

## Revisiting the Arena: The Hunger Games, Neoliberalism, and the Undoing of Youth Activism

Following a mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, teacher Jennifer Ansbach, responding to the rise of the student-led #NeverAgain movement, tweeted, “I’m not sure why people are so surprised that the students are rising up — we’ve been feeding them a steady diet of dystopian literature showing teens leading the charge for years. We have told teen girls they are empowered. What, you thought it was fiction? It was preparation.” Implicit in Ansbach’s characterization of YA dystopian fiction as preparing young people to resist oppression is a tacit acknowledgement of the strong female heroines in these books who, like their progenitor, Katniss Everdeen, combat injustice.

Not all critics interpret YA dystopian fiction as ideologically progressive. Ewan Morrison regards the genre as “communicating right-wing ideas”, while Andrew O’Hehir characterizes it as agitprop “for the ethos of individualism, the central ideology of consumer capitalism.” Building on these critiques, this paper revisits Suzanne Collins’s Hunger Games trilogy ten years after the eponymous first novel was published and demonstrates how the series, in depicting public institutions—especially government—as hostile to freedom, championing rugged individualism, and emphasizing independence over interdependence, injected neoliberal discourses into YA dystopian fiction that persist to this day and find their apotheosis in novels like *Legend* (Lu) and *Flawed* (Ahern). The author argues that not only is neoliberalism antagonistic to democracy, but it also undermines youth activism by curtailing young people’s “capacities for coming together, trusting and caring for each other, and organizing for social change” (Wilson, 5).