

## DISPOSABLE FUTURES: NEOLIBERALISM'S ASSAULT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

### *FUTUROS DESECHABLES: EL ASALTO DEL NEOLIBERALISMO A LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR*

Henry A. Giroux\*

McMaster University, Ontario, Canada.

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#### RESUMEN

El rol de la educación superior como centro del pensamiento crítico y del compromiso cívico está devaluado, la sociedad está siendo transformada dentro de un "espacio de consumo espectacular" y saqueo financiero. No solamente el asalto a la sociedad por parte del neoliberalismo reforzado por las peores dimensiones del *capitalismo casino* en su rol de reconocimiento del valor de cambio como el único tipo de valor, sino porque también ha producido una política de la crueldad y la desechabilidad en la cual los tóxicos elementos de la exclusión, el racismo, y las brechas de clase han llegado a ser normalizadas. Una consecuencia es un vuelo en curso desde las responsabilidades sociales, una denigración de aquellos considerados otros, y un ataque en toda regla a la función crítica de la educación superior. Aquí están en juego no sólo el significado y propósito de la educación superior, sino también la sociedad civil, la política y el destino de la democracia misma. Este artículo examina esas fuerzas en toda América del Norte, que están a la vez protestando contra el terrorismo de estado y la barbarie neoliberal, pero también las fuerzas de resistencia que marchan con el fin de hacer oír su voz como parte de la promesa de una democracia radical, junto con los acuerdos que le dan y les proporcionan una vida significativa y justa. La educación es peligrosa, ya que ofrece a los jóvenes y a otros actores una promesa de justicia racial y económica, un futuro en el que la democracia se convierta en inclusiva, y en un sueño en el que todas las vidas sean importantes. Las universidades deben ser subversivas en una sociedad sana; deben empujar contra la corriente, y dar voz a los sin voz, lo innombrable, y deben ser los susurros de la verdad que acechen a los apóstoles del poder y la riqueza sin control.

**Palabras Clave:** Desechabilidad, Educación Superior, Neoliberalismo, Pensamiento Crítico, Pedagogía, Democracia Radical, Cultura de Crueldad.

#### ABSTRACT

*As higher education's role as a center of critical thought and civic engagement is devalued, society is being transformed into a "spectacular space of consumption" and financial looting. Not only does the assault on society by neoliberalism reinforce the worse dimensions of casino capitalism in its role of recognizing exchange value as the only type of value, but it has also produced a politics of cruelty and disposability in which the poisonous elements of exclusion, racism, and the injuries of class have become normalized. One consequence is an ongoing flight from social responsibilities, a denigration of those considered other, and a full-fledged attack on the critical function of higher education. At stake here are not only the meaning and purpose of higher education, but also civil society, politics, and the fate of democracy itself. This article examines those forces all across North America that are both protesting state terrorism and neoliberal barbarism but also those forces of resistance marching in order to have their voices heard as part of the promise of a radical democracy along with the arrangements that give it and them a meaningful and just life. Education is dangerous because it offers young people and other actors the promise of racial and economic justice, a future in which democracy becomes inclusive, and a dream in which all lives matter. Universities should be subversive in a healthy society; they should push against the grain, and give voice to the voiceless, the unmentionable, and the whispers of truth that haunt the apostles of unchecked power and wealth.*

**Key Words:** Disposability, Higher Education, Neoliberalism, Critical Thought, Pedagogy, Radical Democracy, Culture of Cruelty.

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\* Doctor of Arts, Carnegie Mellon University. McMaster University Professor of English and Cultural Studies and Global TV Network Chair in Communications. girouxh@mcmaster.ca

We now live at a time in which institutions that were meant to limit human suffering and misfortune and protect the public from the excesses of the market have been either weakened or abolished (Bauman, 1999; Giroux, 2001; Mills, 2000; Sennet, 1974). The consequences can be seen clearly in the ongoing and ruthless assault on the social state, workers, unions, higher education, students, poor minorities and any vestige of the social contract. Free market policies, values, and practices with their emphasis on the privatization of public wealth, the elimination of social protections, and the deregulation of economic activity now shape practically every commanding political and economic institution in the United States and increasingly in Canada under the Harper government.

Public spheres that once offered at least the glimmer of progressive ideas, enlightened social policies, non-commodified values, and critical dialogue and exchange have been increasingly commercialized—or replaced by private spaces and corporate settings whose ultimate fidelity is to increasing profit margins. For example, higher education is defined more and more as simply another core element of corporate power and culture, viewed mostly as a waste of taxpayers' money, and denied its value as a democratic public sphere and guardian of public values. What has become clear is that the attack on the social state, workers, and unions is now being matched by a full-fledged assault on higher education. Such attacks are not happening just in the United States and Canada but in many other parts of the globe where casino capitalism is waging a savage battle to eliminate all of those public spheres that might offer a glimmer of opposition to and protection from market-driven policies, institutions, ideology, and values.

*We live at a time when it is more crucial than ever to believe that the university is both a public resource and social good. At best, it is a critical institution infused with the promise of cultivating intellectual insight, the imagination, inquisitiveness, risk-taking, social responsibility, the struggle for justice, and what Joel Westheimer has called educating young people for the common good. In addition, higher education should be at the “heart of intense public discourse, passionate learning, and vocal citizen involvement in the issues of the times” (Leigh, 2012). Underlying this vision of the university are some serious questions about its relationship to the larger society. For instance, how*

might the university's responsibility be understood with respect to safeguarding the interests of young people at a time of violence and war, the rise of a rampant anti-intellectualism, a devastating gap in income and wealth, the rise of the surveillance state, and the threat of ecological and nuclear devastation? What might it mean to define the university as a pedagogical space that disrupts, disturbs, inspires, and energizes young people to be individual and social agents rather than as an institution that re-defines itself in terms of market values and reacts mostly to market fluctuations? It is in the spirit of such considerations that I first want to address those larger economic, social, and cultural interests produced largely by the growing inequalities in wealth, income, and power that threaten the notion of higher education as a democratic public good.

As higher education's role as a center of critical thought and civic engagement is devalued, society is being transformed into a “spectacular space of consumption” and financial looting. One consequence is an ongoing flight from mutual obligations and social responsibilities and a “loss of faith in the culture of open democracy” and the transformation of the citizen into a consumer (Judt, 2010). This loss of faith in the power of politics, public dialogue, and dissent is not unrelated to the diminished belief in higher education as central to producing critically engaged, civically literate and as socially responsible citizens. At stake here are not only the meaning and purpose of higher education, but also civil society, politics, and the fate of democracy itself. And, yet, under the banner of right-wing reforms and neoliberal austerity measures, the only questions being asked about knowledge production, the purpose of education, the nature of politics, and the future are determined largely by market forces. In this discourse, education is reduced to training, public values are transformed into crude instrumental values, and, public and higher education are reduced to operating systems, posing problems that can only be solved through quantification, effective programming, high stakes testing, and an obsession with numerical data. This is, a form of neoliberal or corporatized education wedded to market-driven values that lacks any vestige of a democratic vision and makes clear “the contradiction between democratic values and market fundamentalism” (Guinier & Smith, 2002). It is also a pedagogy of repression and depoliticization.

The mantras of the new market fundamentalism are now well known: government is the problem; society is a fiction; governance is market-driven; deregulation and commodification are vehicles for freedom, long-term thinking and planning are a hindrance, “individuals have to seek, find and practice individual solutions to socially produced troubles” (Bauman, 2007), and higher education should serve corporate interests rather than the public good. In addition, the yardstick of profit has become the only viable measure of the good life while civic engagement and public spheres devoted to the common good are viewed by many politicians and their publics as either a hindrance to the goals of a market-driven society or alibis for government inefficiency and waste.

Missing from neoliberal market societies are those public spheres—from libraries and higher education to the mainstream media and digital screen culture—where people can develop what might be called the civic imagination. Tied largely to instrumental ideologies and measurable paradigms, many institutions of higher education are now committed almost exclusively to economic goals, such as preparing students for the workforce—all done as part of an appeal to rationality, one that eschews matters of inequality, power, public values, and the ethical grammars of suffering (Wilderson, 2012). Many universities have not only strayed from their democratic mission, they also seem immune to the plight of students who face a harsh new world of high unemployment, the prospect of downward mobility, and debilitating debt.

The question of what kind of education is needed for students to be informed and active citizens in a world that increasingly ignores their needs, if not their future, is rarely asked (Aronowitz, 2008). In the absence of a democratic vision of schooling, it is not surprising that some colleges and universities are increasingly opening their classrooms to corporate interests, standardizing the curriculum, instituting top-down governing structures that mimic corporate culture, and generating courses that promote entrepreneurial values unfettered by social concerns or ethical consequences.

Central to this view of higher education in the United States is a market-driven paradigm that seeks to eliminate tenure, turn the humanities into a job preparation service, and transform most faculty into an army of temporary subaltern labor. For instance, in the United States out of 1.5 million

faculty members, 1 million are “adjuncts who are earning, on average, \$20K a year gross, with no benefits or healthcare, and no unemployment insurance when they are out of work” (The blog of Junct Rebellion, 2012). In Canada, the figure is close to 70 percent (McKay, 2014). In the United States, the indentured service status of such faculty is put on full display as some colleges have resorted to using “temporary service agencies to do their formal hiring” (Jaschik, 2010). A record number of adjuncts are now on food stamps and receive some form of public assistance. Given how little they are paid this should not come as a surprise, though that does not make it any less shameful (Patton, 2012). As Noam Chomsky (2015), has argued, this reduction of faculty to the status of subaltern labor is “part of a corporate business model designed to reduce labor costs and to increase labor servility”.

While it has been clearly recognized that the ideal of shared governance between faculty and administrators has broken down, what has not been analyzed is how the Walmart model of power and labor relations—in both the university and the larger society—is connected to the massive inequality in wealth and income that now corrupts every aspect of American politics and society, and increasingly Canadian society. No democracy can survive the kind of inequality in which “the 400 richest people (...) have as much wealth as 154 million Americans combined, that’s 50 percent of the entire country [while] the top economic 1 percent of the U.S. population now has a record 40 percent of all wealth and more wealth than 90 percent of the population combined” (DeGraw, 2011). Surprisingly, a report by the Conference Board of Canada says income inequality has been rising more rapidly in Canada than in the U.S. since the mid-1990s. On a global scale, according to a study by anti-poverty charity Oxfam, it reports that it expects “the wealthiest 1% to own more than 50% of the world's wealth by 2016” (Peston, 2015).

Higher education will not fare well as a public good under such massive inequities in wealth and power. Reduced to consumers, students will fare no better and will be treated as either clients or as restless children in need of high-energy entertainment. Within such iniquitous conditions of power, access, and wealth, education will not foster a sense of organized responsibility fundamental to a democracy. Instead, it encourages a sense of organized irresponsibility—a practice that underlies the

economic Darwinism and civic corruption at the heart of a debased politics.

### **Higher Education and the Crisis of Legitimacy**

What has become clear is that universities are losing their sense of public mission, just as leadership in higher education is being stripped of any viable democratic vision. In the United States, college presidents are now called CEOs and move without apology between interlocking corporate and academic boards. With few exceptions, they are praised as fund raisers but rarely acknowledged for the quality of their ideas. It gets worse. As Adam Bessie (2013) points out, “the discourse of higher education now resembles what you might hear at a board meeting at a No.2 pencil-factory, The emphasis here is on: productivity, efficiency, metrics, data-driven value, [all of] which places utter, near-religious faith in this highly technical, market-based view of education [which] like all human enterprises, can (and must) be quantified and evaluated numerically, to identify the “one best way,” which can then be “scaled up,” or mass-produced across the nation, be it N° 2 pencils, appendectomies, or military drones.”

In this new Gilded Age of money, greed, selfishness, and profit, academic subjects gain stature almost exclusively through their exchange value on the market. For example, one financial holding company, gave a \$1 million gift to Marshall University’s business school on the condition that *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand (Congressman Paul Ryan’s favorite book) be taught in a course. Between 2001 and 2012, the Koch brother dished out \$700 million dollars to promote their interest on college campuses in the U.S. *What happens to education when it is treated like a corporation? What are we to make of the integrity of a university when it accepts a monetary gift from powerful corporate interests or rich patrons demanding as part of the agreement the power to specify what is to be taught in a course or how a curriculum should be shaped?* Some corporations and universities now believe that course content is not an academic decision but a market consideration. In addition, many disciplines are now valued almost exclusively with how closely they align with might be euphemistically called a business culture.

One egregious example of this neoliberal approach to higher education is on full display in Florida where Governor Rick Scott’s task force

on education attempted to implement a policy that would lower tuition for degrees friendly to corporate interests in order to “steer students toward majors that are in demand in the job market”. Scott’s utterly instrumental and anti-intellectual message is clear: “Give us engineers, scientists, health care specialists and technology experts. Do not worry so much about librarians, historians, philosophers, anthropologists and English majors” (Álvarez, 2012). In Wisconsin, Governor Scott Walker drew up a proposal to remove the public service philosophy focus from the university’s mission statement which states that the university’s purpose is to solve problems and improve people’s lives. He also scratched out the phrase “the search for truth” and substituted both ideas with a vocabulary stating that the university’s goal is to meet “the state’s work force needs”. But Walker’s disdain for higher education as a public good can be more readily understood given his hatred of unions, particularly those organized for educators. How else to explain his egregious comparison of union protesters to the brutal terrorists and thugs that make up ISIS.

Another egregious example of neoliberalism’s assault on higher education can be found in the policies promoted by the Republican Party members who control the North Carolina Board of Governors. Just recently it has decimated higher education in that state by voting to cut 46 degree programs. One member defended such cuts with the comment: “We’re capitalists, and we have to look at what the demand is, and we have to respond to the demand”. The ideology that drives this kind of market-driven assault on higher education was made clear by Republican governor, Pat McCrory who said in a radio interview “If you want to take gender studies, that’s fine, go to a private school and take it. But I don’t want to subsidize that if that’s not going to get someone a job” (Thomason, 2015). This is more than an example of crude economic instrumentalism, it is also a recipe for instituting a foundation for thoughtlessness and a kind of stupidity receptive to what Hannah Arendt once called totalitarianism. All of these examples point to a new breed of politician waging war on higher education, the public good, and any viable notion of the welfare state. Like many of their politically extremist colleagues, they epitomize an era in which there is near zero tolerance for economic and racial justice and “infinite tolerance for the crimes of

bankers and government embezzlers which affect the lives of millions” (Badiou, 2012).

What these politicians make clear is not only that their brand of free market fundamentalism undermines both civic education and public values but that it also confuses education with training. Moreover, this market fundamentalism wages a war on what might be called the radical imagination. For instance, thousands of students in the U.S. and Canada are now saddled with debts that will profoundly impact their lives and their future, likely forcing them away from public service jobs because the pay is too low to pay off their educational loans. Students find themselves in a world of massive inequality in which heightened expectations have been replaced by dashed hopes and a world of onerous debt (Fraser, 2013). Struggling to merely survive, the debt crisis represents a massive assault on the imagination by leaving little or no room to think otherwise in order to act otherwise. David Graeber is right in insisting that “student loans are destroying the imagination of youth.” As he puts it, “If there’s a way of a society committing mass suicide, what better way than to take all the youngest, most energetic, creative, joyous people in your society and saddle them with, \$50,000 of debt so they have to be slaves?” (Graeber, 2013).

In a market-driven system in which economic and political decisions are removed from social costs, the flight of critical thought and social responsibility is further accentuated by what Zygmunt Bauman calls “ethical tranquillization” (McCarthy, 2007). One result is a form of depoliticization that works its way through the social order, removing social relations from the configurations of power that shape them, and substituting “emotional and personal vocabularies for political ones in formulating solutions to political problems” (Brown, 2006). Critical reason has entered a period of decline, buried beneath a withering of the social and an avalanche of manufactured ignorance. In a society in which social relations are reduced to a form of social combat and thinking collapses into a hyper-masculine adulation of self-interest, consumer fantasies, and celebrity culture, there are limited possibilities for resisting the madness of violence, cruelty, and misery, dressed up in the lie that the market should govern all social relations.

Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to provide conditions within institutions of schooling that expand the capacities of students to

think critically and teach them how to take risks, act in a socially responsible way, and connect private issues with larger public considerations. The current attack on higher education, teachers’ unions, women’s reproductive rights, voting rights, low income people, and minority youth suggests that we are witnessing the breakdown of democracy, the infantilization of thought, the disappearance of critical intellectuals, and what C. Wright Mills (2008) once called “the collapse of those public spheres which offer a sense of critical agency and social imagination”. This is a particularly important insight in a society where the free circulation of ideas is not only being replaced by mass mediated ideas but where critical ideas if not dissent itself are increasingly viewed or dismissed as either too liberal, radical, or even seditious.

As educators we need to recognize that the most important forms of domination are not only economic but also intellectual and pedagogical, and lie on the side of belief and persuasion. This suggests that educators bear an enormous responsibility for challenging this form of domination. Nor should the relevance of education being at the heart of politics be lost on those of us concerned about inviting the public back into higher education and rethinking the purpose and meaning of higher education itself. Democracy places civic demands upon its citizens, and such demands point to the necessity of an education that is broad-based, critical, and supportive of meaningful civic values, participation in self-governance, and democratic leadership.

### **Dreaming the Impossible**

If young people are to develop a deep respect for others, a keen sense of social responsibility, as well as an informed notion of civic engagement, education must be viewed as a cultural, political, and moral force that provides the knowledge, values, and social relations to make such democratic practices possible and connect human agency to the idea of social responsibility and the politics of possibility. In this instance, teaching needs to be rigorous, self-reflective, and committed not to the dead zone of instrumental rationality but to the practice of freedom, to a critical sensibility capable of advancing the parameters of knowledge, addressing crucial social issues, and connecting private troubles and public issues. What we don’t need are modes of governance that reduce faculty to clerks, forms of pedagogy rooted in modes of infantilization,

conformity, and repression. Instead of models of governance that vacate egalitarian and democratic principles, we need pedagogical practices that create leaders, people capable of envisioning a more just and democratic world and willing to struggle for it.

Before his untimely death, Edward Said, himself an exemplary public intellectual, urged his colleagues in the academy to confront directly those social hardships that disfigure contemporary society and pose a serious threat to the promise of democracy. He urged them to assume the role of public intellectuals, wakeful and mindful of their responsibilities to bear testimony to human suffering and the pedagogical possibilities at work in educating students to be autonomous, self-reflective, and socially responsible. Said rejected the notion of a market-driven pedagogy that lacking a democratic project was steeped in the discourse of instrumental rationality and fixated on measurement. He insisted that when pedagogy is taken up as a mechanistic undertaking, it loses any understanding of what it means for students to “be thoughtful, layered, complex, critical thinker[s]” (Cunningham, 2013). For Said, the educational obsessions with mathematical utility and instrumental rationality were antithetical to a pedagogy rooted in the practice of freedom and attentive to the need to construct critical agents, democratic values, and modes of critical inquiry. On the contrary, he viewed the obsession with methods and practicality as a mode of training more suitable to creating cheerful robots and legitimating organized recklessness and legalized illegalities.

*In opposition to such a debased view of educational engagement, Said (2000) argued for what he called a pedagogy of wakefulness—that is cosmopolitan and imaginative—a public affirming pedagogy that demands a critical and engaged interaction with the world we live in mediated by a responsibility for challenging structures of domination and for alleviating human suffering. This is a pedagogy that addresses the needs of multiple publics. As an ethical and political practice, a public pedagogy of wakefulness rejects modes of education removed from political or social concerns, divorced from history and matters of injury and injustice. Said’s notion of a pedagogy of wakefulness includes “lifting complex ideas into the public space”, recognizing human injury inside and outside of the academy, and using theory as a form of criticism to change things. This is a pedagogy in which academics are neither afraid of controversy nor the willingness*

to make connections between private issues and broader elements of society’s problems that are otherwise hidden.

I believe that Said was right in insisting that intellectuals have a responsibility to unsettle power, trouble consensus, and challenge common sense. This is a view of education that should disturb, unsettle, inspire, and energize—what might be called a pedagogy of disruption. The very notion of being an engaged public intellectual is neither foreign to nor a violation of what it means to be an academic scholar, but central to its very definition. According to Said (2001), academics have a duty to enter into the public sphere unafraid to take positions and generate controversy, functioning as moral witnesses, raising political awareness, making connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from public view, and reminding “the audience of the moral questions that may be hidden in the clamor and din of the public debate”.

The view of higher education as a democratic public sphere committed to producing young people capable and willing to expand and deepen their sense of themselves, to think the “world” critically, “to imagine something other than their own well-being,” to serve the public good, take risks, and struggle for a substantive democracy has been in a state of acute crisis for the last thirty-five years (Newfield, 2008). When faculty assume, in this context, their civic responsibility to educate students to think critically, act with conviction, and connect what they learn in classrooms to important social issues in the larger society, they are hounded by those who demand “measurable student outcomes,” as if deep learning breaks down into such discrete and quantifiable units.

In a society that remains troublingly resistant to or incapable of questioning itself, one that celebrates the consumer over the citizen, and all too willingly endorses the narrow values and interests of corporate power, the importance of the university as a place of critical learning, dialogue, and social justice advocacy becomes all the more imperative. As part of a broader discourse of excellence, equity, and democracy, we must defend the distinctive role that faculty play in this ongoing pedagogical project of shaping the critical rationalities through which agency is defined and civic literacy and culture produced, along with support for the institutional conditions and relations of power that make them possible.

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, agency, politics, and moral responsibility as part of a broader emancipatory discourse. Academics have a distinct and unique obligation, if not political and ethical responsibility, to make learning relevant to the imperatives of a discipline, scholarly method, or research specialization. But more importantly, academics as engaged scholars can further the activation of knowledge, passion, values, and hope in the service of forms of agency that are crucial to sustaining a democracy in which higher education plays an important civic, critical, and pedagogical role.

C. Wright Mills (2000) was right in contending that academics in their roles as public intellectuals ought to transform personal troubles and concerns into social issues and problems open to critique, debate, and reason. Matters of translation, connecting private troubles with larger systemic considerations were crucial in helping “the individual become a self-educating [person], who only then would be reasonable and free”. Yet, Mills also believed, rightly, that criticism is not the only responsibility of public intellectuals. As Archon Fung (2011) points out, they can “also join with other citizens to address social problems, aid popular movements, develop broad-based unions, and organizations in their efforts to advance justice, and sometimes work with governments “to construct a world that is more just and democratic”.

As I have stressed in this talk, under the global reach of a range of diverse political and ideological fundamentalisms, we live at a time in which public values, social provisions, and public goods are under attack, just as power is being concentrated more and more in the hands of the upper 1 percent. Higher education is under siege along with faculty, students, and unions and as such democracy itself is on life support. But history is open and there is a new spirit of resistance emerging in both the United States and around the globe. Educators must be at the forefront of such resistance, because education is central to overcoming both the crisis of ethics, public memory, and agency itself. Let me conclude by suggesting a few things that educators might do as part of this struggle to reclaim higher education in the service of democracy rather than in the

service of the agents of privatization, deregulation, commodification, and the concentration of power in the hands of the few.

*First, educators must go on the offensive in defending higher education as a public good. This means fighting back against a conservative led campaign “to end higher education’s democratizing influence on the nation” This means defending higher education as a public good in order to reclaim its egalitarian and democratic impulses. Higher education should be harnessed neither to the demands of the warfare state nor the instrumental needs of corporations* (Nichol, 2008). Clearly, in any democratic society, education should be viewed as a right, not an entitlement. This suggests that higher education in public colleges should be free—a goal raised more recently by protesting students in Quebec. According to government figures, tuition at public colleges in 2012 in the U.S. was about 62.6 billion. As *Think Progress* points out, “That’s less than what the government already spends to subsidize the cost of college through grants, tax breaks, and work-study funds, which comes to about \$69 billion. It spends another \$107.4 billion on student loans. That means that with the money it already spends to make college affordable, the government could instead subsidize public college tuition, thereby making it free for all students. This would not just mean anyone could attend a higher education institution without worrying about cost, but it could incentivize private ones to reduce their costs in order to compete with the free option” (Covert, 2014). This suggests a reordering of state and federal priorities in order to make that happen. In addition, much needed revenue can be raised by putting into play even a limited number of reform policies in which, for instance, the rich and corporations would be forced to pay a fair share of their taxes, a tax would be placed on trade transactions, and tax loopholes for the wealthy would be eliminated. It is well known that the low tax rate given to corporations is a major scandal. For instance, the Bank of America paid no taxes in 2010 and “got \$1.9 billion tax refund from the IRS, even though it made \$4.4 billion in profits” (Snyder, 2013).

While there is a growing public concern over rising tuition rates along with the crushing debt students are incurring, there is little public outrage from academics over the money squandered on the military budget, and billions of dollars wasted on military projects like the F-35 Stealth Fighter jet

[average cost for three variants is \$178 million), which over the lifetime of the project [55 years] is expected to cost \$1.5 trillion dollars –and by the way they can't fly in the rain. Democracy needs a Marshall Plan in which funding is sufficient to make all levels of education free, while also providing enough social support to eliminate poverty, hunger, inadequate health care, and the destruction of the environment. There is nothing utopian about the demand to redirect money away from the military, powerful corporations, and the upper 1 percent.

*Second, addressing these tasks demands a sustained critique of the transformation of a market economy into a market society and the rise of the punishing state along with a clear analysis of the damage caused both at home and abroad.* Power, particularly the power of the largest corporations, has become more unaccountable and “the subtlety of illegitimate power makes it hard to identify” (George, 2014). Disposability has become the new measure of a savage form of casino capitalism in which the only value that matters is exchange value. Compassion, social responsibility, and justice are relegated to the dustbin of an older modernity that now is viewed as either quaint or a grim reminder of a socialist past.

As the welfare state is defunded and dismantled, the state turns away from enacting social provisions and *becomes a punishing and surveillance state* more concerned about personal security than social welfare. In this script, fear replaces compassion, and a survival of the fittest ethic replaces any sense of shared responsibility for others. This suggests, as Angela Davis, Michelle Alexander, and others have argued that there is a need for academics and young people to become part of a broader social movement aimed at dismantling the repressive institutions that make up the punishing state. The most egregious example of which is the prison-industrial complex, which drains billions of dollars in funds to put people in jail when such funds could be used to fund public and higher education. In the United States the police have become militarized, armed with weapons from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the United States prison system locks up more people than any other country in the world, and the vast majority of them are people of color. Moreover, public schools are increasingly modeled after prisons and are implementing policies in which children are arrested for throwing peanuts at a school bus or violating a dress

code. The punishing state is a dire threat to both public and higher education and democracy itself. The American public does not need more prisons; it needs more schools, free health services, libraries, and a living wage for all workers.

*Third, academics, artists, journalists and other young people need to connect the rise of what we might call the Walmarting of the labor force, in both the university and the larger society, to the massive inequality in wealth and income that now corrupts every aspect of American politics and society.* For instance, the Koch brothers made 3 million an hour on their dividends in 2012. Moreover, they “made enough money in one second to feed one homeless woman on food stamps for an entire year” (Buchheit, 2013). And they along with their billionaire friends are corrupting politics by buying candidates, shaping legislation with an army of lobbyists, and turning higher education into an outpost of corporate power.

The current state of inequality in higher education is most pronounced not simply in rising tuition and the growing exclusion of working and middle class students a serious as these issues are, but in the transformation of over two thirds of faculty positions into an army of exploited, overworked, and powerless academic labor force. This shameful Walmarting of academic labor needs to be challenged and changed as soon as possible. Higher education will lose its critical focus and ability to teach students how to think critically and learn how to take risks as long as a large number of faculty are relegated to the status of part-time workers who are struggling just to make ends meet financially. Clearly, the call to take back higher education from the corporations and religious and political fundamentalists will not take place unless faculty are provided with full time positions, tenure, benefits, and the power to influence the meaning, purpose, and operation of higher education. Faculty need to take back the university and reclaim modes of governance in which they have power while denouncing and dismantling the increasing corporatization of the university and the seizing of power by administrators and their staffs who now outnumber faculty on most campuses.

*Fourth, academics need to fight for the rights of students to be given a formidable and critical education not dominated by corporate values, and to have a say in the shaping of their education and what it means to expand and deepen the practice of freedom and democracy.* Young people have



been left out of the discourse of democracy. They are the new disposables who lack jobs, a decent education, hope, and any semblance of a future better than the one their parents inherited. They are a reminder of how finance capital has abandoned any viable vision of the future, including one that would support future generations. This is a mode of politics and capital that eats its own children and throws their fate to the vagaries of the market. If any society is in part judged by how it views and treats its children, American society by all accounts has truly failed in a colossal way. How else to explain the fact that over half of all public school children live in poverty and thousands of students will not have access to higher education because of rising tuition costs.

*Finally, there is more at stake here than making visible the vast inequities in educational and economic opportunities and the corruption of the political process, there is also the corrosion of democracy itself.* Multinational corporations have abandoned the social contract and any vestige of supporting the social state. They plunder labor and perpetuate the mechanizations of social death whenever they have the chance to accumulate capital. This issue is not simply about restoring a balance between labor and capital; it is about recognizing a new form of serfdom that kills the spirit as much as it depoliticizes the mind. The new authoritarians do not ride around in tanks, they have their own private jets, they fund right-wing think tanks, lobby for reactionary policies that privatize everything in sight while filling their bank accounts with massive profits. They are the embodiment of a culture of greed, cruelty, and disposability. Democracy in the United States is on life support and as a recent Princeton University study noted, democracy has

been hijacked by a free-floating class of ultra-rich and corporate powerbrokers and has been transformed into an oligarchy “where power is effectively wielded by a small number of individuals” (McKay, 2014). The Princeton study made clear that the U.S. was no longer a democracy. It had become an oligarchy.

### **Conclusion:**

The promise of an educated citizenry along with the enduring character of critical reflection and the search for economic, political, and racial justice lives on in the demonstrations of workers, unions, and young people all across North America who are not just protesting police brutality but also marching in order to have their voices heard as part of the promise of a radical democracy along with the arrangements that give it and them a meaningful and just life. At its best education is dangerous because it offers young people and other actors the promise of racial and economic justice, a future in which democracy becomes inclusive, and a dream in which all lives matter. Universities should be subversive in a healthy society; they should push against the grain, and give voice to the voiceless, the unmentionable, and the whispers of truth that haunt the apostles of unchecked power and wealth. These may be dark times, as Hannah Arendt once warned, but they don't have to be, and that raises serious questions about what educators are going to do within the current historical climate to make sure that they do not succumb to the authoritarian forces circling the university, waiting for the resistance to stop and for the lights to go out. My friend, the late Howard Zinn got it right in his insistence that hope is the willingness “to hold out, even in times of pessimism, the possibility of surprise”. Or, to add to this eloquent plea, I would say, resistance is no longer an option, it is a necessity.

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