might be a child’s great desire to fit into the school’s fashion elite and the how parents go to extreme ends to provide this luxury for their children. Being able to wear such recognized brand names equates with status and privilege, which is highly valued in a neoliberal society.

In addition to selling the products, images, and ideologies multi-national conglomerates engineer, Giroux states that the media portray youth “As various lazy, stupid, self-indulgent, volatile, dangerous, and manipulative” (p. 14). Exploring the magnitude of invasiveness, Giroux analyzes a

pastiche of trendy television shows that reinforce the youth as suspect. Popular television programs demonize an entire culture of youth by selectively broadcasting the acts of a hand full of deviants. Revered programs such as *60 Minutes* have been known to run stories focusing on the more suspect characteristics of youth. The image of youth as incorrigible is supported by the media's coverage on school performance statistics. Scores in math, science, and other subjects are reported as being beneath the national standard without factoring in other very important externalities. To placate worried parents and safeguard children against the derelict students, school systems adopt 'carceral' or jail-like policies. Regional data around the U.S. assert that not only have police begun to outnumber teachers, but classrooms have surveillance. In addition, students are being sent off to detention centers for behaviors that could once easily be corrected in the classroom. With the use of surveillance, generations are learning they are not trusted. The idea that children are being encultured with this type of 'carceral' system is antithetical to the ideological basis of a school. *Youth in a Suspect Society* not only brings attention to the prison-like school but also one that resembles corporate institutions. Schools with market-driven ideologies are cultivating hyper-individualism and promoting success with a focus on materialism. Teachers are also affected by schools with corporate ideology. They are 'deskilled' and become hyper-competitive for performance-based rewards. In his previous articles, Giroux discusses these issues within the Bush administration's education agenda. Conversely, Giroux analyses the Obama administration's reward and performance based education system and addresses the ways in which it has guaranteed change. Giroux does discuss the Obama administration's rewards and performance based agenda for education. Yet, the Obama administration and Education Secretary Arne Duncan are examined superficially. Giroux holds Obama in a positive light. He presents Obama as the beacon of hope his campaign presented him during his candidacy. Nevertheless, Giroux's reservations are not *of* the administration but *in* the administration. He focuses more on figures like Secretary Duncan who advocate a neoliberal direction of education. Obama is lauded for his courage to recognize the

importance of youth, which is against the grain of a neoliberal system.

Even without an in-depth study of Foucault, neoliberalism, or market-ideology, Giroux's main thesis still remains clear: "Biopolitics of neoliberalism, examining it as not merely an economic discourse but also as an educational, cultural, and political discourse." (p. 25) The encompassing biopolitics of neoliberalism discourse has destroyed intentions of a social state. In addition, there appears a "politics of disposability" where those of no use in society are disposed or marginalized. There are some instances where the biopolitical lens is reiterated to connect ideas and facts.

According to Giroux, biopolitics "points to relations of power that are more capillary and capacious, concerned not only with the body as an object of disciplinary control but also with a body that needs to be 'regularized,' subject to those pedagogical modes of production that fashion whole ways of life and enlarge the targets of control and regulation" (p. 30). Although *Youth in a Suspect Society* concentrates on biopolitics, it would help the reader to understand how this concept works within the grander scheme of biopolitics. For an in-depth discussion of biopolitics and what biopower entails, one should read Foucault's *History of Sexuality Part 1, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, and "*Society Must be Defended*."

Giroux incorporates Derrida's "autoimmunitary" logic to support notions of biopolitical neoliberalism in the U.S. Autoimmunitary works in a political framework to destroy the very thing that protects it. Analogously, an autoimmunitary in the human body would be like a virus that made the body immune to its own immune system; the autoimmunitary in the body will destroy you immune system's ability to defend itself. In this case, free-markets are destroying the young people that would eventually protect democratic ideology and practice. The failure of American society's immune system is evident in the breakdown of "all democratic modes of sociality, erasing all vestiges of the public good, turning citizens into consumers..." (p. 31). Although Derrida has been criticized

for perplexing audiences, Giroux works the more accessible theories of Derrida into his book.

According to Foucauldian biopolitics, life must be sustained and directed. In the realm of the autoimmunitary, citizens of a democracy who do not become ghoul-like consumers will be marginalized. Those who are victim to marginalization are essentially bodies in need of regulation by power. Giroux states that “prison symbolizes the power of the repressive state operating under the guise of the war on terror, while it’s growing presence and influence normalizes a racially predicated politics of disposability” (p. 83).

Within biopower, all institutions serve to direct life to reassert power. This is more prevalent in democratic institutions, such as the collegiate university. Youth in a Suspect Society eloquently analyzes the ultimate demise of the university, a once egalitarian sphere of society. Giroux also examines the corporate vocabulary and policies the university has adopted. He claims that higher education is no longer about critical thought and developing democratic practitioners. His argument presents the university as a ‘ghoul’ to those conservative or corporate vampire groups controlling them with funding. Giroux is expanding on his *University in Chains* and through the new biopolitical lens the reader is able understand these institutions with a greater depth.

In biopolitics, one cannot fight against the omnipotent power. Power will furtively allow resistance because it transforms its own force and reasserts hegemony. Educators must encourage students to become critically literate against the barrage of media, and safeguard themselves against ‘corporate vampires’ (p. 140). There has never been an actualized egalitarian society in its purest form, but Giroux understands it as a process. If we are able to understand the direction of our society, we will understand the pathway for America. However, if we are able to reassess our situation and the direction our society has taken, then perhaps we can direct it toward the democratic foundation it was once built upon. The youth are essential for continuing the democratic practice and

process in this respect. Although biopolitics uses furtive practices of control, one might wonder to how we can gain cognizance of such power. Are we ever able to be truly critically literate in the media and politics? Giroux understands the limitations of action and thought within biopolitics. Although one can never truly outwit or dissent the technologies and apparatuses of a biopolitical control, they can at least become aware of the neoliberal features. Remember, biopolitics is not inherently bad. Biopolitics becomes detrimental when societies adhere to neoliberalism. According to Giroux, Adam Smith's notion of the "invisible hand" is a capitalistic agent of biopower (p. 157). The invisible hand will direct life and the market to fortify power at all costs. However, the invisible hand example was intended by Adam Smith to be of the free-market. The invisible hand would then reassert biopower under free-market countries. The book focuses on the free-market systems of America. Whether or not the biopolitics of neoliberalism can be applied to other free-market countries is beyond the scope of this study.

The final chapters of *Youth in a Suspect Society* end in a Foucauldian grand finale. The reader is thrown into a full theoretical discussion of biopolitics. To further the analysis, Giroux uses Giorgio Agamben's discussion of biopolitics. Giroux does well to point out that Agamben's theory of biopolitics is limited to pejoratives. Foucault's usage of biopolitics is favored and helps the reader understand that power is no longer in traditional notions of government. Power is exposed in small interstices, non-affiliated agencies, and institutions in which one would never think of finding it (as was shown with the university). Foucault's biopower can be a positive force aimed at sustaining life and promoting utility. Giroux states that "the logic of biopolitics is largely productive." (p. 168) However, one must realize that Giroux is examining neoliberalism through a biopolitical lens. In this sense, neoliberalism is a negative concept that is detrimental for youth in the education system. The reader must not consider biopolitics as negative, but must come to understand the biopolitics of neoliberalism. So the discussion of the book is on one negative aspect of biopower: neoliberalism. However, there are positive

aspects of biopower that are wide ranging in their abilities to sustain life and value. *Youth in a Suspect Society* does not discuss the positive aspects of biopolitics, as it may be beyond the scope of neoliberalism. Giroux does address that biopolitics cannot just be understood in negative terms. Goigorgio Agamben's understanding of biopolitics is disqualified by Giroux as being too limited in its view. Giroux advocates Foucault's interpretation of biopolitics as much more sound. Foucault intended biopolitics to be worked out through many technologies and agencies to reassure life and productivity. The reader is then left to wonder if neoliberalism will always be negative in the biopolitical lens.

The sources of *Youth in a Suspect Society* carefully weigh a balance of theoretical and empirical research. Giroux cleverly orchestrates government statistical data and scholarly research data to support his ideas. For example, Giroux uses the Children's Defense Fund's 2008 annual report that states: "Black males ages 15 to 19 are about eight times more likely to be gun homicide victims than white males," "4.2 million children under the age of 5 live in poverty," and "Black and Latino children are about 3 times as likely to be poor as white children." (pp. 92-93) Another memorable statistic Giroux offers is by the Equal justice Initiative which states "Of the 73 children between the ages of 13-14 years-old sentenced to die in prison, nearly half (36 or 49%) are African American." (p. 104) Contrarily, the reader may have concerns regarding the validity of Giroux's many online sources. While one may not contend with the columns of Paul Krugman, skeptics may question blogs by lesser authorities.

If you have not already read the previous works of Giroux, I recommend that you do. Giroux's theory of biopolitics of neoliberalism is his best analysis of neoliberalism yet. Just when you think Giroux is making theoretical conjectures, he throws a barrage of national and local facts, reports, studies, European theories, and articles that validate his argument. The chapters are aptly named and are very provocative. A reservation with the study may question how biopolitics could affect youth beyond a neoliberal focus. Giroux's

study does not serve as a theoretical “cookie cutter” but a seminal work for challenging a “suspect society.”

About the Reviewer

Christopher J. Kazanjian is a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida. He graduated with his M.Ed. from the University of Texas at El Paso and is seeking his doctorate. His research interests include how critical multicultural pedagogies are able to accommodate Heritage Language Learners. Currently Christopher is conducting his research in the American Southwest border region, where he seeks to develop a critical pedagogy that accommodates a cultural and linguistically diverse youth. Christopher looks to apply these theories in a more global context with a concentration on diasporic and exile heritage communities, such as the Armenians.



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