

Ending America's War with Itself: A Conversation with Henry Giroux.

Lawrence M. Eppard¹ and Henry A. Giroux²

¹Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA, USA

²McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, CA

Lawrence Eppard email: leppard@ship.edu

Henry Giroux email: girouxh@mcmaster.ca

Received September 4, 2019

Accepted for publication October 4, 2019

Published November 12, 2019

Publication Type: Book Review

Preferred Citation: Eppard, Lawrence, and Henry Giroux. 2019. "Ending America's War with Itself: A Conversation with Henry Giroux." *Sociation*, 18(2): 29-36.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.0 Generic License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/)

Introduction

The United States finds itself at a crossroads, facing several social problems that require new and urgent responses. Whether it is the threat posed by climate change, growing economic inequality, mass incarceration, persistent racial inequality, the inhumane treatment of immigrants, the gender pay gap, the student loan debt crisis, or any other pressing social issues, the status quo cannot hold for much longer. Young Americans coming of age today seem less inclined to stand for complacency than many of their predecessors, and their futures and the future of our democracy demand our commitment to bold new approaches.

A number of these topics are central to the work of Lawrence Eppard and Henry Giroux. These themes are front-and-center in *America at War with Itself*, *American Nightmare*, and the recently released *The Terror of the Unforeseen* (all from Henry Giroux), as well as the forthcoming *Rugged Individualism and the Misunderstanding of American Inequality* (from Lawrence Eppard, Mark Rank, and Heather Bullock). Additionally, Eppard and Giroux are currently working together on a volume titled *On Inequality and Freedom*, which explores how a variety of social inequalities unnecessarily constrain many Americans' agency and freedom.

Eppard and Giroux recently sat down for a series of discussions that touched on many of the topics above, as well as other vital issues. The following are highlights from those discussions, edited and arranged for this article.

American Nightmare

Lawrence Eppard (LE): Can you talk a little bit about *American Nightmare*, in terms of what prompted you to write it, your main arguments in the book, etc.?

Henry Giroux (HG): I wrote a book on authoritarianism back in 2004, and *American Nightmare* is an up-to-date extension of that book. I'm certainly not the only one that was beginning to see elements of fascism emerging that were no longer hidden behind the discourse of markets or the false claim to freedom and democracy. I mean, these were all very, very clear. Whether we're talking about ultra-nationalism, white supremacy, calls for racial purity, identifying enemies as a unifying cause, the celebration of the military, the symbolic emphasis on military parades, the expansive military budget, disdain for intellectuals, etc. Increasingly we were seeing elements that were so often on the margins of society move to the centers of power. I mean when you have a president who stands in front of

crowds and endlessly refers to people as vermin, as rapists, says racist things, consistently attacks African Americans in multiple forms, supports white nationalism. A president who aligns himself with dictators all over the world.

We're talking about a language emerging that is a language of brutality. It is a language that aids in the eradication of social provisions, a language aimed at punishing workers and unions, at censoring journalists, a language aimed at demonizing and humiliating those who protest the abuse of power by those at the highest levels. The tools of the state are being used against its own people, particularly those marginalized by class, race, ethnicity, and religion, in ways that suggest that they have no place in an alleged White public sphere. You see, in this language, a friend/enemy distinction in which some groups are treated as non-human. We've seen this in the past. There are dangerous echoes of a grotesque history in this rhetoric of hate, demonization, and militarism.

We have increasingly seen since the 1980s an enormous concentration of wealth in the hands of relatively few people. And it seems to me that if you recognize that wealth is also about power, then it becomes clear that you have politically dysfunctional systems where wealth is able to determine priorities that benefit concentrating wealth and power even further while serving the interests of the ultra-rich, financial institutions, and giant corporations. Inequality produces enormous amounts of polarization and misery and human suffering. You see it in extreme neoliberal policies emerging throughout the world.

So what I was trying to say was that—given this ultra-nationalism, language of disposability, calls for racial purity, economic inequality—the country's in a state of crisis. While it doesn't mirror a fascist state exactly, we have to ask ourselves in what way does fascism begin to emerge in different forms, and under what conditions do these elements become part of government policy?

So that's why I wrote *American Nightmare*, as well as *The Terror of the Unforeseen*, which was just published by the Los Angeles Review of Books.

LE: You have always been very critical of neoliberalism, and have written recently of your concern with the way that it is combining with elements of fascism.

HG: Neoliberalism has now reached such an extreme point because it can no longer fall back on the promises it made about equality and about social mobility. Now it's unabashedly making a claim to support the very things that it really does, which are economic inequality, political inequality, elections driven by money, concentrating power in the hands of relatively few people. It parades its worst attributes as a badge of honor: greed, grotesque inequality, obscene wealth, corruption, racism, cruelty, state violence, contempt for compassion—all of which have become normalized under the Trump administration. In order to mobilize the mass anger that is developed in relation to neoliberal globalization—rather than actually address those problems—this administration has created a politics of diversion which is joined with racism, Islamophobia, nativism, etc.

LE: Can you talk specifically about the damage that neoliberal policies do to our society?

HG: Think about the things that make a democracy viable. Maybe this is the kind of discussion people really need to understand. Do you want to live in a democracy that provides certain kinds of protections, social provisions, and public goods? Well, you can't live in a democracy when you have massive inequality. You can't live in a democracy when very few people take control of the political process, or when corporations define everything about how life should be run. You can't live in a democracy without all of the institutions that provide the opportunities for people to think critically, to be healthy, to have access to resources that are absolutely essential to their own sense of agency. When you have an economic, social, and political formation at work—call it what you want, market fundamentalism, casino capitalism, neoliberalism—all aimed at consolidating economic and political power in the hands of a small number of people, that's not about democracy.

That's the argument that needs to be made, that people are going to suffer under this. All of the things that matter are going to be taken away from them—whether we are talking about pensions, healthcare, access to good schools for your kids—all of these things are being privatized, commodified, or eliminated.

We need a narrative in which people can recognize themselves. They need to be able to recognize in that narrative something about how the loss of jobs is directly related to capitalism. Instead of allowing them to identify with the ultimate capitalist, somebody like Donald Trump, we need a new narrative here, one that says that capitalism and democracy are not the same. We need a democratic ethos, one that keeps alive the importance of historical memory,

moral witnessing, and recognizes that education must be understood as an interrogation on the claims of democracy. What does it mean for people to exercise the kind of power to reclaim their role as agents in a democracy in which they can learn how to govern rather than simply be governed? That they can have some control over the conditions that bear down on their lives? Does that suggest the emergence of narratives that are more than defensive in nature and speak to the need for a vision? Such a vision must concern itself with a real platform for change, the kind of change that addresses the concrete situations and aspirations for social mobility and equality that can motivate people to act politically. We need narratives that speak to the social causes of oppression and the control exercised by ruling elites over basic life resources and the material conditions necessary for real freedom, equality, and justice.

LE: You describe a culture of cruelty that is developing, a culture which is allowing much of what you are talking about to flourish.

HG: A culture of cruelty has become rampant in so many spheres, and it has narrowed the choices we have about how we solve problems. Trump and the Republican Party have taken it to a new level. They utilize a discourse of cruelty and they implement policies that are so repulsive that they really suggest not simply a retreat from democracy, but an entrance into a new form of barbarism. Whether we're talking about reducing food stamps for the poor or incarcerating children of undocumented workers, it seems to me that what we see now is a level of cruelty that is really difficult not to recognize.

You know if you eliminate provisions for healthcare, and in doing so it means that millions of Americans will no longer be able to get even the most basic health care, that is not just a crisis, that's an act of cruelty. It's an act of cruelty when you propose policies that favor elites while eliminating all those provisions that provide just a modicum of services for people. It raises the question of why people participate in it, if it is really aimed at them. Why do they participate if it means they're going to lose something that is essential, like their healthcare? In one of the richest countries in the world, people no longer seem to be talking about social mobility, but instead about struggling to survive. Our social system has now made cruelty a fundamental pillar of its mode of governing.

LE: Up there with the cruelest of policies is the child separation policy. What does such a policy say about our humanity?

HG: This is a very dangerous situation. In some ways it is a signpost about the dangers of the past, the present, and where we are going. I'd say it's a warning. We have to ask ourselves, in what way does this echo something about the past that bears a resemblance to previous events that we should just be alarmed about? It is not only cruel but it seems to be reproducing an element of history that we thought we'd never see again. It is barbarism. Kids being separated, being punished, many being sexually abused, reports of five-year-olds taking care of babies. These separations undermine every value that a decent democracy would adhere to.

LE: The family separations shook me and continue to shake me to my core.

HG: You know, the ultimate test for any democracy is how it treats its children. Children are powerless and you can't use the neoliberal arguments against children. You can't say they lack character, or they're irresponsible, or they make bad choices, or they're lazy. It doesn't work, I'm sorry. When you turn children into victims, you're talking about the emergence of a predatory culture and society that is as corrupt as it is barbaric in its reasoning and policies. People often write me and say, "Henry, you can't compare what happened in the fascist regimes to what happened here." But fascism can resurrect itself in different forms, it doesn't have to absolutely replicate itself in every detail from the past.

LE: I find it odd that the same crowd that demands patriotism is often the crowd that also makes excuses like, "Well our poverty is not as bad as poverty in the poorest areas of the world," or, "Well this supposed fascism that Giroux speaks of, it's not like we are talking about Nazi Germany." Nazis and poor countries—those don't seem like "patriotic" standards for a healthy and vibrant democracy, not to mention one of the richest countries in world history, to compare itself to.

HG: That's ignorance resurrecting itself as an insight. Tell that to the parents whose children are being separated from them. Tell that to the people who are wasting away in prison because of a racist criminal justice system. Tell that to people who are living in poverty with long odds of escaping. These are not issues that are measured against how bad they are compared to problems in other countries. You don't solve problems in your own country by saying, "Well, we're not as bad as Brazil." You say, "Look, what are the problems? How do we deal with them?"

And the fact of the matter is these problems are indeed severe. When over 28 million people don't have health insurance, that's three quarters of the population of Canada! When you have over two million people in prison, many of them because of racism in the criminal justice system, what do we say about that? Do we say, "Well, the prisons aren't as bad as they are in Turkey?" I mean come on. That's thoughtlessness, which is at the root of fascism, as Hannah Arendt said. It allows people to give up any sense of responsibility.

LE: Along with tribalism there seems to be an emergence of a politics of retribution, where some politicians appeal to their base by promising to hurt certain other groups of Americans. This can't be leading anywhere good, can it?

HG: We have to recognize that we're in a new historical formation. Neoliberalism has eroded notions of shared responsibility and shared citizenship. Shared fear has now replaced shared citizenship. The destruction of all kinds of public spheres and public goods has contributed to civic illiteracy. Neoliberalism claims that all problems are individual problems so that people cannot translate private issues into larger public considerations. So neoliberalism not only creates economic misery, but offers a pedagogy that makes it increasingly difficult for people to understand the conditions in which they find themselves. That pedagogy is used as a weapon. Ignorance is no longer innocent, it's a weapon of domination and a tool of power.

LE: Switching gears a bit, did you happen to catch our disappearing act at the G7 climate session?

HG: Oh jeez. The world is burning and he thinks it's a niche issue. Trump has rolled back all kinds of environmental protections, many of which impact directly on health. He claims that Bolsonaro is doing a fabulous job in Brazil—meanwhile the rainforest is burning.

LE: What is your take on the current administration wishing to take us out of the Paris Agreement?

HG: It is embarrassing and cruel. They'll do anything, even destroy the planet, in order to make sure that the financial elite don't get taxed. So they can pollute and do anything they want on the basis of a government that is simply there to regulate their own interests. This is what I mean when I say we don't have state sovereignty, we have corporate sovereignty. This is a state run by the corporations, let's not fool ourselves.

The Canadians I talk to say, "Wow, how could this all be happening there?" People are shocked and almost traumatized by how somebody so ignorant and ethically irresponsible could possibly be elected. I think for them, it is both a signpost of something they can never allow to happen in Canada, and also an indication of why things like good schools matter, why keeping money out of politics matters.

LE: You have often mentioned the effects of hyper-masculinity on society in your work. You say that hyper-masculinity is celebrated in our society. Can you expand on that?

HG: You have a society that is largely organized for the production of violence. That's not just about the military budget being the largest in the world. It is also about the way desires and subjectivities and identities are being militarized. Everywhere you look in the U.S., the representations of what it means to be a male seem to err on the side of violence. The concept of militarization is part of the DNA of American life, it touches everything. So why should we be surprised by this emergence of a new kind of in-your-face, hyper-masculinity?

Child Well-Being as a Moral Index

LE: You pay a lot of attention to child well-being and the war on youth in your work. Why do you think that indicators of child well-being in the U.S., and particularly how they compare to other wealthy countries, are not received as more of a scandal here?

HG: One important way to judge a society is the way it treats youth. There is a lot of stuff being published about class, race, and gender, all of which matters. But youth as the object of political and ethical considerations has sort of dropped out from any serious and sustained analysis, and I have always been sort of baffled by it. We seem to lack a moral ethical index to begin to talk about how a society judges itself. Youth are a kind of index of the degree to which we take the future and democracy seriously.

LE: That's an important point. One of the ways I see us failing our youth is in higher education. What does the current state of higher education, and the student loan debt crisis in particular, say about how we are meeting our obligations to the next generation?

HG: What we have now among young people is a new form of indentured servitude. The student loan crisis suggests that we don't care about the future, because instead of investing in young people we are punishing them. They've been written out of the discourse of democracy. Somehow, according to some people apparently, it is these students' own fault that they are in debt. The crisis of youth is about the crisis of the future. It is being perpetuated by the dictates of austerity, precarity, and neoliberalism. The student debt crisis is the dirty underside of an ethos that refuses to accept that education is a right, not a privilege, and that the central concern of education should be to educate young people to be critical and engaged citizens.

The saddest thing for me, I mean I went to college for a few hundred dollars a year. When I graduated, institutions were offering people to come to teach and in exchange they would lower your rent and give you all kinds of other perks. There was a real need and desire to expand the rights and capacities of young people through education. Youth were central to how we defined society, there was a sense that they mattered.

But the 1980s were a turning point. The civic emphasis on solidarity, social provisions, the social sphere, common goods, and expanding the welfare state began to decline. A ruthless neoliberal ethic began to assert itself politically, ideologically, and in a range of policies. All of which legitimated a notion of agency and public life shaped by an ethos of rugged individualism, survival of the fittest, privatization, deregulation, consumerism, and a war of all against all ethos. Out of that you get massive inequality, giveaways to the rich, the decline of public goods such as education, the school-to-prison pipeline, a culture of cruelty, and an emerging politics of disposability in which an increasing number of people are seen as excess, as throwaways, and are subject to social abandonment.

The more educated a population we have, the more productive the economy is. Everybody benefits when we invest in education economically, politically, and ethically. It is a plus all around. And when it is under assault in the way that it is now, where we want to educate people simply to assume jobs and basically learn how to consume, the very ideals central to the university, if not democracy itself, are undermined.

LE: I certainly agree with what you have to say about our treatment of children and what that says about our culture, our society, our democracy, and ultimately our humanity. I worry about growing inequality for a number of reasons, and certainly one of those is about the world we will leave for our children.

HG: Economic inequality in the U.S. is at obscene levels. One could say the U.S. has reached its limit in terms of whether or not it wants to call itself a democracy. Elites are consolidating power in ways that we haven't seen since the first Gilded Age. Meanwhile 20 percent of all kids in the U.S. live in poverty and the welfare state is under enormous attack.

The repercussions are horrendous. Public goods are being defunded, everything from public schools to public transport. We see a massive shift of wealth away from the general population to the upper one tenth of one percent. We see the rise of the punishing state. Economic power translates into political power and wreaks havoc on those institutions that serve the public good.

LE: I am always given at least some measure of hope when I focus on the fact that there are solutions to almost all of our social problems. If we want to end child poverty, we can look to countries like Denmark or Finland. If we want high-quality, highly-accessible healthcare at an affordable price, we can look to the U.K. Heck, we can even look to ourselves. As Robert Reich likes to say, if we want strong economic growth that benefits all, we can model ourselves after ourselves—during the post-war period.

I don't know if it is anti-intellectualism, a rejection of complexity, mistrust of experts and institutions, ethnocentrism, or something else, but as a culture we seem far too ignorant to the fact that these problems have solutions. Many Americans care about these issues but seem to be unaware that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. I try to help my students understand these policies as much as possible, so that they will not fall into defeatism, not assume that no solutions exist.

HG: I hate to be too simple about this, but part of this is the failure of education, and I don't mean the students themselves but the school system. The failure to educate Americans about the facts and what they mean. Looking at the conditions that prevent people from being able to bring things together and connect them, to think thoughtfully, to think critically. We are victims of an educational system that teaches to the test. We learn like a game show—just learn facts with no sense of connection.

Many Americans care about crucial social problems, often because they are victims of them. Yet, they are often unaware of the underlying social, political, and economic conditions that produce them. Anti-intellectualism runs deep and has a long legacy in American society. Unfortunately, ignorance is not innocent and it is systemically manufactured through celebrity culture, the defunding of public education at all levels, and the rise of disimagination propaganda machines produced by right-wing outlets.

Americans growing up in the U.S. today are victims of a culture which values immediacy, values celebrities, and values stupidity quite frankly. A culture which encourages them to focus only on self-interest, to be narcissistic, to be consumers. I mean, what does it mean to be a kid today, and to grow up in this culture?

Couple this with an attack on the working conditions of teachers, and a university system that is being destroyed. When you have adjuncts comprising 70% of all faculty, that degrades the university, reduces faculty power, and aims to bring faculty in line with Walmart workers. Additionally, when you live in a culture of precarity and you don't know if your contract is going to be renewed next year, this is also an attack on academic freedom. In my estimation, neutrality is a crime in teaching. Being neutral means to be complicit in passing on bad values to students. We have an educational system that will fire people when they make comments to students that suggest something about the realities in which they live. Whether teachers say, "Hey, you know, the U.S. has been invading countries and engaged in overt and covert military operations since its inception. In some cases it participated in genocidal actions. Let's look at this. What's the evidence? Am I right or am I wrong? Let's set this as a problem to investigate."

If we don't view education as being central to politics itself, we're going to lose the battle over democracy. If you read the intellectual neoliberals and you look back to the Powell Memo or the Trilateral Commission, they all said the same thing: this is a war over the power of ideas. The Left has to learn that.

Race is the Child of Racism

LE: In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote that, "Race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming 'the people' has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy." He was of course emphasizing that modern notions of racial hierarchy and supposed inferiority grew out of domination, not the other way around.

I often find in our discussions of racism in this country that Americans focus a lot on individual bigots, rather than the systemic perpetuation of racial inequality. Often missing from this discussion, for instance, is how we cannot truly confront prejudice and discrimination without aggressively tackling problems like residential segregation and the racial wealth gap.

HG: Absolutely. You can't have massive inequality and eliminate discrimination. You cannot reduce solving systemic racism to some sort of communicative skill. It's not. The discourse around 1619 that appeared in the *New York Times* is really interesting. We need to rewrite our history. African Americans were fundamental to the building of this country. And we have to ask ourselves, if they were fundamental to the building of this country, why aren't they sharing in its prosperity? Why are they victims of massive discrimination? What happened? Not learning from this history is becoming complicit with it.

When we talk about questions of segregation and we talk about discrimination, you can't wipe out history and claim that that legacy is irrelevant. The degree to which we ignore economic inequality is the degree to which we ignore the question of historical responsibility and turn our backs on elements of history that are very much still with us. They need to be remembered in order to be addressed and in order to recognize the new forms in which they emerge.

LE: In doing my own work, I am always struck by the way in which racism erodes our sense of solidarity, such as the manner in which it makes it more difficult to develop comprehensive social policies.

HG: Racism creates false arguments that impede any sense of real solidarity. When you constantly use the language of bigotry and hate to suggest that the culture of blackness is also the culture of criminality. To reinforce law and order policies that are nothing but racist. Or to basically sanction all sorts of policies that are ultimately racist in nature. It divides the country, it divides the working class, and it undermines any real sense of solidarity.

Not Just "Freedom From" but "Freedom To"

LE: It seems to me that we have to find a way to talk about many of our social problems in a way that speaks to both Left and Right. In fact you and I are tackling this with our new project.

HG: That's right. I tell this story about my father back when he was working in a factory. All of a sudden SDS comes to him at some time in the 1960s and starts talking to him about Mao Zedong. He comes home and he says to me, "Henry, they're talking to me about this Chinese guy. Who is he?" There were fumes in the factory choking people, some people were dying of cancer, and they were giving him a lesson in Chinese history.

We need to create narratives in which people can recognize themselves. Many people on the Right cannot recognize themselves in this Left liberal narrative because it is often not about the nature of the problems that they face on a daily level. We have to situate those problems. You have to make them meaningful to make them critical and transformative. That's what we have to do. If we can't do that, Trump is going to win, and I don't know where it goes from there. A second term of Trump, along with rising

elements of fascism in a number of other parts of the world, these trends aren't just anti-democratic, they are more dangerous than that.

LE: Can you talk about a more expansive conceptualization of freedom that might speak to Left and Right, red and blue alike? Beyond our often limited conceptualizations in this country, which often favor negative liberty notions?

HG: There are things missing from our very limited notion of freedom, including that freedom is not only about the freedom from, but the freedom to. To say that a kid who is born in poverty has the same choices as anybody else, the same choices as a kid in the upper one percent, is just nonsense. It is nonsense to suggest that they just need to pick themselves up by their bootstraps. Unless you talk about freedom and choices in relation to constraints, then they are empty, meaningless terms.

Everybody has unique capacities, but those capacities and their uniqueness can't be produced and maximized unless we realize how much we need to help each other to create such conditions. We need to work together to make sure that those conditions exist, and that is a social rather than an individual issue. And in this way freedom becomes multi-faceted in ways in which everybody benefits.

We need to be able to see our problems not just as individual problems, but as social problems. In doing so, we can come together and make society better—not only for ourselves, but for our children. And that's something that we need to do collectively.

What kind of a future do we want for our children, and how will they remember us? Will they remember that we had the courage to say no to forms of domination that are hurting all of us? That we had the courage to believe in justice, to believe that democracy is worth fighting for? That we fought for our schools, for our healthcare, and for our planet? Or that we were complicit?

Governments have a responsibility to freedom. Freedom from fear, from poverty, from devaluation, from meaningless work, from unemployment, from precarity. Government has a responsibility to expand these freedoms. If the government is run by the economic elite, they don't feel obligated to offer you these freedoms.

The country has always had a kind of romance with rugged individualism that slides very easily into what we saw with neoliberalism. It is also colonized by a memory hole. It creates all of these myths around notions of freedom that get absorbed as part of a neoliberal ethic where freedom means freedom from government regulation and freedom to consume, or more recently the freedom to hate without shame, but it also increasingly displaces any notion of the social. The evisceration of the social sphere, notions of solidarity, and shared responsibilities in the U.S. is worse than England, worse than when Margaret Thatcher said there was no such thing as society, only individuals and families. Such notions depoliticize people, offering them a kind of misrecognition about the social state and the crucial notion of the common good.

We need to reclaim what democracy means. We need to talk about it not just in terms of political and individual rights but economic and social rights. If you don't have enough money, and you don't have enough resources to live, political rights are meaningless. What does it mean to say that I have the right to assembly and free speech when I'm starving? We have to resuscitate the language of social rights. We have to fight for public goods.

Capitalism is not democracy. We've got to get this out of our heads. Its notion of progress has nothing to do with justice. Its notion of economic activity has nothing to do with social costs. This divorce between economic activity and its effects on the quality of human life is a prescription for barbarism and points to a society that runs away as fast as it can from any sense of ethical and political responsibility.

Signs of Hope

LE: Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future? I worry how we will come back together as a nation around shared values, a shared sense of reality, shared facts, etc., given how fractured we are in terms of our bubbles, whether they are residential bubbles, media bubbles, ideological bubbles, etc.

HG: I don't think you should ever underestimate the ability of people to change their minds. I agree with Noam Chomsky, I have been around too long not to see how people change after being given information that lights up their world in a way that it wasn't lit before. I mean there are always people who have internalized their position to such a degree that it may be impossible to change their consciousness, but I don't believe that is true for most people. I don't think most people are simply immune to any possibility of learning something new or being able to examine a question in a different way.

What I am really concerned about is the attack on and destruction of the public spheres that make that possible. If you don't have the institutions that make that possible, then it becomes all the more difficult for those people to address the kinds of questions that we are talking about. That's what scares me. Not whether people have the ability to open up to a different perspective, but where the institutions are that would make that possible.

LE: There are certainly signs of hope. From Black Lives Matter to MeToo, to the teachers' strikes, to the awareness of youth, to the rise in the saliency of issues like inequality.

HG: Yes and we shouldn't underestimate any of that, we have plenty of hope. MeToo, Black Lives Matter, the young people from Parkland, the teachers' movement—we are seeing people who are fed up and have had enough. Whether its women, the LGBT community, young people, independents, etc. They aren't just demonstrating, but searching for a politics that will bring these groups together. And it seems to me that those mobilizations are going to increase. Even the mainstream media, such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, I mean they have called Trump an authoritarian.

As contradictions intensify under Trump, as they no doubt will, we will see more and more people mobilizing. The key is how they come together. The thread, I think, that brings them all together, is radical democracy. The elimination of economic inequality, the willingness to recognize that power is associated with wealth and influence. Unless we can bring power and wealth together and connect them to inequality, we are in big trouble.

I like Bernie Sanders, and I think what he has done is tremendous. But we need more. We need a third party movement. Bernie Sanders has done something fundamental: he changed the language. All of the sudden people are talking about inequality. That's new. All of the sudden people are realizing that banks enrich the financial elite. All of the sudden we are talking about people dying in this country by virtue of being atomized and being alienated, living in despair and anguish, and not knowing what to do with it.

What gives me a ray of hope is that history is open. It is not determined in a way that would suggest there are no alternatives. I have faith in humanity. Many people do care. Many people do struggle. I have faith that people are more compassionate than they are selfish. Without hope, there is no future that matters. Without hope you become cynical or complicit. Hope has to be central to any notion of politics that matters. Without hope you give up a sense of critical agency and without agency hope becomes irrelevant.

LE: Thank you so much for your time and these wonderful insights Henry, it is always a great pleasure to discuss these issues with you.

HG: I am glad to be able to do it. Good to see you.

As Eppard and Giroux indicate, there is significant hope for the future across a number of social issues in the U.S. Many other countries have largely solved child poverty, and we can, too. A number of 2020 presidential candidates are promoting major legislative overhauls for healthcare and student loans. Movements like Black Lives Matter and MeToo have helped to significantly increase Americans' awareness of and commitment to confronting racial and gender inequality and mistreatment. Teachers have been striking across the country for better treatment for their colleagues and increased resources for their students. Young activists are demonstrating nationwide on issues from gun control to climate change, and seem to possess a critical social vocabulary that their predecessors lacked. Despite the actions of the current administration on a range of issues, including the child separation policy, there has been significant backlash—a number of individuals, groups, states, and democratic institutions are fighting back. Despite attacks on the media, many outlets have seen a resurgence as they push for accountability from elected officials. The future is indeed bright if we continue to demand the future that we know we deserve.

For more from Eppard and Giroux, see *The Terror of the Unforseen* (2019 from the Los Angeles Review of Books) and *Rugged Individualism and the Misunderstanding of American Inequality* (forthcoming from Lehigh University Press).

Lawrence M. Eppard is a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Shippensburg University. He can be reached at leppard@ship.edu.

Henry A. Giroux is a faculty member in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. He can be reached at girouxh@mcmaster.ca.