

ESSAYS**Punishing Youth and Saturated Violence in the Era of Casino Capitalism**

Henry A. Giroux
McMaster University

An earlier version of this article first appeared online in *CounterPunch Magazine*,
<http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/10/31/casino-capitalism-and-higher-education/>

Abstract

This essay powerfully describes the rise of a neoliberal or “casino capitalism” as a punishing state that has been largely ignored by the mainstream media but is actively resisted by young people around the world. I highlight the pervasive use of violence and the celebration of war-like values that are no longer restricted to a particular military ideology, but have become normalized throughout our entire society, especially in public schools that serve vulnerable student populations. I also portray how schools have become militarized and prison-like sites that criminalize the behavior of young people, particularly that of poor males, minorities, and immigrants. This imposition of violence on children constitutes the “punishing of youth” as the title alludes to, and depicts the substantial numbers of Latin@ children who move straight from a prison-like school to becoming inmates in the US’s ever-increasing private, for-profit prison complex.

There is by now an overwhelming catalogue of evidence revealing the depth and breadth of the state sponsored assault being waged against young people across the globe, and especially in the United States. What is no longer a hidden order of politics is that American¹ society is at war with its children, and that the use of such violence against young people is a disturbing index of a society in the midst of a deep moral and political crisis. Beyond exposing the moral depravity of a nation that fails to protect its youth, the violence used against American youth speaks to nothing less than a perverse death-wish, especially in light of the fact that As Alain Badiou argues, we live in an era in which there is zero tolerance for poor minority youth² and youthful protesters and “infinite tolerance for the crimes of bankers and government embezzlers which affect the lives of millions.” While the systemic nature of the assault on young people and its testimony to the rise of the neoliberal punishing state has been largely ignored by the mainstream media, youth in Canada and the United States are resisting the violence of what might be called neoliberalism or casino capitalism. For instance, the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the Quebec Protest Movement are demonstrating against such assaults while simultaneously attempting to educate a larger public about the degree to which American and Canadian public spheres, institutions, and values have been hijacked by a culture of spectacular and unrelenting violence—largely directed against youthful protesters and those marginalized by class and race, who increasingly have become the targets of ruthless forms of state-sanctioned punishment.

Put into historical context, we can see that collective insurance policies and social protections in the United States, in particular, have over time given way to the forces of economic privatization, commodification, deregulation, and hyper individualism now³ driving the ongoing assault on democratic public spheres, public goods, and any viable notion of equality and social justice. At least since the 1980s, the American public has witnessed the transformation of the welfare state by punitive workfare programs, the privatization of public goods and

1. J. F. Conway, “Quebec: Making War on Our Children,” *Socialist Project*, E-Bulletin No. 651, (June 10, 2012). <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/651.php>

2. Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, tr. Gregory Elliott, (London, UK: Verso, 2012), pp. 18-19.

3. See Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009).

spaces, and a hollow appeal to individual responsibility and self-interest as a substitute for civic responsibility and democratic engagement. Embracing the notion that market-driven values and relations should shape every domain of human life, a business-centered model of governance has eviscerated any viable notion of the public values and interests, while insidiously criminalizing social problems and cutting back on basic social services, especially for young people, the poor, minorities, immigrants, and the elderly. As young people and others organize to protest economic injustice and massive inequality, along with drastic cuts to education, workers benefits and pensions, and public services, the state has responded with the use of injurious violence, while the mainstream media has issued insults rather than informed dialogue, critical engagement, and suggestions for meaningful reform. Indeed, it appears the United States has entered a new historical era when policy decisions not only translate into an intentional, systemic disinvestment in public institutions and the breakdown of those public spheres that traditionally provided the minimal conditions for social justice and democratic expression, but are also merging with state-sanctioned violence and the use of mass force against the state's own citizenry. I am not referring to the violence now sweeping the United States in the form of the lone, crazed gunman shooting innocent victims in colleges, malls, and movie theaters. As horrifying as this violence is, it does not fully equate with the systemic violence now waged by the state on both the domestic and foreign fronts.

On the domestic front, state violence in⁴ ⁵ response to the Occupy movement in its first six months has been decisive and swift: "There have been at least 6705 arrests in over 112 different cities as of March 6, 2012." Similarly, in Montreal, Canada thousands of peaceful protests have been arrested while protesting tuition increases, increasing debt burdens, and other assaults on young people and the social state. What does it mean as young people make diverse claims on the promise of a radical democracy and articulate their vision of a fair and just world that they are increasingly met with forms of physical, ideological, and structural violence? Abandoned by the existing political system, young people are placing their bodies on the line, occupying shrinking public spaces in a symbolic gesture that also deploys concrete measures demanding their presence be recognized when their voices are no longer being heard. They have, for the most part, protested peacefully while trying to produce a new language, political culture, public institutions, and a "community that manifests the values of equality and mutual respect that they see missing in a world that is structured by neoliberal principles." Young people are organizing in opposition to the structural violence of the state while also attempting to reclaim the discourse of the common good, social justice, and economic equality. Rejecting the notion that democracy and markets are the same or that capitalism is the only ideological and economic system that can speak in the name of democracy, youth movements are calling for an end to poverty, the suppression of dissent, the permanent warfare state, and the corporate control of the commanding institutions of politics and culture.

Many of us have been inspired by the hope for a better future that these young people represent for the nation as a whole. Yet, of utmost concern is the backlash the protesters have faced for exercising their democratic rights. Surely, what must be addressed by anyone with a stake in safeguarding what little remains of U.S. democracy is the immediate threat that an emerging police state poses not just to the young protesters occupying a number of North American cities but to the promise of a real democracy. This threat to the possibility of a democratic social order only increases with the ascendancy of a war-like mentality and neoliberal modes of discipline and education which make it that much more difficult to imagine, let alone enact, communal obligation, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Unless the actions of young protesters, however diverse they may be, are understood as a robust form of civic courage commensurate with a vital democracy, it will be difficult for the American public to resist an increase in state violence and the framing of protests, dissent, and civic responsibility as un-American or, even worse, a species of criminal behavior.

Stuart Hall suggests that the current historical moment, or what he calls the "long march of the Neoliberal Revolution,"⁶ has to be understood in terms of the varied forms of violence that it deploys and reinforces. Such anti-democratic pressures and their provocation of the protests of young people in the United States and abroad have deepened an escalating crisis symptomatic of what Alex Honneth has termed the "failed sociality"

4. See <http://occupyarrests.moonfruit.com/>

5. Kyle Bella, "Bodies in Alliance: Gender Theorist Judith Butler on the Occupy and SlutWalk Movements," *TruthOut* (December 15, 2011), <http://www.truth-out.org/bodies-alliance-gender-theorist-judith-butler-occupy-and-slutwalk-movements/1323880210>

6. Stuart Hall, "The March of the Neoliberals," *The Guardian* (September 12, 2011), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/sep/12/march-of-the-neoliberals>

characteristic of neoliberal states.⁷ In turn, state and corporate media-fueled perceptions of such a crisis have been used to stimulate fear and justify the creeping expansion of a militarized and armed state as the enforcer of neoliberal policies amid growing public dissent. Police violence against young people must therefore be situated within a broader set of categories that enables a critical understanding of the underlying social, economic, and political forces at work in such assaults. That is, in order to adequately address state-sponsored violence against young people, one should consider the larger context of the devolution of the social state and the corresponding rise of the warfare state. The notion of historical conjuncture—or a parallel set of forces coalescing at one moment in time—is important here because it provides both an opening into the factors shaping a particular historical moment and it allows for a merging of theory and strategy in our understanding of the conditions with which we are now faced. In this case, it helps us to address theoretically how youth protests are largely related to a historically specific neoliberal project that promotes vast inequalities in income and wealth, creates the student loan debt bomb, eliminates much needed social programs, eviscerates the social wage, and privileges profits and commodities over people.

Within the United States and Canada, the often violent response to non-violent forms of youth protest must also be analyzed within the framework of a mammoth military-industrial state and its commitment to extending violence and war through the entire society. As the late philosopher Tony Judt put it, “The United States is becoming not just a militarized state but a military society: a country where armed power is the measure of national greatness, and war, or planning for war, is the exemplary (and only) common project.”⁸ The blending of the military-industrial complex with state interests and unbridled corporate power points to the need for strategies that address what is specific about the current neoliberal project and how different modes of power, social relations, public pedagogies, and economic configurations come together to shape its politics. Such considerations provide theoretical openings for making the practices of the warfare state and the neoliberal revolution visible in order “to give the resistance to its onward march, content, and focus, a cutting edge.”⁹ It also points to the conceptual value of making clear that history remains an open horizon that cannot be dismissed through appeals to the end of history or end of ideology.¹⁰ It is precisely through the indeterminate nature of history that resistance becomes possible. While there is always hope because a democratic political project refuses any guarantees, most Americans today are driven by shared fears, stoked to a great extent by media-induced hysteria. Corporations stand ready to supply a culture of fear with security and surveillance technologies that, far from providing greater public safety, do little more than ensure the ongoing militarization of the entire society, including the popular media and the cultural apparatuses that shape everyday life. Images abound in the mainstream media of such abuses. There is the now famous image of an 84-year-old woman looking straight into a camera after attending a protest rally, her face drenched in a liquid spray used by the police. There is the image of the 19-year-old pregnant woman being carried to safety after being pepper-sprayed by the police. There are the now all-too-familiar images of young people being dragged by their hair across a street to a waiting police van.¹¹ In some cases, protesters have been seriously hurt. Scott Olsen, an Iraq war veteran, was critically injured in a protest in Oakland in October 2011. On March 17, 2012, young protesters attempting to re-establish an Occupy camp at Zuccotti Park in New York were confronted by excessive police violence. *The Guardian* reported that over 73 people were arrested in one day and that “A woman suffered a seizure while handcuffed on a sidewalk, another protester was thrown into a glass door by police officers before being handcuffed, and a young woman said she was choked and dragged by her hair....Witnesses claimed police punched one protester several times in the head while he was subdued by at least four officers.”¹² Another protester claimed the police broke his thumb and injured his jaw. Such stories have become commonplace in recent years, and so many are startling reminders

7. Alex Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 188.

8. Tony Judt, “The New World Order,” *The New York Review of Books* 11:12 (July 14, 2005), pp. 14-18.

9. Stuart Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution,” *Cultural Studies* 25:6 (November 2011), p. 706.

10. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1966) and the more recent Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

11. Philip Gourevitch, “Whose Police,” *The New Yorker* (November 17, 2011), <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/comment/2011/11/occupy-wall-street-police-bloomberg.html>

12. Ryan Devereaux, “Dozens Arrested as Occupy Wall Street Marks Anniversary with Fresh Protests,” *The Guardian* (March 18, 2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/18/occupy-wall-street-six-month-anniversary/print>

of the violence used against civil rights demonstrators by the forces of Jim Crow in the fifties and sixties.¹³

These stories are also indicative that a pervasive use of violence and the celebration of war-like values are no longer restricted to a particular military ideology, but have become normalized through the entire society. As Michael Geyer points out, militarization in this sense is defined as “the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence.”¹⁴ The war on terror has become a war on democracy, as police departments and baton-wielding cops across the nation are now being supplied with the latest military equipment and technologies imported straight from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. Procuring drones, machine-gun-equipped armored trucks, SWAT vehicles, “digital communications equipment and Kevlar helmets, like those used by soldiers used in foreign wars,”¹⁵ is justified through reference to the domestic war against “terrorists” (code for young protesters) and provides new opportunities for major defense contractors and corporations to become ever “more a part of our domestic lives.”¹⁶ As Glenn Greenwald confirms, the United States since 9/11¹⁷ has aggressively paramilitarized the nation’s domestic police forces by lavishing them with countless military-style weapons and other war-like technologies, training them in war-zone military tactics, and generally imposing a war mentality on them. Arming domestic police forces with paramilitary weaponry will ensure their systematic use even in the absence of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil; they will simply find other, increasingly permissive uses for those weapons.”

With the growth of a new militarized state, it should come as little surprise that “by age 23, almost a third of Americans are arrested for a crime.”¹⁸ In a society that has few qualms with viewing its young people as predators, a threat to corporate governance, and a disposable population, the violent acts inflicted on youth by a punishing state will no doubt multiply with impunity. Domestic paramilitary forces will certainly undermine free speech and dissent with the threat of force, while also potentially violating core civil liberties and human rights. In other words, the prevailing move in American society toward permanent war status sets the stage for the acceptance of a set of unifying symbols rooted in a survival-of-the-fittest ethic that promotes conformity over dissent, the strong over the weak, and fear over civic responsibility. With the emergence of a militarized society, “the range of acceptable opinion inevitably shrinks,”¹⁹ as violence becomes the first and most important element of power and a mediating force in shaping all social relationships.

²⁰The grave reality is that violence saturates almost every aspect of North American culture. Domestically, violence weaves through the cultural and social landscape like a highly charged electric current burning everything in its path. Popular culture has become a breeding ground for a form of brutal masculine authority and the celebration of violence it incorporates has become the new norm in America. Representations of violence dominate the media and too often parade before viewers less as an object of critique than as a for-profit spectacle and heightened source of pleasure. As much as any form of governance seeks compliance among the governed, the permanent war state uses modes of public pedagogy—practices of pedagogical persuasion—to address, enlist, and construct subjects willing to abide by its values, ideology, and narratives of fear and violence. Legitimation in the United States is largely provided through a market-driven culture addicted to consumerism, militarism, and spectacles of organized violence. Circulated through various registers of popular culture, cruelty and violence imbue the worlds of high fashion and Hollywood movies, reality TV, extreme sports, video games, and around-the-clock news media. The American public is bombarded by an unprecedented “huge volume of exposure to... images of human suffering.” As Zygmunt Bauman argues, “the sheer numbers and monotony of

13. Phil Rockstroh, “The Police State Makes Its Move: Retaining One’s Humanity in the Face of Tyranny,” *CommonDreams* (November 15, 2011), <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/11/15>

14. Michael Geyer, “The Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945,” in *The Militarization of the Western World*, ed. John R. Gillis (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 79.

15. Andrew Becker and G.W. Schulz, “Cops Ready for War,” *ReaderSupportedNews* (December 21, 2011), <http://readersupportednews.org/news-section2/316-20/9023-focus-cops-ready-for-war>

16. Becker and Schulz, “Cops Ready for War.”

17. Glenn Greenwald, “The Roots of The UC-Davis Pepper-Spraying,” *Salon* (November 20, 2011), http://www.salon.com/2011/11/20/the_roots_of_the_uc_davis_pepper_spraying/

18. Erica Goode, “Many in U.S. Are Arrested by Age 23, Study Finds,” *New York Times* (December 19, 2011), p. A15.

19. Judt, “The New World Order,” p.17.

20. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments* (Malden: Blackwell, 1995), p. 149.

21. Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, pp. 149-150.

images may have a ‘wearing off’ impact [and] to stave off the ‘viewing fatigue,’ they must be increasingly gory, shocking, and otherwise ‘inventive’ to arouse any sentiments at all or indeed draw attention. The level of ‘familiar’ violence, below which the cruelty of cruel acts escapes attention, is constantly rising.”

When an increasing volume of violence is pumped into the culture as fodder for sports, entertainment, news media, and other pleasure-seeking outlets, yesterday’s spine-chilling and nerve-wrenching violence loses its shock value. One consequence is that today’s audiences exhibit more than mere desensitization or indifference to violence. They are not merely passive consumers, but instead demand prurient images of violence in a way that fuels their increasing production. Spectacularized violence is now unmoored from moral considerations or social costs. It now resides, if not thrives, in a diverse commercially infused set of cultural apparatuses that offers up violence as a commodity with the most attractive and enjoyable pleasure quotient. Representations of torture, murder, sadism, and human suffering have become the stuff of pure entertainment, offering a debased outlet for experiencing intense pleasure and the thrill of a depoliticized and socially irresponsible voyeurism. The consuming subject is now educated to take intense pleasure in watching—if not also participating as agents of death—in spectacles of cruelty and barbarism. After all, assuming the role of a first shooter in the age of video game barbarism has become an unquestioned badge of both pleasure and dexterity, leading potentially to an eventual employment by the Defense Department to operate Drone aircraft in the video saturated bunkers of death in some suburban west coast town. Seemingly unconstrained by a moral compass based on a respect for human and non-human life, U.S. culture is increasingly shaped by a disturbing *collective* desire for intense excitement and a never-ending flood of heightened sensations.

Although challenging to ascertain precisely how and why the collective culture continues to plummet to new depths of depravity, it is far less difficult to identify the range of horrific outcomes and social costs that come with this immersion in a culture of staged violence. When previously unfamiliar forms of violence, such as extreme images of torture and death, become banally familiar, the violence that occurs daily becomes barely recognizable, relegated to the realm of the unnoticed and unnoticeable. Hyper-violence and spectacular representations of cruelty disrupt and block our ability to respond politically and ethically to the violence as it is actually happening on the ground. How else to explain the public indifference to the violence waged by the state against non-violent youthful protesters who are rebelling against a society in which they have been excluded from any claim on hope, prosperity, equality, and justice? Cruelty has saturated everyday life when young people, once the objects of compassion and social protections, are treated as either consumers and commodities, on the one hand, or suspects and criminals on the other.

Disregard for young people and a growing taste for violence can also be seen in policies that sanction the modeling of public schools after prisons. We see the criminalization of disadvantaged youth, instead of the social conditions which they are forced to endure. Behaviors that were once handled by teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators are now dealt with by the police and the criminal justice system. The consequences have been disastrous for young people. Not only do schools take on the technologies and culture of prisons and engage in punishment creep, but young children are being arrested and put on trial for behaviors that can only be called trivial. There was the case of the 5-year-old girl in Florida who was put in handcuffs and taken to the local jail because she had a temper tantrum; or the 13-year-old girl in a Maryland school who was arrested for refusing to say the pledge of allegiance. Alexa Gonzales in New York was another student arrested by police—for doodling on her desk. There is more at work in these cases than stupidity and a flight from responsibility on the part of educators, parents, law enforcement officers, and politicians who maintain these policies. Clearly, embedded in these actions is also the sentiment that young people constitute a threat to adults, and that the only way to deal with them is to subject them to mind-crushing punishment. Students being miseducated, criminalized, and subjected to forms of penal pedagogy in prison-type schools provide a grim reminder of the degree to which the ethos of containment and punishment now creeps into spheres of everyday life that were once largely immune from this type of official violence.

Some of the most shocking examples of the increasing tendency to use excessive forms of punishment on students as well as process them through what is called the “School-to Prison pipeline” is on full display in two recent reports. One StatelImpact report stated that public schools in Florida and Ohio often used a disciplinary

practice called “seclusion.”²² That is, they repeatedly ²³²⁴locked “children away in cell-like rooms, closets or old offices, sometimes without their parents’ knowledge.” In Ohio, “which sent students to seclusion rooms 4,236 times in the 2009-2010 school year, sixty percent of these students had disabilities.”

Such practices boggle the mind and have no educational value whatsoever. In fact, seclusion has been found to be deeply traumatizing to some students and in some cases children have tried to hurt themselves or commit suicide. ²⁵²⁶²⁷ThinkProgress reported that “in one special education school in Georgia, a 13-year-old boy hung himself in a seclusion room in November 2004.” It gets worse. A Department of Justice report uncovered a “School to Prison pipeline” in Mississippi which revealed that principals and teachers in the schools in Meridian, Mississippi sent largely black and disabled students “to prison for minor disciplinary problems [such as] dress code violations, flatulence, profanity and disrespect.” These disciplinary practices suggest that students who are poor, disabled, and vulnerable now inhabit schools that have become “zones of abandonment” that exist beyond the formal rules of school governance where students “become unknowable with no human rights.” Under such circumstances, students become voiceless and thus powerless, subject to disciplinary procedures that erase any vestige of agency, subjectivity, or self-recognition.

All of these violations point to the ongoing and growing fundamentalisms and “rule of exceptions” in the American polity that bear witness to a growing militarization of American society. Such disciplinary practices also point to a society that is not only at war with its children, but is also in the thrall of a galloping authoritarianism in which the chief function of schooling is repression, especially for low-income and poor minority students as well as those with disabilities and special needs.²⁸ Public schools for low income and poor minority children have become what João Biehl calls a “machinery of social death” where young people considered disposable are “often placed in a state of ‘terminal exclusion.’”²⁹

Governing-through-crime policies also remind us that we live in an era that breaks young people, corrupts the notion of justice, and saturates the minute details of everyday life with the threat if not yet the reality of violence. A return to violent spectacles and other medieval types of punishment inflict pain on both the psyches and the bodies of young people. Equally disturbing is how law-and-order policies and practices in the United States appear to take their cue from a past era of slavery. Studies have shown that “Arrests and police interactions... disproportionately affect low-income schools with large African-American and Latino populations,”³⁰ paving the way for these youth to move almost effortlessly through what has been called the school-to-prison pipeline. Sadly, the next step one envisions for such a society is a reality TV franchise in which millions tune in to watch young kids being handcuffed, arrested, tried in the courts, and sent to juvenile detention centers. This is not merely barbarism parading as reform—it is also a blatant indicator of the degree to which sadism and the infatuation with violence have become normalized in a society that seems to take delight in dehumanizing itself.

The prevalence of institutionalized violence in American society and other parts of the world suggests the need for a new conversation and politics that address what a just and fair world looks like. Young people and others marginalized by class, race, and ethnicity appear to have been abandoned as American society’s claim on democracy gives way to the forces of militarism, market fundamentalism, and state terrorism. Until educators,

22. John O’Connor and Sarah Gonzalez, “Many Florida Schools Use Seclusion Rooms for Students With Disabilities,” *StateImpact* (April 9, 2012). Online: <http://stateimpact.npr.org/florida/2012/08/09/many-florida-schools-use-seclusion-rooms-for-students-with-disabilities>

23. See John O’Connor and Sarah Gonzalez, “Many Florida Schools Use Seclusion Rooms for Students With Disabilities.”

24. Aviva Shen, “Ohio and Florida Public Schools Lock Mentally Disabled Children in Closets,” *ThinkProgress* (August 9, 2012). Online: <http://thinkprogress.org/education/2012/08/09/667931/ohio-florida-school-closets/>

25. Ibid. Aviva Shen, “Ohio and Florida Public Schools Lock Mentally Disabled Children in Closets.”

26. Annie-rose Strasser, “Mississippi Schools Sending Kids to Prison for Misbehaving in the Classroom,” *ThinkProgress* (August 13, 2012). Online: <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/08/13/681261/mississippi-schools-sending-kids-to-prison-for-misbehaving-in-the-classroom/>

27. Joao Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 4

28. I have borrowed this idea of school as a repressive institution from Stanley Aronowitz, “Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy: Not Mainly a teaching method,” in Robert Lake and Tricia Kress, *Paulo Freire’s Intellectual Roots: Toward Historicity in Praxis* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2012), in press.

29. Ibid. pp. 10-11, 14.

30. Smartypants, “A Failure of Imagination,” Smartypants Blog Spot (March 3, 2010), <http://immasmartyants.blogspot.com/2010/03/failure-of-imagination.html>

intellectuals, academics, young people, and other concerned citizens address how a physics and metaphysics of war and violence have taken hold on American society and the savage social costs they have exacted, the forms of social, political, and economic violence that young people are currently protesting against as well as the violence waged in response to their protests will become impossible to recognize and act on. The American public needs to make visible and critically engage the underlying ideological, political, educational, and economic forces that embrace violence as both a commodity, spectacle, and mode of governing. Such an approach would address the necessity of understanding the emerging pathology of violence not just through a discourse of fear or isolated spectacles, but through policies that effectively implement the wider social, economic, and political reforms necessary to curb the culture of violence and the institutions that are sustained by it.

There is a cult of violence in America and it is reinforced by a type of collective ignorance spread endlessly by special interests such as the National Rifle Association, politicians wedded to the largess of the military-industrial complex, and a national entertainment-corporate complex that both employs violence and uses it to refigure the meaning of news, entertainment, and the stories America tells itself about its national identity and sense of destiny. Violence is not something to be simply criminalized by extending the reach of the criminal justice system to the regime of criminals that now run the most powerful financial services and industries. It must be also understood as part of a politics of distraction, a poisonous public pedagogy that depoliticizes as much as it entertains and corrupts. That is, it must be addressed as a political issue that within the current historical moment is both deployed by the neoliberal state against young people, and employed as part of the reconfiguration or transformation of the social state into the punishing state. At the heart of this transformation is the emergence of new form of corporate sovereignty, a more intense form of state violence, a ruthless survival of the fittest ethic used to legitimate the concentrated power of the rich, and a concerted effort to punish young people who are out of step with neoliberal ideology, values, and modes of governance. Of course, these anti-democratic tendencies represent more than a threat to young people, they also put in peril all of those individuals, groups, public spheres, and institutions now considered disposable because that are at odds with a world run by bankers, the financial elite, and the rich. Only a well-organized movement of young people, educators, workers, parents, religious groups, and other concerned citizens will be capable of changing the power relations and vast economic inequalities that have generated what has become a country in which it is almost impossible to recognize the ideals of a real democracy.