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Yvonne V. Wells¹

Henry Giroux (2011) writes passionately in his philosophical, psychological and educational text, *On Critical Pedagogy*, as a contributor to the *Critical Pedagogy Today Series*, edited by Steinberg, S. & Freire, A.M. Always a champion for the marginalized of Western societies and an author of numerous books and monographs about democracy, social justice and the connection between liberal education and good, American self-determined living, Giroux brings all deep thinkers into a conversational circle. He excites the mind and sets the radical educator on a path of practical application of sound pedagogical practices.

In this text, Giroux's style remains crisp, direct, and accessible. A brief and systematic directive, *On Critical Pedagogy* invites everyone into the philosophical conversation about the position of human beings against unbridled Western styled globalization and corporate dominance over human cultures. His topic, this time, public education, is presented in his consistently critical voice. He warns the reader that pernicious failure of the public education system, particularly in the United States threatens, not only the individual, but in fact, the entire future of American democracy.

This book is a good, quick read that comes into focus when considered along with his most recent, even shorter work: *Disposable Youth: Racialized Memories and the Culture of Cruelty*. These works do not mince words. Giroux via the dialectical process provides an invitation to critique by appealing to the dark fears of most Americans concerning "end times" while at the same time articulating reality for any liberal intellectual who feels that he or she has lost their voice in recent conservative shifts. Those who write, lecture, and plan critical curricula will want to read, cite, and dialectically discuss *On Critical Pedagogy*. The work offers clear definitions presented at the opening of each chapter, making mastery of his concepts possible for all levels of readers, regardless of their comfort with Philosophical writing.

In Chapter one of *On Critical Pedagogy*, Giroux describes the disconnection from rich human history and a "here and now" perspective in public education which imposes specific knowledge bits and pieces disconnected from meaning and context. Topics about physical sciences, mathematical logic and social engineering methodology have replaced ethical considerations, contextual analysis and critical thought entirely throughout

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educational systems in America. The implications of this direction toward value free education that teaches students enough to have them fit into a society conceived out of corporate necessities are dire for Giroux. The less powerful and more needy in society now find doors to cultural and individual identity closed at the level of their public education systems. Freedom of thought and open access to the goods and services of society are thus, limited especially for the most vulnerable public school and community college student. Subsequent chapters in this text detail the ways in which education reform has come to be used as a tool against the American student, increasing social control rather than cultural development.

Chapter five makes the direct connection between empty education, social media and exploitation of the most vulnerable youth in society through media mis-representation, for example of the African American youth as glorified, but terrifying thugs, and high levels of youth crime and violence against youth by an adult American society that no longer respects childhood and in fact, complies with a politics of “disposal” of marginalized youth in our society. By chapter seven the liberal thinker will have found in Giroux’s critique the lost voice of liberal versus neoliberal thought and begun to regain social, contextual, consciousness and critical thinking power. For Giroux re-contextualizes the deep thinker in society, reminding us to take note of the noise of corporate conservatism surrounding our developmental thought processes. He describes the ways in which conservative talk combines with neoliberal compliance and entreats human beings to allow larger corporate systems to take control of their very human being-ness, using surveillance to strip away dignity and rendering all Americans “un-educated” and un-thinking.

It would be completely within Giroux’s rights as a Philosopher to simply disturb the Western educator with dark warnings about the social, public and educational collapse that threatens to dissolve what remains of our failing system of Democracy. The Philosopher is under no contract to repair social problems, but simply to articulate them. Yet, he takes a final step in the last chapters of *On Critical Pedagogy* to propose pausing and “re-thinking” the importance, the role and the methods of meaningful, engaging and liberating education. We are reminded of Democratic ideals that reflect a true American Pedagogy. That pedagogy, in the words of Freire in conversations with Giroux, quoted in *On Critical Pedagogy*, engages thinkers, allows inclusion of marginalized students, and lay the groundwork for Citizenship and Self-determination. These are “old school” educational tasks not so long ago actively promoted in the Western American world via a public education system.

Conservative thinkers should read this work by Giroux. He values the teaching of cultural values as a part of the education process as they would value it in transmitting

American “values”. Liberal thinkers will want to read this work. Giroux helps them to sharply distinguish themselves from cynical, complying and obedient neoliberals who, based on false assumptions about the permanence of their materially grounded privilege have helped dismantle true public education. Educators who just “can’t put their fingers on” what has been lost from the public classroom in America in terms of history, cultural context, and opportunity for all will want to read this to rekindle their hope. Psychologists, particularly developmentalists who recall Piaget’s lively, constructivist and meaning laden ideas about the process, of intellectual development will also want to read *On Critical Pedagogy*.

As always, Giroux is direct, concise and clear in his dedication to critical pedagogy as reflected in *On Critical Pedagogy*. His presentation of philosophical definitions, political terms and ideas is systematic enough to spin an entire course on Pedagogy, Community Psychology or Educational Philosophy around this work. Giroux is to Pedagogy as Carl Rogers is to humanistic Psychology.

Reference

Giroux, H. A. (2012). *Disposable Youth: Racialized Memories and the Culture of Cruelty*. In: *Framing 21 Century Social Issues*. Routledge: N.Y.