collection—and there are many—speak to the theories, practices, and politics that rhetoric and composition should subscribe to in a twenty-first century context.


Reviewed by Kenneth J. Saltman, DePaul University

For years Henry Giroux’s scholarship has insisted on making youth central to the discourse of politics and democracy itself. He has attentively tried to link the crisis of youth to the crisis of democracy, and *The Abandoned Generation* represents a culminating effort in that direction. Giroux has long argued that central to any notion of democracy is a social contract in which youth symbolize the future. For the first time in history, Giroux argues, particularly under the Bush administration, that social contract is no longer in effect. Youth are no longer seen as a social investment but rather as the object of social scorn. There is no logic in this neoliberal, right-wing agenda for a way to talk about youth to make an investment in their future, financial or otherwise.

One flank in the war on youth hits kids materially with poverty, lack of medical care and adequate housing, and crumbling schools bereft of books. This economic abandonment is thoroughly documented in *The Abandoned Generation* through description and stunning doses of statistical information. Giroux writes,

The hard currency of human suffering as it impacts on children can . . . be seen in some of the astounding statistics that suggest a profound moral and political contradiction at the heart of the United States: 20 percent of children are poor during the first 3 years of life and over 13.3 million live in poverty; 9.2 million children lack health insurance; millions lack affordable child care and decent early childhood education. . . . When broken down along racial categories, the figures become even more deplorable. . . . In 1998, 36 percent of black and 34 percent of Hispanic children lived in poverty, compared with 14 percent of white children.

A second flank in the war against youth is symbolic. Conservatives, liberals, and some progressives participate in scapegoating youth for
crime, poverty, and cultural degeneration. Giroux explains that this representational assault on youth, led by for-profit media corporations, displaces blame from those responsible for the worsening conditions facing youth while concealing the extent to which adults profit by controlling social priorities and fiscal allocations. Mass media products such as Hollywood films function pedagogically and politically by representing youth as alternately violent, crazy, stupid, and depressed. In this representational dreamworld the lessons are clear. Youth appear incapable of criticizing the conditions they face or acting collectively to transform those conditions. Such representations educate youth and adults about how to think about youth; they have an impact on policies, laws, and resource distributions that effect youth; and they undermine the political agency youth have to respond to these conditions.

Though a class- and race-based generational conflict is at the core of both the economic and symbolic struggle over youth, the symbolic dimension also involves the way that youth as a category are being redefined. No longer viewed as a promise for a better future, youth are being abandoned as the embodiment of hope and possibility for the future. Part of what makes Giroux's analysis both fascinating and unique is how he links particular symbolic and economic attacks on youth to broader economic and cultural structural changes.

_The Abandoned Generation_ illustrates the ways the war on youth is being waged in conjunction with the “war on terrorism,” corporate globalization, and neoliberal ideology. _The Abandoned Generation_ is one of the few books in the field of education to address complexly the implications of September 11, 2001 for the ways it has been taken up politically, for the ways under the justification of national security it has been used by the right to militarize the culture, undermine civil liberties, wage war for corporate interest, and profoundly undermine the public sector financially by cutting taxes on the rich while drastically raising military spending and waging an extravagantly expensive war. (See also Kenneth J. Saltman and David Gabbard, eds. _Education as Enforcement: The Militarization and Corporatization of Schools_. New York: Routledge, 2003.) Giroux explains how in the context of schooling the “new” repression is part of a deeper continuing trend that militarizes schools while reducing the social role of schools to the transmission of the selective tradition. He illustrates how such trends as No Child Left Behind, standardization of curricula, and high-stakes testing participate in the trend. Giroux's discussion of September 11, 2001 brilliantly takes on the jingoistic patriotism that sought to create a new ideological
consensus against dissent and critical thought. The chapter is essential reading as teachers continue to be fired for raising questions about the justness of the war in Iraq or the question of how it might be possible to wage war on terrorism (a method of fighting) rather than on an enemy. The chapter links the ways that the prohibition on thought and the attack on dissent are tied to the privatization and commodification resulting from the conditions of corporate globalization and are pushed forward by advocates of neoliberal ideology:

When notions of freedom and security are decoupled, so that freedom is reduced to the imperatives of market exchange and security is detached from the “helping functions” of the welfare state, then not only does freedom collapse into a brutal form of individualism, but the state is stripped of its duty to make social provisions while its policing functions are inordinately strengthened.

Part of what makes this book both thoroughly compelling and essential reading is the way that it responds to the current political, economic, and cultural contexts with astute description and analysis as well as theoretical insights about how intellectuals, academics, and educators concerned with the viability of democracy can understand and respond to the radical material and symbolic assaults the right-wing is waging not just on youth but on schools, social services, the environment, and all things public.

As Giroux illustrates, corporate globalization (and the neoliberal ideology pushing it forward) involves privatization of public goods and services and the deregulation of constraints on the more destructive aspects of global capital. As states are becoming increasingly subject to the race to the bottom, the state is not withering away but rather is transformed into a punitive instrument of capital. Hence, the elements of the welfare state are eradicated and replaced with increasingly draconian institutions like prisons and police while big government is recalled from exile under the justification of security. For example, as Giroux discusses, schools become increasingly punitive as they are organized by enforcement-oriented measures that control the bodies of kids. Zero-tolerance policies, surveillance, mandatory drug tests—increasingly schools look like prisons or army barracks. The curriculum, too, follows this repressive trend with the new school reforms returning to the most egregious forms of what Paulo Freire referred to as banking education. As the chapter on No Child Left Behind illustrates, the push for such reforms as phonics and scripted lessons is aimed at both privatizing public
schooling and ideologically orienting the curriculum in ways that deny the connections between knowledge and power, authority, ethics, and the historical construction of knowledge. While public institutions are being remade through the “new” repression, public discourse is being generated through privately controlled cultural production.

These attacks on democratic public life expanded the power of the state and corporate sector in a number of ways. As the book explains, expanded corporate control over politics, the economy, and culture threatens the particularly public promises of American democracy. The insights of *The Abandoned Generation* couldn’t be more pertinent as the Bush administration continues to spend almost four billion dollars a month on Iraq and seeks another sixty to seventy billion dollars in additional funding for that occupation, while conservatives in the Senate seek to undermine Congress’ promise of education funding for the next fiscal year. But the insights of the book are a far cry from dressing up in sophisticated language bumper sticker platitudes about the need to spend so much on schools that the Air Force will need to have a bake sale to build a bomber. While Giroux calls for radical reconsideration of fiscal priorities, he reveals that this is hardly a simple task. Material struggles are interwoven with cultural politics and need to be considered as part of a much broader analysis of the extent to which, within corporate globalization, individual agency has been privatized, political deliberation has been undermined through conservative cultural production, and the meaning of democracy itself has been essentially highjacked by the right.

*The Abandoned Generation* uses films such as *Ghost World* and *Baby Boy* to illustrate the ways that corporate cultural production function politically and pedagogically as part of a broader public discourse on such matters as gender, race and political participation to frame issues, produce subject positions, and inform identity. Giroux links his textual analysis to the ways culture is related to the broader economic and political trends that the book explores. For example, the chapter on *Ghost World* considers how the film highlights the anomie experienced by girls facing a deadening future of experience mediated through consumer culture. At the same time, the chapter highlights how the film, despite its ability to tap into the oppression experienced by many youth, fails to offer any sense of how youth could develop a sense of political agency to understand and address the structural causes of the misery and hopelessness they experience. The analysis of *Baby Boy* links the infantilization and demonization of young black males in popular representation to the discourse of self-help, showing how they work together to individualize
the social conditions informing the experience of unemployment, pov­ 

erity, and racism. As in the discussion of *Ghost World*, textual anal­

ysis must be understood in relation to the business of selling culture—that is, 

the political economy of mass media.

The consequences of the war on youth and the broader public, Giroux 

contends, is not merely the abandonment of financial support for kids, the 

most vulnerable part of the population, but the redefinition of the meaning 

of youth within the society’s vision for the future.

Despite the accurate yet bleak picture that emerges from Giroux’s 

rendering, the book is hopeful about the possibility of teachers, other 

cultural workers, and other activists reshaping the political landscape. 

The work of imagining and enacting democracy in classrooms and 

multiple social sites stands, for Giroux, against the monolithic logic of 

security that aims to shut down questioning, thinking, debate, and 

deliberation. Giroux recognizes that the attack on democracy is not only 

about undermining the institutions necessary for citizens to have the 

capacity to engage in civic dialogue. As well, it is centrally about 

propagating a “politics of guarantees” in which simple binary categories 

(good versus evil) stand for complexities, in which the terms of debate 

(war on terrorism) preclude debate itself. Against this politics of 

guarantees, Giroux calls for a politics without guarantees as the 

referent for any pedagogical engagement with the current context. 

What this means is grounding pedagogical practice in a nonuniversal, 
nontotalizing discourse such as radical democracy as a way of “taking 

a stand without standing still.” The importance of Giroux’s position 
cannot be overstated as the lures of common sense and practical 
politics within the discourse of security push people toward simplistic 

positions—you are either with us or with the terrorists, you either 
support the nation and its aggression or you are the enemy—or the 

position that any attempt to understand terrorism is an apology for it. 
As Giroux explains, situating events such as 9/11 in their global 

economic, political, and cultural context, performs “the obligatory work 
of politics by attempting to situate individual acts within those broader 

sets of conditions that give rise to individual acts of terrorism, while 
simultaneously asking how the United States can intervene more produc­

tively in global politics to produce conditions that undercut rather than 

reinforce terrorism.”

Were *The Abandoned Generation* to be judged on its informational 

value alone, it would be an excellent book. Were it evaluated solely on the 
basis of its innovative drawing together of the cultural politics of security
with the conditions of corporate globalization and the mission of neoliberal ideology, it would be extremely innovative and massively important. Were it only to offer tremendous insight into the current remaking of schooling within current conditions, again it would have been an invaluable book for anyone concerned about the fate of public schooling as the public is profoundly attacked. It does all of this seamlessly and in a way that makes it hard to put down. More than this, it lends itself to the crucial work of rethinking the meaning of culture and politics in ways that might limit the unchecked expansion of the private sector and the amassing of private power by the few while lending itself as a resource for expanding public control over work, cultural production, and the critical capacities of citizens for collective democratic action.


Reviewed by Jason Arthur, University of Missouri, and Shari Stenberg, Creighton University

I propose that we understand pedagogy as the reflexive inquiry that teacher and learners undertake together.

—Chris W. Gallagher

Shari, the graduate professor of composition:
It was my first time teaching a graduate course—Composition Theory—in our small MA program. The charge: to introduce four students, who were likely familiar with composition only by way of the first-year writing courses they had taken years ago, to the field. They would know it as a service site, not a discipline. So, as I worked to prepare the course, the familiar wall of defensiveness arose, followed by the familiar response: I would have to convince them of composition's scholarly legitimacy. I would have to provide evidence: Look at our growing body of scholarship! Our PhD programs! Our journals! But I didn't want to fall into the trap of defining the discipline by something other than what we claim makes us so innovative, progressive, humanitarian in the first place: the processes and study of teaching and learning. In fact, I concluded,