

# Chapter 5

## The Political Context

*I can live on my knees or I can live standing up;  
and I'm not going to live on my knees.*

– Dr. Henry Giroux



**Dr. Henry Giroux**

To this point, in this volume we have discussed some of the underpinnings related to engaging in research in general and to qualitative research in particular. We have introduced an orientation for inquiry, called the Five Contexts, by which to engage conceptually with a variety of research genres. The first two aspects of this orientation have included a discussion of the autobiographical and the historical contexts of performing qualitative research. We now move on to the third aspect of this orientation, the political context. This chapter introduces the political context of qualitative

research, featuring video clips of an interview with Henry Giroux, who offers a reflection on this context and relates it to issues of qualitative research. The particular political stance that is offered in this chapter relates to critical inquiry.

It may be important to consider that any event may be historical, but not necessarily political, as it pertains to the individual. As such, any biographical event may be historical, such as a birthday, for example, without it necessarily being a political event. It is also fairly safe to say that, conversely, any political event not only has the capacity to be an (auto)biographical event but also tends to be historical. Such is the nature of political endeavor. Because political events and historical events are not necessarily mutually inclusive as the former can be subsumed under the latter, it is important to delve into how political actions or inactions influence and impact upon the other research contexts, as outlined in this volume. Few people speak of these concerns as eloquently as Henry Giroux.

## Reflection on the Political Context

Professor Henry Giroux was interviewed in his office at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, on December 12, 2008. In the first of two video clips, Professor Giroux talks about his early influences and the process by which he came to recognize the importance of the political in any research endeavor. This first video clip is essentially autobiographical and is populated with personal historical milestones. A number of these historical milestones are further described through Henry Giroux's stance on democracy and justice. Throughout this video clip, Dr. Giroux speaks of his own personal circumstances in order to illuminate how the political contexts at work within society impact upon one's sense of agency.

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In this video clip, Henry Giroux contends that it is patently impossible to separate the personal from the political. As such, in looking to previous chapters in this volume, Norman Denzin points to historical events that serve to ground the political context within the personal autobiographical. William Pinar's view, in this volume, also speaks of the importance of the autobiographical context which remains central to the political context.

The political context discussed by Henry Giroux notes that society tends to define individuals by what it is that they lack, rather than qualities that they may possess. Professor Giroux grew up in a working class neighborhood and he notes that he learned many valuable skills, few of which were useful in school or within the larger community. In fact, he points to the notion that numerous skills and types of knowledge

that are often valorized within our educational systems are not always translatable into immediate and necessary survival skills. By using examples from his early years and noting that his early life was anything but frictionless, Henry Giroux ties together the autobiographical, the historical, and the political contexts that form the central thesis of this volume.

At the intersection between personal and public histories, Henry Giroux notes that it was the foment of the 1960s that acted as precursor to a radical new shift that we now recognize as the postmodern era. It was the failed intellectual revolution of the 1960s in tandem with such tragedies as the Vietnam War that raised political consciousnesses (and consciences) around the world. Giroux suggests that, ever since that eventful decade, issues around justice and the need for greater agency, equity, and emancipation became ever more present in the public psyche, if not in the public domain. To further demonstrate the need for a political consideration regarding qualitative research, we include an excerpt of the preface and introduction to the first section of Henry Giroux's classic book, *Theory and Resistance in Education* (1983).

## Excerpt of an Article by Henry Giroux

The following excerpt was taken from the preface and introduction to one of Professor Giroux's most influential books, entitled *Theory and Resistance in Education* (1983). In this excerpt, he discusses the struggle for economic and social democracy and the need to develop a mechanism for critique that speaks of the need for social action and emancipatory transformation.

### Preface

This book was written during a trying time. On the national level, political hopes and dreams for a better future have been replaced by publicity gimmicks and advertisements for a creeping authoritarianism. The moral questions that once informed issues regarding human needs and welfare have been overshadowed by technical questions about balancing budgets and increasing military stockpiles. Leftist academics are being slowly purged from the universities, while many of their colleagues disappear into the security of their tenured positions and refuse to resist or challenge the academic assassins who act without compassion or reflection. The script is grim, and the historical logic that informs it raises alarm. Such a scenario is not meant to prompt despair or cynicism; instead it points to the necessity to organize collectively and to fight harder. It also implies that the struggle will be a long and arduous one, and that in time the seeds of a new society may or may not bloom. In other words, one has to struggle against the new authoritarianism and hope that such an effort will pay off in the future. The dialectic between the reality and the promise cannot be escaped, it can only be ignored, and then only by those who have the economic and political power to close their doors and hide from the carnage they create, but never actually see or touch. This is the age of clean killers.

To struggle for economic and social democracy is to take risks. It is impossible to escape this logic. In my own case, I made the mistake of thinking that all major universities generally provided a setting where a critical dialogue could be constructed, oppositional views aired, or, for that matter, where alternative positions could be taught. It now appears that there are very few universities left in the United States where academic freedom is taken

seriously. The message, of course, is not strictly a personal one, though that is not to be discounted since actions that violate the principles of academic freedom always disrupt lives in a deeply painful way. What is more important is that the message is a political one, and it speaks to the need for educators, teachers, community people, and others to develop, where possible, political, cultural, and educational collectives that provide both the space and the support necessary for them to survive and to struggle with dignity and power. There are no safe avenues any longer. There are only fleeting possibilities for us to think through the past, to examine the sedimented histories that constitute who we are, and to insert ourselves into the present so as to struggle for a better society. This book makes a small contribution to that effort. It provides no final answers: only the politicians and the game shows do that, and both of them are rigged. The book simply raises questions, invokes a real discourse for educators, and points to new relations and modes of analysis for understanding and changing schools and the larger society. The rest is open-ended....

*Since the established universe of discourse is that of an unfree world, dialectical thought is necessarily destructive, and whatever liberation it may bring is liberation in thought, in theory. However, the divorce of thought from action, of theory from practice, is itself part of an unfree world. No thought and no theory can undo it; but theory may help to prepare the ground for their possible reunion, and the ability of thought to develop a logic and language of contradiction is a prerequisite for this task (Marcuse 1960).*

In this brief paragraph, Marcuse manages to capture both the spirit and the challenge that presently confront radical pedagogy. Its spirit is rooted in an aversion to all forms of domination, and its challenge centers around the need to develop modes of critique fashioned in a theoretical discourse that mediates the possibility for social action and emancipatory transformation. Such a task will not be easy, particularly at the present historical juncture, informed as it is by a long tradition of ideological discourse and social practices that promote modes of historical, political, and conceptual illiteracy.

The following section attempts to develop a theoretical discourse that seriously engages the challenge implicit in Marcuse's statement. It does so by positing an argument for a theory of radical pedagogy that takes as its first task the development of a new language and set of critical concepts. In this case, it calls for a discourse that acknowledges as a central concern the categories of history, sociology, and depth psychology. At the same time, it attempts to fashion these categories into a mode of analysis that grounds human agency and structure within a context that reveals how the dynamics of domination and contestation mediate the specific forms they take under concrete historical circumstances. In essence, this section attempts to rescue the critical potential of radical educational discourse while simultaneously enlarging the concept of the political to include those historical and socio-cultural institutions and practices that constitute the realm of everyday life. In more specific terms, this means developing analyses of schooling that draw upon a critical theory and discourse that interrelate modes of inquiry drawn from a variety of social science disciplines. On the other hand, this section attempts to construct a theoretical foundation to extend the notion of critique into relations and dimensions of schooling and social activity often ignored by both traditional and radical educators.

The questions underlying the modes of analysis used in this section are important ones: how do we make education meaningful by making it critical, and how do we make it critical so as to make it emancipatory? The starting point for pursuing these questions is historical in nature and suggests a brief commentary on how the issue has been treated in traditional and radical analyses.

Educational traditionalists generally ignore the issue. In both conservative and liberal versions of schooling, theory has been firmly entrenched in the logic of technocratic rationality and has been anchored in a discourse that finds its quintessential expression in the attempt to find universal principles of education that are rooted in the ethos of instrumentalism or self-serving individualism. At the same time, these accounts have suppressed questions

of the relations among power, knowledge, and ideology. In effect, traditional educational theory has ignored not only the latent principles that shape the deep grammar of the existing social order, but also those principles that underlie the development and nature of its own view of the world. Schools, in these perspectives, are seen merely as instructional sites. That they are also cultural and political sites is ignored, as is the notion that they represent arenas of contestation and struggle among differentially empowered cultural and economic groups.

Needless to say, various modes of radical educational theory and practice have emerged in the last few decades to challenge the traditionalist paradigm. We have witnessed structuralist accounts that focus on macro-issues concerning those social, economic, and political determinants of schooling that have aimed at capital accumulation and the reproduction of the labor force. Characteristic of these investigations are accounts of schools as part of an “ideological state apparatus,” the ultimate function of which is to constitute the ideological conditions for the maintenance and reproduction of capitalist relations of production, i.e., the creation of a labor force that will passively comply with the dictates of capital and its institutions. We have also seen the development of historical and sociological accounts of the way in which the structure of the workplace is replicated through daily routines and practices that shape classroom social relations, that is, the hidden curriculum of schooling. More recently, we have accounts of schooling that illuminate how cultural resources are selected, organized, and distributed in schools so as to secure existing power relations.

I shall argue in this section that all of these positions have failed to provide an adequate basis for developing a radical theory of pedagogy. The traditionalists have failed because they have refused to make problematic the relations among schools, the larger society, and issues of power, domination, and liberation. There is no room in their discourse for the fundamental categories of praxis: categories such as subjectivity, mediation, class, struggle, and emancipation. While radical educators do make the relations among schools, power, and society an object of critical analysis, they do so at the theoretical expense of falling into either a one-sided idealism or an equally one-sided structuralism. In other words, there are, on the one hand, radical educators who collapse human agency and struggle into a celebration of human will, cultural experience, or the construction of “happy” classroom social relations. On the other hand, there are radical views of pedagogy that cling to notions of structure and domination. Such views not only argue that history is made behind the backs of human beings, but also imply that within such a context of domination human agency virtually disappears. The notion that human beings produce history – including its constraints – is subsumed in a discourse that often portrays schools as prisons, factories, and administrative machines functioning smoothly to produce the interests of domination and inequality. The result has often been modes of analysis that collapse into an arid functionalism or equally disabling pessimism.

It is at this juncture that the work of the Frankfurt School becomes important. Within the theoretical legacy of critical theorists such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse there is a sustained attempt to develop a theory and mode of critique that aims at both revealing and breaking with the existing structures of domination. Crucial to this perspective are an analysis and a call for the integration of the processes of emancipation and the struggle for self-emancipation. History, psychology, and social theory interface in an attempt co-rescue the human subject from the logic of capitalist administration. Political education (not necessarily schooling) takes to a new dimension within the context of this work. As Marcuse points out:

*It is precisely the preparatory character of [education] which gives it its historical significance: to develop, in the exploited, the consciousness (and the unconscious) which would loosen the hold of enslaving needs over their existence – the needs which perpetuate their dependence on the system of exploitation. Without this rupture, which can only be the result of political education in action, even the most elemental, the most immediate force of rebellion may be defeated, or become the mass basis of counterrevolution (Marcuse 1969).*

Central to the work of the Frankfurt School is an examination of the degree to which the logic of domination has been extended into the sphere of everyday life, the public sphere, and the mode of production itself. What critical theory provides for educational theorists is a mode of critique and a language of opposition that extends the concept of the political not only into mundane social relations but into the very sensibilities and needs that form the personality and psyche. The achievements of the critical theorists are their refusal to abandon the dialectic of agency and structure (i.e., the open-endedness of history) and their development of theoretical perspectives that treat seriously the claim that history can be changed, that the potential for radical transformation exists. It is against this theoretical landscape that I shall examine the various analyses of the hidden curriculum and reproductive theories of schooling that have emerged in the last few decades in the United States and Europe. Whereas the Frankfurt School provides a discourse that illuminates the social, political, and cultural totality in which schools develop, the various analyses of schooling provide a referent point from which to assess both the strengths and limitations of such work. Moreover, it is precisely in the interface of the work of the Frankfurt School and the various theories of schooling under analysis in this section that the theoretical elements for a radical theory of pedagogy begin to appear. It is to this task that I will now turn.

In this compilation of segments from *Theory and Resistance in Education* (1983), Henry Giroux's message is intensely political as it suggests that dreams for a better future have become derailed by an insouciant, unchallenged, and creeping authoritarianism that seeks to create a labor force made up of "passive-compliants" to operationalize the dictates of the dominant forces within society. Although we are reassured that this scenario is not meant to send us to the depths of despair, it does help us to realize that there is a battle being fought and that the battleground is in and around our collective systems of education. Why bother to fight or defend at all? Giroux claims that one must defend academic freedom and wage a battle now in order to secure a future that our children would wish to inherit. After all, the stakes are very high: the prize is nothing less than economic and social democracy.

As such, the political aspects of our current challenges have their genesis in the past; the "sedimented histories that constitute who we are" may allow us "to insert ourselves into the present" in the struggle for a better society. This view connects directly with the previous chapter that focuses on the Historical Context in calling for a discourse that acknowledges not only history but sociology and psychology as well. Thus, Giroux contends, the objective of this struggle is to ground human agency and structure within a context that reveals how domination and contestation subjugate the individual to specific societal structures that are at once social and historical. This hearkens back to the Autobiographical Context, presented in the third chapter of this volume, which also attests to the need for individuals to develop an understanding of not only themselves, but of themselves in relationship to the world which they currently inhabit.

While the starting point may be historical and autobiographical in nature, how does Giroux suggest that this "understanding" may occur? He begins by suggesting that a critical education is the key to making education emancipatory. Schools are not merely instructional sites; they are also cultural and political sites and, as such, they represent contested terrain that is represented by the struggle among "differentially empowered cultural and economic groups."

To date, however, educational institutions have uniformly failed to provide an adequate basis for developing a radical theory of pedagogy. Professor Giroux's endeavors remain central to the work of the Frankfurt School in examining the degree to which the logic of domination has crept into the life spheres of the individual. Thus, Henry Giroux's message, while intensely political, is hopeful in that it reaffirms the potential for radical transformation and, ultimately, emancipation and the prospect of the alleviation of human suffering.

## An Interview with Henry Giroux

Following is an excerpt from the full-length interview with Henry Giroux. In this video clip, Professor Giroux speaks of the notion that research itself is not devoid of issues of power. Because governments and corporations alike invest heavily in research, research is not a neutral commodity, even though it is at the heart of educative and educational endeavors.

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Professor Giroux, in this video clip, states that corporatist-driven research is antithetical to notions of democracy. As an example, he points to the vast amount of funding that goes into the development of armaments and the technology of warfare. He notes that research should strive to become more ethical in order to link private and corporate issues to societal issues. In discussing such mechanisms of control, he comments that we must reexamine the purpose and meaning of education. He states that education should drive exploration, rather than the current experience of the corporations funding research for the purpose of directing educational endeavors.

Dr. Giroux points to an "elaborated code" that serves to punish, through marginalization and exclusion, those who are unaware or who have not learned the symbols, gestures, and language of the dominant society. As if this is not enough, it is incumbent upon every individual, who wishes to become successful, to become literate in a multiplicity of ways in order to understand the various registers of human interaction. This is a very powerful political statement, as it connects individual agency to corporate structures and beyond through mastery of this elaborated code of conduct that controls and maintains, as its reward, acceptance to ever greater levels of power. It is this understanding, Dr. Giroux claims, that allows human interaction to survive.

## Summary

In this chapter, Henry Giroux discusses and describes the importance of recognizing the political dimensions of any research within which one is engaged. Professor Giroux identifies points in his own personal autobiography that have assisted him in realizing the enormity of the political context not only in research but in our everyday lived experiences. He notes that the ability to develop agency is a major key in developing success within any parameters of life and work and notes that it is of extreme importance to maintain a dialogue with others, corporate and otherwise, particularly regarding acts of terrorism and to issues relating to symbolic violence as well. As such, Giroux believes that there are huge political issues surrounding language, not only in terms of what is said or how it is said, but also how it is used to marginalize and exclude individuals and groups of individuals in order to afford control to dominate others. In short, both research and language are situated within social formations and structures which are, in turn, fraught with political issues and concerns relating to the abuse of power.

Professor Giroux makes his point about how these issues continue to be global issues, and this raises the specter of globalization which has occurred in accelerated terms since the rise of what Zygmunt Bauman has referred to as postmodernity. In agreement with Bauman, Henry Giroux acknowledges that there are no hard and fast distinctions between so-called late modernity and early postmodernity, but suggests that the two eras have melded seamlessly together as both can be seen to be operating consecutively *and* concurrently and do not necessarily represent mutually exclusive time periods. Professor Giroux holds to the notion that it is more important to mark the relations between the elements of modernity and postmodernity than it is to identify the differences between the eras. It is to the next chapter that we turn in order to hear the words of Professor Zygmunt Bauman as he describes how he has discarded the idea of postmodernity as being merely a “stop-gap” appellation in favor of the more encompassing and accurate notion of “liquid modernity.”

## Selected Annotated Bibliography – Henry Giroux

Giroux, H. A. (2004). Cultural studies, public pedagogy, and the responsibility of intellectuals. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 1(1), 59–79.

The author argues that cultural studies are an invaluable field to critical pedagogy, both inside the classroom and in the public sphere. Cultural studies investigate the arena of democratic politics, resistance, and social agency that are key to understanding how private issues may relate to a larger social context. This approach to pedagogy is particularly important given the increasing diversity of students and the lack of cultural sensitivity to this multiplicity. Debate, dialogue, and critical engagement are necessary to understand the relationship between representation and agency within public memory. Pedagogy should be held ethically and politically accountable



to the stories it helps produce, and also foster an environment where critical imagination and discussion can occur.

Giroux, H. A. (2004). Pedagogy, film, and the responsibility of intellectuals: A review. *Cinema Journal*, 43(2), 119–127.

This article is an introduction to and contextualization of the arguments brought forth in this issue of *Cinema Journal* by a variety of authors. Giroux offers insight into the role of intellectuals in reclaiming democratic values, social agency, and political pedagogy in a post-9/11 America. He argues that educators must turn toward a critical and moral pedagogy that examines the relationships between power, knowledge, and ideology, which are crucial for understanding how public memory is shaped and national identity is constructed. Moreover, educators need to engage students openly in discussions of politics and to voice their own particular positions on issues. This approach is critical in order for students to gain the skills necessary to assume public responsibility and active participation on political and social issues.

Giroux, H. A. (2004). Critical pedagogy and the postmodern/modern divide: Towards a pedagogy of democratization. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(1), 31–47.

This article examines the impacts of neoliberalism on democracy and social issues, and the necessity of developing a critical pedagogy to counter global capitalism, while resurrecting a “militant democratic socialism.” Through a transdisciplinary pedagogical approach, educators can provide an alternative to the mainstream vision of the future and provide the tools required to construct representations of our environment and of ourselves. It is the responsibility of educators to democratize political culture through self-reflective analysis of the kinds of labor, practices, and production that occur in public and higher education. It is the role of critical pedagogy to reshape this condition through the project of democratization.

Giroux, H. A. (2003). *The abandoned generation: Democracy beyond the culture of fear*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Henry Giroux continues his critique of the US political and popular culture’s influence on the lives of our children. In his controversial new book, Giroux argues that the USA is at war with young people. No longer seen as the future of a democratic society, youth are now derided by politicians looking for quick-fix solutions to crime and demonized by the popular media. This perception of fear and disdain is being translated into social policy. Instead of providing a decent education to young people, we offer them the increasing potential of being incarcerated. Instead of guaranteeing them decent health care, we serve them more standardized tests. There is a war on in the USA these days, and Henry Giroux sees our youth as the target.

Giroux, H. A. (2003). *Public spaces/private lives: Democracy beyond 9/11*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

While many of the essays in this book were written before 9/11, they point to a number of important issues such as the commercialization of public life, the stepped-up militarization, racial profiling, and the threat to basic civil liberties that have been

resurrected since the terrorist attacks. This volume serves to legitimate the claim that there is much in America that has not changed since 9/11. Rather, we are witnessing an intensification and acceleration of the contradictions that threatened American democracy before the tragic events of 9/11. This book offers a context for both understanding and critically engaging the combined threats posed by increases in domestic militarization and a neoliberal ideology that substitutes market values for democratic values.

Giroux, H. A. (2003). Spectacles of race and pedagogies of denial: Anti-black racist pedagogy under the reign of neoliberalism. *Communication Education*, 52(3/4), 119–211.

This article explores the occurrence of a more subtle and complicated representation of race within American culture since the civil rights movement. Neoliberalism has created a culture of privatization and profit making, for the benefit of the individual over public good. This has created an atmosphere in which all problems, including racism, are private issues to do with an individual's own character, motivation, and intelligence rather than as systemic issues. In addition, the article details how the mainstream ideology of color blindness allows Whites to ignore existing power asymmetries that may be expressed in terms of housing availability, income disparity, incarceration rate, and educational opportunity. A crucial role of public pedagogy is to provide the tools necessary for a collective antiracist struggle.

Giroux, H. A. (2003). Neoliberalism and the disappearance of the social in *Ghost World*. *Third Text*, 17(2), 151–161.

This article examines how the mainstream film *Ghost World* presents a sympathetic picture of marginalized youth within a non-genuine, middle-class world. The author details the movie's plot, and praises the authenticity of teenage speech, dress, and the portrayal of adolescent alienation. Giroux explores the movie's shortcomings, including its failure to acknowledge the option of a pedagogy of resistance to challenge the conventional world. In this way, the movie serves to isolate and privatize teenage resistance, a neoliberalist strategy that serves to diminish politics by fostering individual cynicism. Giroux argues that youth pose a threat to the established social order in America, and the movie fails to engage in the larger questions of "politics, power, and public consciousness" that are necessary to inspire collective action.

Giroux, H. A. (2002). *Breaking into the movies: Film and the culture of politics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press.

*Breaking into the Movies* brings together Henry Giroux's best-known essays from the last 20 years, centering on important subjects on the cultural studies and pop culture agenda, including violence, race, class, gender, identity, politics, and children's culture. The volume charts his career as one of the most astute observers of the Hollywood tradition, from early reflections on *Norma Rae* and *Looking for Mister Goodbar* to ground-breaking analyses of more recent movies such as *Pulp Fiction*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Dangerous Minds*, and *Fight Club*. By addressing the profound pedagogical role of film in contemporary society, Giroux demonstrates

how it dramatically shapes the way young people come to terms with today's most highly charged social issues.

Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education (Revised Edition)*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey.

The past decade has witnessed a virtual explosion of interest in social theory. This volume aims to stir controversy by valorizing as well as offering criticism of what is new and exciting in social theory. At the beginning of the new millennium, educators, parents, and others should reevaluate what it means for adults and young people to grow up in a world that has been radically altered by a hyper-capitalism that monopolizes the educational force of culture as it ruthlessly eliminates those public spheres not governed by the logic of the market. Giroux provides new theoretical and political tools for addressing how pedagogy, knowledge, resistance, and power can be analyzed within and across a variety of cultural spheres, including but not limited to the schools.

Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Stealing innocence: Corporate culture's war on children*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Henry Giroux looks at the way corporate culture is encroaching on the lives of children: that the triumph of democracy is related to the triumph of the market; that children are being affected by power and politics; and that teaching and learning are no longer linked to improving the world. Looking at childhood beauty pageants, school shootings, and the omnipresent nihilistic "chic" of advertising, Giroux paints a disturbing picture of the world surrounding our children. He turns to the work of Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Stuart Hall for lessons on how we can reinstitute a realistic childhood for our children. Giroux points out that children today are over-inundated with outside influences that coerce young people to face adulthood too early in their lifetimes, thereby forcing traditional childhood concerns to the wayside.

Giroux, H. A. (2000). *Impure acts: The practical politics of cultural studies*. London: Routledge.

This book begins with the premise that the culture of politics – culture's capacity to create those discursive resources and material relations of power that shape democratic public life – appears to be in crisis, subject to derision by a wide range of ideological perspectives. In opposition to such attacks, this book argues that struggles over culture are not a weak substitute for "real" politics, but are central to any struggle willing to forge relations of power, theory, and practice, as well as pedagogy and social change. Giroux challenges contemporary politics by addressing a number of issues including the various attacks on cultural politics, the multicultural discourses of academia, the corporate attack on higher education, and the cultural politics of the Disney Empire.

Giroux, H. A. (1999). *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Press.

Giroux explores the surprisingly diverse ways in which Disney, while hiding behind a cloak of innocence and entertainment, strives to dominate global media and shape

the desires, needs, and futures of today's children. Giroux takes the reader inside the company's vision of the full range of its media – its films, television, famous characters, and spin-off products, as well as its special school, "Celebration." He reveals how Disney idealizes and implements its goal of building a world culture. Giroux tackles Disney's theme parks, its recent forays into education and its movies in an attempt to expose how Disney's legacy is eroding democracy and endangering our nation's youth. Disney's movies, argues Giroux, promote sexism and racism and encourage massive consumer spending while assuming the guise of innocuous family fun.

Castells, M., Flecha, R., Freire, P., Giroux, H., Macedo, D., & Willis, P. (1999). *Critical education in the new information age*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Press.

This volume offers essays by some of the world's leading educators and provides a revolutionary portrait of new ideas and developments in education that can influence the possibility of social and political change. The authors take into account such diverse terrain as feminism, ecology, media, and individual liberty in their pursuit of new ideas that can inform the fundamental practice of education and promote a more humane civil society. The book consolidates recent thinking just as it reflects on emerging new lines of critical theory. The authors of this volume embrace current educational issues with a political and moral urgency. Given the complexity of issues that educators, policy makers, administrators and activists face at the dawn of the new millennium, the publication of this volume could not be more timely.

Giroux, H. A. (1998). *Channel surfing: Racism, the media and the destruction of today's youth*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

What truth, if any, is contained in depictions of today's youth? What message about our children is being transmitted? In *Channel Surfing*, Giroux turns to this barrage of media images and sees a message that sells our children short by damning them to the preconceived role of alienated outcast. Surfing from one channel of communication to the next, Giroux builds a complex web of associations between characters in films, tarnished real-life teen idols, and sexualized presentations of nubile young clothing models to show us the dark vision of our children that rides the airwaves and inhabits the print media. Henry Giroux's most fascinating and intriguing book yet, this volume is sure to create controversy and debate at the same time that it calls for a more ethical attitude toward the prospect of our children's future.

## Questions for Further Study

1. What are the origins of the term "political?" Using an etymological dictionary, trace the origins of the word and how it has been used throughout the ages. How does this word relate to concepts of power, government, citizenry, and human rights?

2. Can you describe an event in your own life that was an intrinsically political situation? What were the circumstances and how was this political? What was the resolution, if any?
3. What kinds of revelations have you witnessed as a result of listening to Henry Giroux in the two video clips that accompany this chapter? What was revealed to you and why is it significant in terms of your autobiography and/or historical outlook?
4. By way of practical exercise, can you think of an example, personal or media-related, that is hopeful by way of democratic imagination? What evidence do we have of a “democratic imagination” at work? What changes would we need to embrace in order for this example to become a reality?
5. Would you agree, as Henry Giroux suggests, that the English language is a “punishing language?” Please justify your conclusion in terms of autobiographical or historical events that you have witnessed.

## References

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- Marcuse, H. (1969). *An essay on liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.