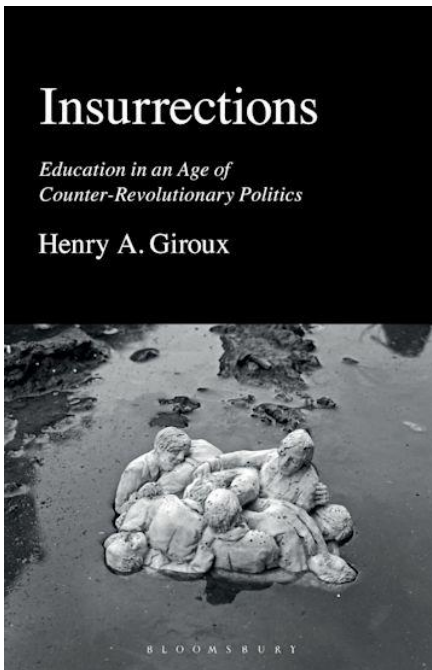


INSURRECTIONS: EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

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Giroux, Henry A (2023) *Insurrections: Education in an Age of Counter-Revolutionary Politics*, London: Bloomsbury Press.



This book, a collection of eighteen short, blog style chapters, expresses an overall despair with the direction of American politics and a call for remembering the collective protests in American history; a call to ‘merge a sense of moral courage with a sense of civic courage and collective action’ (Giroux, 2023: 141) to address the rising fascist threat, and a warning call to anyone in liberal democracies. In this, Giroux’s narrative style and the short but dense chapters, supported by 43 pages of endnotes and references, reads like a call to political and cultural battle more than a call to raising consciousness in the public spheres of democracy. With chapter titles such as ‘Social Media as a Disimagination War Machine’,

‘Weaponizing Culture’, ‘Gangster Capitalism and the Politics of Ethicide’, ‘Hideous Freedoms’, and the use of Achille Mbembe’s (2019) *necropolitics* in chapter two, ‘Necropolitics and the Politics of White Nationalism’, a sense of

absolute brutality winds its way throughout the description of American and, in some chapters, Canadian society. If you have read his previous work, you will recognise Giroux's conclusions on the necessary re/action needed, expressed here in *Insurrections* on page 130:

“The challenge of changing public consciousness and the social imagination through the merging of political education and popular culture has to be aligned with the struggle to change material relations of power. There is more to consider here than the repudiation of manufactured ignorance, the scourge of white supremacy, and a corrupt political system. In the shadows of this escalating crisis, it is imperative to mobilize a multi-cultural, mass-based movement to uncover and fight on multiple levels this rebranded notion of fascism and its mounting wreckage before hope becomes an empty slogan and democracy a relic of the past”.

Giroux describes in chapter eleven, how ‘fascism thrives on the breakdown of shared values and becomes normalised by creating a cultural politics and modes of commonsense that subvert language, agency, truth, and democracy’ (Giroux, 2023: 78) and he draws on C W Mills to locate education and the pedagogical power in a society that tackles the ‘depoliticizing politics of commonsense’ (Ibid.: 80). He calls on us to remember the rich counterrevolutionary work of critical educators such as W E B Du Bois, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, bell hooks, Maxine Greene, Frederick Douglas, Antonio Gramsci, and more, as guides in the difficult work ahead.

Giroux's long commitment to education and critical pedagogy are also woven into much of the book. In chapter sixteen, ‘Making Education Central to Politics and Everyday Life’, Giroux writes:

“The urgent need to make education fundamental to politics demands a new language, a different regime of desires, new forms of identification, and a struggle to create new modes of thinking, subjectivity, and agency. It is important to stress repeatedly that direct action, cultural politics, and political education are essential tools to mobilize public attention as

part of a broader campaign both to inform a wider public and create the conditions for mass struggle” (Giroux, 2023: 127).

A gap in the work is that Giroux tends to keep his distance from the actual people who support the political right as well as the people who make up the many collective movements that are emerging that counter the conditions he describes. If he laments the loss of hope caused by the rise of authoritarianism, he hasn't offered any specific examples of how it might be different. While his descriptions of the conditions under neoliberal capitalism are powerful, the call to action seems weary.

A key audience for this book will be young people enrolled in higher education courses and their instructors. The work will be helpful in understanding the history of anti-capitalist struggle and how that history can frame a reading of current events that signal how democracy is under threat. How will this be taken up by students with highly tuned digital capabilities and online social connections or those who describe how they are ‘quiet quitting’ work in highly corporatised environments? Or those students racked with anxiety about the climate crisis and an imminent collapse of the systems that sustain life on the planet? Or by students or instructors, who with their communities have been transformed by social crises and a new experience of community through movements like Black Lives Matter or Idle No More, and the resurgence of Indigenous land protectors? Giroux uses Achille Mbembe's (2019) description of global systems of (neo)colonialism as *necropolitics* and I am reminded of Mbembe's more recent work, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (2021) a work that is deeply embedded in knowledge of African resistance. I take seriously Mbembe's position that what he describes is for understanding the African context and not a statement of a shared or universal decolonial project but I will use his words as a way to foreground the work by Indigenous people and Black and other racialised communities in North America which is Giroux's focus. Mbembe (2021: 2) writes:

“If decolonisation was an event at all, its essential philosophical meaning lies in an active will to community – as others used to speak of a will to

power. This will to community is another name for what could be called the will to life”.

Giroux’s lack of acknowledgment of the significant movements of Indigenous people’s resurgence, of young climate activists shaping public space and government policies, or of racialised communities’ strength and collective transformation away from things being done ‘as usual’, is a gap in this book. There needs to be attention to how strong, new movements are emerging around issues of, for example, land and water protection, climate change, food insecurity, permaculture, non-industrial agriculture. Each of these movements create spaces where we can see life being lived differently. At the core, we can witness people reimagining life as a part of community rather than as neoliberalism’s resilient individuals and the building of new relations. These are not abstract acts of revolution; they are everyday commitments of a *will to life* and the stories of these lives can be the guide out of the battlefields of capitalism and colonialism and into the resurgence of ‘the enormous work of reassemblage’ (Mbembe, 2021: 5) even as it evokes its partner: destruction (Ibid.).

This brings us back to the book’s beginning. The title *Insurrections: Education in an Age of Counter-Revolutionary Politics*. The folks who mobilised to attack the United States’ Capitol Building in January 2021 and the Truckers’ Convoy that arrived to take over the government of Canada in 2022 promoted themselves as insurrectionists taking back control of their lives and protecting their livelihoods. In the battle grounds of Giroux’s *Insurrections*, we are left on our own to imagine a path forward. Without examples and stories and the lived experiences of people reconvening in communities, the only vision is endless war.

References

Mbembe, A (2019) *Necropolitics*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Mbembe, A (2021) *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*, New York: Columbia University Press.

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