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## BOOK REVIEWS

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**University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex, by Henry A. Giroux. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007, pp. 223.**

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Drawing from President Eisenhower's almost prophetic 1961 speech on the risks of building an armed democracy, *University in chains* calls out to the military-industrial-academic complex as interlinked dimensions that contribute to the ongoing crisis of American democracy by shifting the freedom vs. security trade-off in favor of the latter.

Giroux develops a four-fold argumentation, starting from the transformation of universities into hypermodern militarized knowledge franchises that reinforce the intelligence-academic partnership. The collective paranoia that followed the 9/11 attacks initiated an endless War on Terror, which allowed for the disappearance of the state of exception legitimized by a permanent state of emergency, to the extent that conflict turned into a common tool of state policy. As a consequence, the blurring lines between military and civilian functions resulted in the paramilitarization of civil society including the most powerful setting where minds of generations are shaped, namely higher education institutions. Indeed, under the

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cover of ethics of responsibility and patriotic correctness, dissent is systemically silenced and instrumentally labeled as un-American in a disturbing witch-hunt against alleged evil doers.

The militarization of knowledge meets the demands of a continuous scramble for research funding, as the lack of adequate financial aid is a recurrent issue that afflicts academia. According to the author, the American tendency to privilege military sectors of society is allegedly fostering the imperial ambition of a global empire that is diverting money from crucial domestic programs. Besides the army, also multinational corporations take advantage of this situation and impose a market-driven model of education, in which academics are downsized and outsourced to contract and part-time labor. Hence, the faculty loses its bargaining power and becomes subjected to corporate control of entrepreneurs who privilege short-term returns, with consequences for the quality of inclusive and critical learning, reduced to a subordinate function of job training. The lucid dissertation conducted in the second chapter transcends from a merely American setting, with the possibility to apply its contents to the whole international academic environment whose value is reduced to grant-getting skills and the 'publish or perish' imperative.

The third chapter denounces the right-wing assault on the pedagogic infrastructure that brings to mind a revival of the McCarthy era. Education is currently being reshaped according to a form of content manipulation that narrows the political spectrum and censors uncomfortable positions. The new dynamism of the right-wing attack opts for a strategy that is both explicitly defensive, by complaining that conservatives receive an unfair treatment within university, and subliminal, since it adopts the liberal lexicon of affirmative action, in order to disempower opposition by recurring to their same means. Giroux stresses that politics, education and citizenship are closely related and thus, to silence an open debate implies not

only the failure of the role of pedagogy, but also that of democracy, whose functioning rests upon engaged and informed citizens.

The final chapter warns about the perils of the instrumentalization of knowledge within American society and calls out for further commitment in ‘breaking the chains’ and re-thinking the future of higher education. Overall, *University in chains* is a ground-breaking book on a neglected issue, as Giroux provides a passionate argumentation that is definitely not neutral. On the contrary, the author invites everyone to take a side and act straightforwardly upon it for the sake of the public good. However, the outcome is a lucid analysis of the situation of higher education that transcends the United States, as for instance the impoverishment of curricula due to marketable prerogatives and precarious life of researchers.

Ten years have passed since its publication, but the book still strikes for how well it tackles present day problems, which seem especially suited to the current Republican administration. Finally, a remarkable learning outcome is that despite the many challenges brought by globalization, universities are one of the few remaining public spaces able to raise meaningful questions. Therefore, as embedded in the proper functioning of democracy, some ambiguity must be tolerated, for these questions to be raised freely and contribute to the goal of educating individuals to become engaged agents of positive change within democratic societies.

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