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The Treason of Intellectual Radicalism and the Collapse of Leftist Politics

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Radical politics in contemporary western democracies finds itself in a state of crisis. When viewed from the vantage point of social change, a progressive transformation of the social order, political radicalism is found wanting. This would seem to go against the grain of perceived wisdom. As an academic enterprise, radical theory has blossomed. Figures such as Slavoj Žižek openly discuss Marxism in popular documentaries, new journals have emerged touting a radical "anti-capitalism," and whole conferences and sub-fields are dominated by questions posed by obscure theoretical texts.

Despite this, there is a profound lack in substantive, meaningful political, social, and cultural criticism of the kind that once made progressive and rational left political discourse relevant to the machinations of real politics and the broader culture. Today, leftist political theory in the academy has fallen under the spell of ideas so far removed from actual political issues that the question can be posed whether the traditions of left critique that gave intellectual support to the great movements of modernity – from the workers movement to the Civil Rights movement – possess a critical mass to sustain future struggles.

Quite to the contrary, social movements have lost political momentum, they are generally focused on questions of culture, shallow discussions of class, and are generally obsessed with questions of identity divorced from the questions of material forms of oppression rather than on the great "social question" of unequal distributions of economic and political power which once served as the driving impulse for political, social and cultural transformation. As these new radical mandarins spill ink on futile debates over "desire," "identity," and illusory visions of anarchic democracy, economic inequality has ballooned into oligarchic proportions, working people have been increasingly marginalized, and ethnic minority groups are turned into a modern "coolie" labor force.

This has been the result, we contend, of a lack of concern with real politics in contemporary radical theory. Further, we believe that this is the result of a transformation of ideas, that contemporary political theory on the left has witnessed a decisive shift in focus in recent decades – a shift that has produced nothing less than the incoherence of the tradition of progressive politics in our age. At a time when the left is struggling to redefine itself and respond to current political and economic crises, a series of trends in contemporary theory has reshaped the ways that politics is understood and practiced. Older thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, and newer voices like Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, David Graeber and Judith Butler, among others, have risen to the status of academic

and cultural icons while their ideas have become embedded in the "logics" of new social movements. As some aspects of the recent Occupy Wall Street demonstrations have shown, political discourse has become increasingly dominated by the impulses of neo-anarchism, identity politics, post-colonialism, and other intellectual fads.

This new radicalism has made itself so irrelevant with respect to real politics that it ends up serving as a kind of cathartic space for the justifiable anxieties wrought by late capitalism,[pullquote]This new radicalism has made itself so irrelevant with respect to real politics that it ends up serving as a kind of cathartic space for the justifiable anxieties wrought by late capitalism . . . [/pullquote] further stabilizing its systemic and integrative power rather than disrupting it. These trends are the products as well as unwitting allies of that which they oppose.

The transformation of radical and progressive politics throughout the latter half of the twentieth and the early decades of the twenty-first centuries is characterized by both a sociological shift as well as an intellectual one. A core thesis has been that the shift from industrial to post-industrial society has led to the weakening of class politics. But this is unsatisfying. There is no reason why class cannot be seen in the divisions of mental and service labor as it was with an industrial proletariat. There is no reason why political power rooted in unequal property and control over resources, in the capacity for some to command and to control the labor of others as well as the consumption of others ought not to be a basic political imperative. To this end, what we would call a *rational radical politics* should seek not the utopian end of a "post-statist" politics, but rather to enrich common goods, erode the great divisions of wealth and class, democratize all aspects of society and economy, and seek to orient the powers of individuals and the community toward common ends. Indeed, only by widening the struggles of labor and re-thinking the ends of the labor movement – connecting the struggles labor to issues beyond the workplace, to education, the environment, public life, issues of racial and gender equality, culture and the nature of the social order more broadly – can we envision a revitalization of a worker's movement, one that would have no need of the alienated theory of the new radicals.[1]

But this is merely one fringe expression of what we see as a corrupted, simplified and de-politicized "new" radicalism. Once grounded in the Enlightenment impulse for progress, equality, rationalism, and the critical confrontation with asymmetrical power relations, the dominant trends of radical political thought now evade the concrete nature of these concerns. The battles that raged in the 1980s and 1990s between postmodernists and defenders of modernity – while serving as a harbinger of the contemporary split between the radical theorists divorced from reality and those who seek to establish anti-foundationalist conceptions of democratic discourse – were attached to a strong sense that the future of rationalism and radical politics hung in the balance. Today's radical intellectuals do not feel compelled to defend their arguments or respond to their critics. Their purported radicalism becomes all the more opaque when the coherence of their claims is called into question. A concern for an exaggerated subjectivity, identity politics, anti-empirical theories of power, an obsession with "difference" – all serve to deplete the radical tradition of its potency. Radical intellectuals now

formulate new vocabularies, invent new forms of “subjectivity,” and concoct new languages of discourse that only serve to splinter forms of political resistance, consigning radicalism to the depths of incoherence and (academic success notwithstanding) political irrelevance.

Indeed, the disintegration of the great radical movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – from the labor movement to the Civil Rights movement – has detached philosophical thinking from the mechanisms of power and political reality more broadly. The result has been – despite the ironic new turn toward “anti-philosophy” – the conquest of politics by poorly constructed philosophy. Abstraction has been the result, as well as a panoply of shibboleths that have only served to sever “radical” thought from its relevance to contemporary politics and society. It seems to us that the survival of the tradition of rational, radical political and social criticism pivots on a confrontation with these new academic trends and fads.

The rise of this new radicalism is largely due to the success of liberalism on the one hand and the collapse of Marxism on the other. Liberalism has been highly successful at incorporating many of the social movements that have emerged throughout the twentieth century: the rights of women and minorities, a basic social security and welfare state scheme for the poor, and the recognition of different sexual identities and preferences – all have found their place to some degree within the modern liberal state. As a result, these movements which, in their earlier, more radical phase of development, saw their struggles in connection with the struggles of working class interests, were cleaved off and given pieces of the political pie. This resulted, as Theodore Lowi has argued, in a conservatism of these interest groups as they protect their constituent interests.[2] But it also detached these different struggles from the central struggle over social and economic power, the control of work, consumption, time and space, by the owners of capital.

The collapse of Marxism not only weakened labor movement radicalism, it caused a more general intellectual breakdown on the left. With its emphasis on science and knowledge of objective social processes, Marxism’s disintegration left a theoretical vacuum that was now to be filled by the very cultural concerns produced by capitalist economic life itself. The post-Fordist, flexible accumulation of late capitalism, its emphasis on ephemeral fashion, personalized technology, and mass consumption, has led to an anomic self-absorption where objective political concerns have become abstract.[3] As consumerism and mass culture continues to weaken class consciousness the social order becomes increasingly legitimized forcing radical politics into the domain of the mind and the realm of spectacle. The political now morphs into the personal, and class has dropped out as a category of power-analysis and as an organizing variable of society. Theory now follows the superstructural stream of consciousness and politics becomes, for the new radical mandarins, a sphere of self-promotional platitudes. What is left over from these two intellectual-political shifts is the context within which the new radicalism begins.

What we are calling here a “treason of intellectual radicalism” can be seen to consist of several impulses that have had a deep and debilitating effect on progressive politics. First has been a shift toward a radical “non-foundational” or even “anti-foundational” thought. According to this

philosophical view, in its more radical forms, the social world (and even the natural world) is constructed by subjects no longer possessing any kind of foundations for knowledge. The "myth of the given," or the proposition that the social world is essentially constructed by subjects and discourse, is a basic starting point. There is no longer a need to rely on foundations for knowledge nor need we possess universal or rational justifications for political or ethical propositions and ideas. Political reality is the product not of concrete mechanisms of resource control and the organization of social structure, but instead the product of discourse.

On this view, the site of politics becomes the struggle between and over the discursive narratives of the political and social. Now, political subjectivity is to be created, indeed, even "invented" and pushed against the state. The constructivist epistemology adopted by these thinkers is seen as liberating politics from the "realities" of class and social structure. As one advocate of this thesis argues, political subject-formation "cannot be articulated in relation to a pre-given socio-economic identity like that of the proletarian, but has to be invented or aggregated from the various social struggles of the present."[4] These discourses and subjectivities are particularist in nature, even as they assert themselves as universals. This kind of thinking "is bound to discourse, literally narratives about the world that are admittedly partial."[5] The politics that follows from this necessarily eschews formal political institutions, even as it becomes an increasingly abstract affair for academics only. Even more, it no longer sees exploitation and domination in concrete, material terms. As Robert Meister has insightfully argued, "As soon as the paradigm of language supplants the model of production, exploitation appears as merely another way of being misunderstood."[6] The result is not political resistance in any meaningful sense of the term, but the "spectacle" of a political demonstration or some puerile display of public "art."[7] In the meantime, more politically mature and reactionary forces have been able to roll back the welfare state, consolidate economic and political power, and help craft a neoliberal social order.[8]

A second feature of alienated theory is its emphasis on anti-rational, anti-Enlightenment and anti-science as an epistemological and political stance. Knowledge, now seen as inherently braided with power, is recast as an interpretive activity; impartiality is a myth of scientific rationality, one premised on the power of exclusion. The perspective of the marginalized now becomes the central focus of how knowledge ought to be constructed. Dispensing with objectivity, theorists are now able to transform theory, properly understood as the search for the explanation of facts, into a kind of aesthetic enterprise where the boundaries between politics and culture blur.[9] New theoretical languages and vocabularies have been invented where the aim is not the explanation of reality or the construction of rational argument, but the exploration of some alternative perspective that has been repressed. Universalist principles and categories are anathema, on this view, to radical politics because of their tendency to crush difference and privilege exclusion.

Now, we are told to privilege experience, the phenomenological dimensions of power over its structural causes. This results in a collapse of politics into culture. It displaces politics in its "dirty hands" manifestation where realizable ends are sought and fought for and instead insists on the "utopian" as an impossible goal. As Stanley Aronowitz argues, "utopian thought seeks to

transform the present by articulating an alternative future, its power lies in its lack of respect for politics as the art of the possible, in its insistence that realism consists in the demand for the impossible."[10] Power is now to be grasped through the elusive terrain of culture, the non-empirical sources of which can no longer be located and are hence "overdetermined."[11] No longer can we look to class, to the power of privilege, but rather to the ways that power and knowledge are entwined. All objective points of reference have been abandoned. With the academic victory privileging the discourse of identity, the "unreal" has taken precedence over the real.[12]

A third salient feature of this *nouveau* radicalism is its emphasis on spontaneous, disruptive and localized struggle as the means of politics. Taking their cues from the legacy of anarchism and third-world indigenous struggles such as the Zapatistas, these tactics are seen as the essence of a democratic politics of resistance. The basis for new movements is now seen to be the emergence of new identities, themselves created from the exaggerated subjectivity of the modern, narcissistic self.[13] Rejecting the state and conceiving of a post-state politics is now a central dogma of the new "radical" theorists. Since the state is seen to be inherently despotic, only the spontaneous, autonomous collection of groups who act against the state and outside of it are viewed as vehicles of political change. The absence of domination is now cast as the freedom to explore narcissistic lifestyles as well as expand an already exaggerated subjectivity where participatory and direct democracy become the political ideal. In the end, they valorize the individual's resistance to the state and the power of localism.

Here left and right touch in their extremes: it is precisely a libertarian ethos of freedom that dominates their vision, as David Harvey has insightfully pointed out: "This is the world that libertarian Republicans construct. It is also the view of individual liberty and freedom embraced by much of the anarchist and autonomist left, even as the capitalist version of the free market is roundly condemned."[14] Now, it is a "multitude," a disruptive *demos*, that commands the political imaginary of the new radicals. Instead of a rational radical position which seeks to democratize the state and its powers and to transform it in order to enhance and protect public goods, the new interpretation of radical democracy "is only intelligible once it is thought as being *against* the state – and once the term 'democratic State,' which appeared so naturally from Tocqueville's pen, is by the same stroke rejected."[15] In turn, claims like these have been used to legitimize the use of violence; to pit the violence of the state against "emancipatory violence."[16] Further, it has been used as a pretext for reviving left-wing totalitarian traditions, such as Jacobinism, Leninism, and Maoism, and reconsidering their significance for the modern left.[17] Of course, these claims are made cautiously and a modern Maoist like Alain Badiou easily slips into patent misapplication of mathematics to obscure his politics.[18]

Finally, in opposition to the universal and the concrete, the new radical politics and its advocates in the academy have come to celebrate the uncertain and unstable as a principle both for conducting politics and pursuing research. Hence, for example, the history of feminist thought has "only paradoxes to offer."[19] The effort to understand mechanisms of domination and oppression is itself a manifestation of ideology.[20] Any recourse to normative judgments

or empirical claims is hopeless. “In vain do we try to break out of the ideological dream by ‘opening our eyes and trying to see reality as it is,’ by throwing away the ideological spectacles: as the subjects of such a post-ideological, objective, sober look, free of so-called ideological prejudices, as the subjects of a look which views the facts as they are, we remain throughout ‘the consciousness of our ideological dream.’”[21]

Ultimately, for the new radical intellectual, everything is a form of ideology. This does not mean that critique should become more rigorous, but, rather, that we should celebrate indeterminacy. *Au courant* theories of emancipation start with the premise that there is no “real.” We become free when we are disabused of the notion that critique can reveal truths that are obfuscated by social relations. We are liberated from definitions and categorizations. Such thinking has had its strongest effect among radical theorists discussing race and gender. Racial and gendered oppression is supposedly combatted when we recognize these categories as ideological constructions. However, the consequence of such thinking leaves the systemic and institutionalized forces that perpetuate oppression unaddressed. Both society and individual are constructed by incommensurables. This means that any political struggle that would seek to establish a freer, more just society would fall prey to merely creating new ideologies.

These four elements of the new radical intellectuals and the movements they have influenced are in direct contradiction to the *rational radicalism* that we implicitly espouse here. On our reading, there is not only a theoretical but also a deeply *political* difference between what these theorists search for and the Enlightenment-inspired radical view of a social order marked by solidarity around common goods, civic virtue oriented toward the defense of the public welfare, well-ordered political institutions with public purpose as their aim, constitutionalism that secures individual as well as economic rights, and the democratization of social and economic life as basic criteria for social justice. The alternative move, marked by identity politics, anti-statism, direct and participatory democracy, and neo-anarchism, has succeeded in fragmenting and marginalizing left movements and politics. Perhaps even worse, these “new movements” lack any real constituency, have scarcely any concrete political demands, and are purposefully self-alienated from the levers of real power and policy.[22]

As a result, a real, politically consequential left has withered. The political culture of western democracies are marked more by a general value-consensus around liberal-capitalism than any time since the late 1950s. Movements that once saw the true mechanisms of politics – the need to influence parties, to push for legislative reform, to insist on the expansion of the democratization of economic and political institutions, to forge ideologies that were rooted in national culture – have simply disappeared. Nietzsche’s insistence that aesthetics replace the political has now become manifest in this new radicalism. Now, so-called academic “radicals” can be seen to have betrayed politics: they dismiss the reality of the political process and instead call for an obscure and abstract “resistance.” Perhaps the basic thesis can be laid out that where there is no strong labor movement, there can be no robust left politics, and even less relevant left political theory.

But whatever the explanation for the increased irrationalism of current left theory, we believe that these intellectuals should be held accountable for the ideas they promulgate. Staggering is the extent to which these radical mandarins self-confidently strut their stuff, even as political defeats mount for leftist politics[pullquote]Staggering is the extent to which these radical mandarins self-confidently strut their stuff, even as political defeats mount for leftist politics . . . [/pullquote] with the increasing victory of "right to work" legislation, the dismantling of environmental protections, the increased power of corporate interests, and an expanding wealth and income divide. We take seriously the notion that there is a responsibility for intellectuals to debate and critique ideas that have public consequence; the effect of these thinkers and their ideas on the left we see as a primary concern. As Christopher Lasch once remarked, "Cultural radicalism has become so fashionable, and so pernicious in the support it unwittingly provides for the status quo, that any criticism of contemporary society that hopes to get beneath the surface has to criticize, at the same time, much of what currently goes under the name of radicalism."[23]

With this in mind, reviving the tradition of rational progressive politics can be saved only once these new radicals and their approaches have been interrogated and critiqued. Confronting the fashionable nonsense of the present requires that these their ideas be scrutinized against the more rationalist claims that have given shape to radical and critical thought since the Enlightenment, not to mention the common sense that the thinkers we address have sought to evade. We believe that the success of these thinkers and ideas marks a real and disturbing departure from the more rationalist, more realist understanding of progressive and radical politics that marked the more successful movements of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century.

Indeed, one of the more recent fruits of this new radical theory has been the renewed interest in Marxism by so called "millennial Marxists" and their associated publications, like *Jacobin, n+1*, and others. They put forth no new body of theoretical arguments but seek a rediscovery of Marxism and class politics. But Even this relatively modest claim to fame cannot be further from the truth. An undeserved self-confidence and moral self-righteousness abound while concrete political analysis vanishes. To be sure, this new trend is scarecely more than a pseudo-radicalism with no real politics in view rendering its pursuits shallow and bereft of critical content. Far from opposing the trends of the culture industry and its very technique of commodifying culture and thought, their efforts are merely its expression. Radicalism now acts as a cultural tag, a new identity, at best a means to vent moral rage without genuine political acuity. In a mesmerizing sleight of hand, these new "radicals" have turned the discourse of Marxism and other figures of a past radicalism that once nourished organic labor and social movements against the realities of exploitation and human debasement into limp caricatures.

This is partly the result of the very cultural expressions of class that is typical of the new urbanism and the new inequality. Rather than some organized relation between a labor movement and a broader political and cultural left – one that shared vision of socialist and or at least radical social democratic principles and social formations – we now see the formation of the left as a cultural community devoid of class interests and concerns. It is precisely when

radical theory is not renewed for the ends of contemporary critique that it becomes a reified fad – a museum piece for an elite. These "millennial Marxists" have done little more than debase left political discourse, dumb down cultural critique, and turn the traditions of the left into an intellectual smorgasbord. Radical Politics now once again becomes what Tom Wolfe rightly called "radical chic" – but now re-tooled for the new-urban hipster. Contemporary conservatives and moderates now have ample cause to revive this charge. The new radicals reject the hard-work of confronting the present, have nothing positive to present as a political agenda, and instead render esotericism into a "hip" virtue.

In many ways this is the very product of the system they shallowly critique. The class basis of the new radicalism no longer sounds in key with working people; no longer is it the expression of organic intellectuals. With no movement to attach to, no working class politics to inform their political sensibilities, theory becomes a fetish. Exploitation and domination are real problems, but the words lose their meaning if they are not attached to concrete referents. This is a disservice to the exploited and dominated. It is to place them – as Bertolt Brecht wrote at the conclusion of the film version of his *Threepenny Opera* – back in the dark. They retain their ignominious invisibility. Radical theory should illuminate present social relations. Sadly, millennial Marxists only fetishize it. This purported revival of Marxian politics is not a revolt by the generations raised during the conservative Reagan revolution and economic complacency of the Clinton-era's credit economy. Their Marxism is the product of the sensibilities cultivated by late capitalism. It's facile and unreflective cant a mere sound-byte radicalism ready-made for and by a cultural consciousness mauled by Facebook and Twitter.

The thinkers we have mentioned and their ideas have had a disintegrating effect on the nature of progressive politics the critique of which ought to lead us toward a more lucid, more compelling account of what progressive political and social criticism ought to be able to achieve. The basic purpose of this effort should be to indict a style of theory and thinking that has become so esoteric and self-referential that it has divorced itself from the historic concerns of progressive politics: from remedying inequality, confronting forces eroding our public goods, or challenging the entrenched power of political and economic elites. Whether it is a rampant irrationalism, a rejection of any sense of realism in politics, naïve anti-statism, theories of power and oppression that have no empirical basis, or simply an incoherent, confused set of texts upon which one can project and read whatever one wants, this new radicalism has been able to seduce a generation into an understanding of politics that privileges an abstract, self-regarding "politics" over the concrete analysis of power and a politics based on the public good.

We believe that the appeal of these thinkers and ideas is symptomatic of a crisis in progressive politics – a crisis that cannot be simply solved. We hope that a new self-critique of the left by the left can lead to a more rationally informed, more realistic account of the nature and import of real politics and radicalism's role in transforming it. Our fear is that the proliferation of these theories and the ideas that they make common will penetrate so deeply that an effective, politically relevant left will all but collapse. To renew radical political theory along rational lines will require much work, but we believe it begins with critique. With this in mind, we hope

that those who encounter these new radical mandarins will reflect more critically on the false self-confidence of their ideas and political prescriptions, and realize that another, more satisfying and productive tradition of radicalism once existed and is once again possible.

Notes

This article is adapted from the Introduction to a forthcoming book of essays edited by the authors titled The Betrayal of Politics: Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics. *(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2015).*

[1] For a discussion of this kind of renewed and expanded conception of the labor movement, see Stanley Aronowitz, *The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers' Movement*. (London: Verso, 2014), 135ff.

[2] See Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy and the Crisis of Public Authority*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969).

[3] For a discussion of the relation between the new, late capitalist form of economics and culture and consciousness, see Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 284ff.; as well as Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism.* (London: New Left Books, 1975), 500ff.

[4] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. (London: Verso, 2007), 91.

[5] Stanley Aronowitz, "Postmodernism and Politics," in Andrew Ross (ed.) *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 51.

[6] Robert Meister, *Political Identity: Thinking through Marx*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 21.

[7] Lauren Langman has shown that this can be seen as a "carnivalization" of politics where meaningful political action is displaced by escapism. See his "Alienation, Entrapment and Inauthenticity: Carnival to the Rescue." In Jerome Braun and Lauren Langman (eds.) *Alienation and the Carnivalization of Society*. (New York: Routledge, 2012): 53-75.

[8] For an excellent discussion of this problem, see Joseph M. Schwartz, "A Peculiar Blind Spot: Why did Radical Political Theory Ignore the Rampant Rise in Inequality Over the Past Thirty Years?" *New Political Science*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2013): 389-402.

[9] For an important critique of this tendency to collapse politics into culture, and its roots in the politics of the 1960s, see Stephen Eric Bronner, *Moments of Decision: Political History and*

the Crises of Radicalism. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 101ff. Also see the important discussion by Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *The Cynical Society: The Culture of Politics and the Politics of Culture in American Life*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 82ff.

[10] Aronowitz, "Postmodernism and Politics," 55.

[11] Daniel T. Rodgers has recently assessed this movement of ideas as one where "Notions of power moved out of structures and into culture. Identities became intersectional and elective. Concepts of society fragmented. Time became penetrable. Even the slogans of the culture war's conservatives were caught up in the swirl of choice." *Age of Fracture*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 12 as well as 77ff.

[12] See the important discussion by Joseph M. Schwartz, *The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America*. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 47ff.

[13] Richard Wolin remarks on this theme that "Identities shorn of substantive ethical and cultural attachments would conceivably set a new standard of immateriality. It is unlikely that fragmented selves and Bataille-inspired ecstatic communities could mobilize the requisite social cohesion to resist political evil. Here, too, the hazards and dangers of supplanting the autonomous, moral self with an 'aesthetic' self are readily apparent." *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 312.

[14] David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206.

[15] Miguel Abensour, *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 2. Critchley similarly argues on this point that "democracy as democratization is the movement of *disincarnation* that challenges the borders and questions the legitimacy of the state. Democratization is a dissensual praxis that works against the consensual horizon of the state." *Infinitely Demanding,* 119. These authors, as well as many other fellow travellers, misconstrue Marx's critique of the state which was actually the critique of the *bourgeois incarnation of the state* expressing capitalist interests. As Terry Eagleton correctly points out: "The state as an administrative body would live on. It is the state as an instrument of violence that Marx hopes to see the back of. As he puts it in the *Communist Manifesto*, public power under communism would lose its political character. Against the anarchists of his day, Marx insists that only in this sense would the state vanish from view. What had to go was a particular kind of power, one that underpinned the rule of a dominant social class over the rest of society. National parks and driving test centers would remain." *Why Marx Was Right*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 197.

[16] This view of violence has an old pedigree. It appears in the writings of revolutionaries ranging from Robespierre to Trotsky. Contemporary defenders of "left-wing" violence, such as, Žižek, Badiou, and others often turn to Walter Benjamin's essay "Critique of Violence," in his *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. (New York: Shocken Books, 1986),

277-300.

[17] Note, for example, the two volumes seeking to revive the idea of communism, Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (eds.) *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010) and Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou (eds.) *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference* (London: Verso, 2013) as well as volumes published in Verso's *Pocket Communism* and *Revolutionaries* book series.

[18] Badiou's recourse to mathematics has been the subject of an insightful attack: "Alain Badiou calls himself a Platonist and proclaims the revolutionary political power of his philosophy of numbers. But insofar as his mathematical ontology disguises the contingent in robes of necessity, it can only diminish our freedom. We can embrace the politics if we so wish. But we should not confuse this choice with mathematics, nor can we call it philosophy." Ricardo L. Nirenberg and David Nirenberg, "Badiou's Number: A Critique of Mathematics as Ontology." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37 (2011): 583-614, 612.

[19] This is the title of a work by the influential historian Joan Scott. The notion that history only reveals contradictions, paradoxes, incoherencies, etc. has had a powerful impact on historians, particularly working on issues of gender, race, and decolonization. Three historians have objected that "The implication is that the historian does not in fact capture the past in faithful fashion but rather, like the novelist, gives the appearance of doing so. We this version of postmodernism applied to history, the search for truths about the past would be displaced by the self-reflexive analysis of historians' ways of fictively producing convincing 'truth-effects.'" Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 227.

[20] This conception of ideology has nothing to do with the traditional Marxist theory of ideology and, indeed, is a repudiation of it.

[21] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso Books, 1989), 48.

[22] Robert Meister correctly notes about these new movements that each "conspicuously lacks either an epistemological vision, a political majority, structural leverage, or a historical trajectory – and often it lacks one of another combination of these." *Political Identity*, 25.

[23] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), xv-xvi.

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After Ferguson: Notes on Oppression

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"It is common, indeed usual, to be uncertain of a boundary but quite certain of what lies well to the east or west of it."

– *Walter Stein*

Oppression

"Oppression," according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is: "the action of exercising arbitrary or cruel power: *A system of oppression.*" (Italics added) Two corollaries of this definition are noteworthy. First, and crucially, "oppression" is not a subjective condition: people may live under a system of oppression and not notice or accommodate to it; this is not uncommon. To paraphrase: "you may not be interested in the system, but the system is interested in you."

In the United States the system of oppression is founded on a political settlement that cedes some local power to black persons as such but no share of sovereign power (as the powerlessness of President Obama to effect significant changes in racial hierarchy, or even to speak about it, makes clear); indeed even deliberately excluding them from the basic right to vote via felon disenfranchisement and newly invented "voter identification" laws that return to the Pre-Civil Rights era. In addition, black persons function within an economic structure that purposefully relegates an inordinate proportion of them to an underclass, a "reserve army of labor"; a social structure that preserves stigmata and stereotypes for black persons at all levels of the social order (hence the offence of "driving while black," of shopping in an upscale department store, or of being on foot in the "wrong" neighborhood); and above all, a separate and unequal system of criminal justice and civil procedure that ensures the perpetuation of the system under a patina of "fairness" and "due process."

This is the core structure of systematic injustice – true of all colonialism and all entrenched or informal systems of apartheid[1] – that keeps the master/servant relationship in place over all. As to the latter phrase, a simple reality check is in order: how many black families do we know of that have white domestic servants? Beyond that homely example, we can note the second corollary of the definition: some persons – e.g., American White supremacists, or members of the New York Police Department may declare that they are "oppressed" when that is manifestly not the case.

Indeed, outside perhaps of post-colonial Rhodesia it is hard to think of an instance in human history of a master-servant relationship that reverses the order of affairs: that is,

institutionalizes blacks “oppressing” whites, or for that matter of any white minority being oppressed by anybody non-white.[2] Black persons in this society, certainly, do not exercise power over others because they don’t have any; of course some of them engage in violent behavior, and sometimes on a racial basis, but that isn’t close to oppression. In fact, oppression is often marked mainly by *non-violence*, as Marx and Engels pointed out in explaining why workers keep going back to exploitative jobs day after day.[3]

It is necessary to emphasize this point because of the rhetoric about policemen or black business owners being “oppressed” that flourished during the morality play of Ferguson or the protests in New York City. The wielders of the baton pleading victimization because two of their number were murdered is a rhetoric that deliberately turns white into black, ocean into sky, in order to obscure the obvious and ugly truths of a social order constructed on a base of racial hierarchy, as well as to put themselves above all constraint or discipline. But then whatever else they do – much of which is essential and some of which is done very well – the police as an institution are the lynchpin of that order (and of the class/gender structure when push comes to shove), and they do that job very well. That many individual officers fill that role as honorably as is possible cannot make up for the real position they occupy. Once upon a time, indeed, police forces in many Southern cities, not to mention Los Angeles, were infiltrated or even controlled by members of the Klan; that time is presumably past, but the virulence of the NYPD toward peaceful protesters even before two of its number were allegedly assaulted, and the outbreak of hatred among them after the unrelated assassination of two officers in Brooklyn, speak volumes; as does the fact that they chose this moment to turn their backs on an elected mayor instead of seizing the opportunity to make the case for gun control that is in their true interest as law enforcers in a violent society. Their role as the neutral, incorruptible upholders of social peace and moral values exists only in the fantasy land of television. When they effectively go on strike or a slowdown, as was happening in New York City at the moment of this writing, the true order of things is revealed: no one can break their strike, or their demonstration, for they themselves, when class struggle breaks out, are the strikebreakers of choice.

There is a more general point here. Often groups claim “oppression” or “victimization” because of not being allowed to force others to do their will; as Mill put it, this is “the most monstrous doctrine” of all. The Taliban and ISIS are the most virulent exponents of that doctrine on the contemporary scene, but it is true of the proponents of any regime, large or small, religious or nationalist, that protests resistance to its unilateral demands. The desire to achieve or maintain power over others is the will to power – to tyranny – nothing less; it is not rebellion or self-defense.

Not everyone who claims victim status is actually a victim; as Walter Stein indicates, the distance from a supposedly ambiguous boundary is usually quite clear; victimhood is not a subjective status.[4]

The American South, for example, was a tyranny prior to Civil War, at the worst being denied the right to enslave and thus oppress others – which cannot be a right, but only a monstrous

wrong. (As Rousseau suggested, anyone who thinks otherwise is not worth talking to.) The political system in historical fact was dominated by the South, as the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas-Nebraska Act , and the Fugitive Slave Law made clear. Losing an economic struggle, such as over tariffs, or taxation levels, is not being oppressed. “Losing” and “being a victim” are not necessarily synonymous, at least in a system where everyone has the right to vote. The wealthy, for example, despite the extraordinary existence of those among them who claim to be victims of a Nazi-like or Communist Regime, are under no circumstance discriminated-against victims because of taxation; or if they are, so are all their workers by virtue of the very laws that enforce the specific rules of private property in wealth-producing activities. Anyone can be wealthy, and anyone can not be; they are not a caste. Oppression, per the Dictionary, would be a system that excludes the wealthy from equal citizenship. Since most legislation in any nation was passed at their behest, and most parliamentary systems set up to, among other things, protect their wealth, the claim of being oppressed is a bad joke.

Violence

Not only oppression is sometimes mistakenly conceptualized as though it has ambiguous dimensions. For many observers watching from distant sidelines, the demonstrations and riots that recur whenever the deep structures of injustice and inequality are momentarily but unequivocally illuminated, as in Ferguson, seem to pose a problem of moral complexity. However, to assert the truism that “right” and “wrong” exist “on both sides” is far different from claiming that as a “side” the oppressors are in any degree “right,” or the oppressed in principle “wrong.” Mass conflict is always bloody, even when on a small scale, as in so-called “race riots,” and certainly during anti-colonial uprisings, as in any war; but the fact of oppression is not somehow made less intolerable by the bad behavior of the oppressed.[5] Undoubtedly, in the end many rebellions or revolutions may go terribly wrong, but we want never to forget that “war crimes,” or its domestic equivalents, is a rubric existing only to describe the losers.

The same caveat applies to “terrorism.” “Terrorist,” like “subversive” is an epithet, a way of casting an anathema on its subjects. It is designed to foreclose consideration and analysis of an event, rather than discussion and debate about it; to foreclose any possible ambiguity about who is “right” or “wrong.” As I’ve noted above, sometimes we apply it, without too much distortion, to the actions of those who attempt to wreak their will on others, and punish those who resist *them*. But very often it stems from the delusion of oppressors that they are merely defending themselves. However, many frames within which “terrorism” occurs are two-sided conflicts, civil or supra-national wars. In these, “terrorism” is a word which the strong use to define the resistance of the weak, calling what they do themselves “self-defense” or “enforcing the law,” as though “law” was the positive acts of any regime, however one-sided, brutal or corrupt.

So, for example, simply to call Hamas (or even Hezbollah) “terrorist”, without further elaboration, covers up the true nature of the conflict over Palestine. “Terrorism” is most often defined as the intentional targeting of civilians by non-state actors, but that misses the point.

To return to Walter Stein's epigram, he was arguing that nuclear weapons, delivered from far away or on high, abolish the combatant/non-combatant distinction that is crucial to the idea of "Just Wars." Today, however forces such as Hamas and Hezbollah, opposing oppression in what used to be guerilla warfare–that is, lacking the wherewithal to engage in sustained ground combat – have at their disposal an array of weapons that enables them to cross over what used to be at least a spatial gap that helped maintain the distinction. Now state actors meet non-state actors on a battlefield so expanded, and so horrific, that the distinction is obliterated. This fact is recognized in international practice. We need only think of the FLN, a non-state actor which practiced violence on a much larger and more violent scale, and yet produced a new state that however unstable and corrupt is now recognized as "legitimate" by the nations of the world. Precisely what the objection is or was to the methods of resistance practiced by these various actors can be stated without the loaded word that tells us nothing about who is actually doing what, on either side.

As well, invoking "innocent civilians" commits us to a loaded language which forces much worse actions into the narrow framework of "terror." If 9/11 was "terrorism," than what were Dresden, or the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? In fact, these were the mass slaughter of civilians, that is their rightful name. Violence is what it is. American white colonizers engaged in acts of conquest, Native Americans in acts of resistance: not "terror."[6] How one judges those acts is formally independent of but actually dependent on one's judgment of the conflicts themselves, and – as we have seen time and again – their historical outcomes. These judgments are totally context-dependent. On the whole, though, the spokesperson for a state that commits multiple assassinations – along with their "collateral damage" – via unarmed and thus invulnerable drones should be careful how it addresses the "terrorism" of others. In the end, the nature of a revolt is determined by the nature of the cause – a "long train of abuses" – and the response of the oppressors, not some inexplicable savagery of the rebels.[7]

So for example opposition to the War in Vietnam was not lessened by the knowledge that the forces of the North were often purely murderous. As Machiavelli insisted, the moral categories we apply to conflicts between individuals are not decisive in the realm of states and history. We can see the result of this confusion in someone like Camus, the dedicated anti-colonial activist turned pacifist, who when the choices became stark could not bring himself to oppose French oppression and torture in Algeria: discovering moral complexity where there was none, and so falling silent at the very moment when speech was demanded. There was and is no moral complexity, though, because however we define the moral issue, it is sadly subsidiary to the overarching existence of a gross imbalance between power and justice, and as long as that imbalance remains, so too does the starkness of the choice remain. To make our assessment of the overthrow of injustice depend on the behavior of the oppressed in any degree is to stand with the status quo; to counsel suffering in silence. As with Camus, the humanist position on violence retreats from any meaningful concept of justice. But notions of "justice" aside, ultimately, and more decisively, the intellectual failure here is the refusal to see the armed state as the source of violence: its own organized violence that exists to protect those on one side of the boundary.

Therefore the *bien-pensant* condemnation of "violence" is never complete or truly genuine, since the official violence of the authorities, even when deadly, goes seriously unpunished; whereas for social outsiders the rules place even the protection of property above the lives of persons. Lenin's dictum is reversed: a gun in the hands of a policeman is an instrument of "justice," a gun in the hands of a proletarian – in the U.S. a black man – is an instrument of criminality until proven otherwise – this is the unstated belief behind the popular success of the National Rifle Association's campaign against gun control, which aims to turn every (white) citizen into an armed outpost of the State, leaving only black men outside it, for whom violent crime and rebellion are perceived by many white persons, especially within the N.R.A., as indistinguishable. Whereas if a black man is killed by a white policeman – or even a mere vigilante, as George Zimmerman; or a group of thugs with badges, as in the case of Errol Garner – that is perfectly acceptable; the same is true of the numerous border killings of so-called "illegal" (that is, undocumented) immigrants. Nowadays this race-inflected love affair with armed violence passes unnoticed (think of the addictive video games in which heavily armed American troops try to destroy un-American looking aliens), as though it is merely a recognizable aspect of the national character, or of Southwestern culture. As to the overall relationship between violence and race, though, the surest indication of its reality is the extent to which black police officers are afraid to be in plainclothes when in the presence of their white counterparts.[8]

In any event, where the means of destruction are as one-sided as they are in Missouri, or the United States, the notion of "both sides" exists mainly to exculpate the oppressors, or to ease the putative guilt of bystanders for doing nothing; in common discourse it is invariably applied to the actions of the oppressed. The disengaged critic of violence feels good at having discharged a moral duty, but this option is not open to those engaged in rebellion. Since peaceful protest is always met by either contempt (often disguised as useless sympathy, the formation of commissions etc.) or repression, the next step is either escalation or surrender. It is also for this reason of general disengagement that police actions resulting in homicide rarely fall under the headings of "crime" in the annual reports; if collated at all, it is as though they were something else, and it is difficult even to be sure of their number, except to say that they are seriously undercounted. George Orwell's famous description of "Shooting an Elephant." encapsulates the linguistic fallacy at work here. Orwell knew full well, as his tone makes clear, that the outcome of the event only seemed morally ambiguous because he was a legitimate agent of colonialism; in reality there was no ambiguity at all: he was shooting an elephant. Legitimate crime, that is, isn't "crime," official violence isn't violence.

This is known to everyone who lives under the heel of the oppressor. The black woman who said during the riots in Ferguson that she tells her children never to call 911 when in trouble, but to call a friend or neighbor instead, because they themselves will be the ones punished by the police, was expressing this knowledge. It is why the "irrational" behavior of black men during an arrest or questioning, such as Michael Brown allegedly charging at Officer Wilson, is never really irrational, but is an expression of their understanding of the absolute fact that guilty or innocent the white police are out to hurt them, and will do so up to any extent they can get away with.

What has happened in this eruption turned into a morality tale is that history has been removed from the realm of the observable, which thus has no causes and therefore no effects. Disembodied and outside of time, the actors in what is treated as a momentary occurrence engage in what is described as merely unjustifiable behavior; or, with more understanding, as a non-verbal form of communication s kind of "language of the unheard," (in Martin Luther King's words) – which will in any event be ignored except to form a commission. But they are more than that; they are rebellious attacks on a power structure that is suddenly vulnerable. With regard to concrete policy, then, they may be deemed irrelevant. But this interpretation serves to diminish their purpose and their meaning: they are rebellions, and should be seen as such: like a revolution, though on a much lesser scale, a rebellion "is not a tea party."[9] Whether street demonstrations in Ferguson or rocket attacks by Hamas, they are the response of the dispossessed to their dispossession; the revolutions of those in no position to make a revolution.

As to the means of rebellion, of resistance, those of us who benefit from or have otherwise accommodated to what is an oppressive regime for others, can have no first-hand experience of oppression unless we have made a conscious effort to immerse ourselves in it. To be sure, the question of means is a moral one, subject to ethical questioning – would I push the Fat Man off the bridge to save the children? torture the kidnapper to find the hostage? – but it is primarily existential. In the case of oppression you are either in it or not. As demonstrated in the early writings of Camus, who came close to the immersive experience by making himself into an intimate observer and listener, it is possible for an outsider to be thus possessed of authentic knowledge. Journalists can do this, aid workers, volunteers, but sideline observers know nothing of the experience of oppression.

Nor do the actions of the oppressed themselves give any clue as to what might be an "appropriate" response. Quiescence, submission, non-resistance, non-violent resistance, violent resistance, revolution, are all on the same moral ground. They arise out of the experience and from nothing else; that accommodation is the most accessible and least disturbing response is beside the point. Conversely, as personal character varies to the fullest possible extent in every organized group of humans, from saint to serial killer, there will be those whose acts of violent resistance will go beyond the pale into the inhumane, and can be criticized as such – but only if the critic remembers that hideous acts of violence have been engaged in by soldiers, police, mercenaries, and so on from his own human group; and that their appearance does not in any way implicate the movement, if there is one, as a whole; any more than the bombing of Dresden suggests that the US should not have participated in WWII. Otherwise, though, Gandhi is no more authentic, no more virtuous, no more historically progressive than Subhas Chandra Bose.

Thus this is a debate that rightly takes place among those who must rebel; outsiders such as myself have nothing to contribute to it except well-intentioned advice; the colonizers know nothing of what it is like to live in a world you never made. So the question is not what violence is or is not "legitimate," because that concept pertains only to the State; who else can decide? But if the state itself is oppressive or sustains oppression institutions, it is not up to Israelis to

lecture Palestinians, or whites in the U.S. to lecture blacks about their moral standing; as the history of the civil rights movement demonstrates over and over, Black people are perfectly capable of doing that themselves. White people, per contra, have to remind themselves every day that their own life of privilege – at least for those of us who live such a life – is built on a foundation that has the never-disappearing past of slavery as its everyday cement. Most days we forget this; it is necessary that we be reminded.

Of course white persons without any degree of privilege but their whiteness, or masculinity, regularly transfer their grievances to the most immediately visible of those who confront them directly (what Jean Jaurès, speaking of anti-Semitism, called "the socialism of fools"). "gain, this is to some extent understandable. White rage (deepened in its rhetoric at least by the existence of the internet) as in response to Ferguson recognizes that a symbolic and yet also very real relationship has been repudiated by the protesters, who are demanding that the existing structure of opportunity and of moral authority be upended, and replaced by a new system defined by time and place as an extension of "equality.' On the other hand, we must remember that those who actually contrive the concepts and interpretations that legitimize this inchoate construct are not the poor or marginalized, but persons like myself: the (mostly white male) persons of language and communicative skills who control the institutions that make and remake "public opinion." Moreover, we must also keep in mind the couplet that tells us "Cet animal est très méchant/Quand on l'attaque, il se défend." ("This animal is very wicked/It bites the foot that tries to kick it."). Those who rebel do so because they are *always* under attack.

Crime

Just like the standard notion of "violence," the way most of us conceptualize "crime" and "the criminal" is among other things an effect of the distorted outcome produced by the system of oppression. To take a salient example ripped from the headlines, grand juries (as anyone who has served on one will be aware) will indict any black person (even were he "a ham sandwich") charged with the non-violent crimes for which most felony arrests of black people are made; while exonerating, as we have seen, the white killers of black persons. Their members will tell themselves, if they search for any understanding of their own behavior, that this is just the charge that the legal system has given them, as well as being the unfortunately necessary outcome of the demography of crime. Last year (2013) indeed, there were by one official count 2,645 "homicides" by black people, some of them probably justifiable, and a minuscule amount compared to the number of drug possession "crimes" committed by them (or arrests for no crime at all); this was about ten times as many as homicides committed by whites.

Responsibility for this discrepancy is often held to be the nature of "Black culture" (a misuse of the term "culture," since the criminogenic neighborhoods of the "inner cites" consist of what are better referred to as "subcultures"). But it is not any "culture" that produces the relatively inordinate degree of violent crime; it is the system (or, if you will, the "culture") of racial oppression: as is similarly the case in any society anywhere in the modernized world, where

violent crime is primarily a behavior engaged in by unemployed or poorly employed young men with low expectations – or, as in the incarceration-fixated U.S., by men who have been confirmed in their criminality, such as it may or may not have been, by lengthy and desocializing prison sentences.

It is also the case that the poor commit crimes mostly against each other, that is in their own worlds: that is part of the class structure in such societies. In the United States, not uniquely but to a greater extent than elsewhere, class and race destructively intersect. That outcome is the product of what the criminologist Edwin Sutherland called "differential association." It will stop operating in the ways to which we have become accustomed only when the conditions that produce it are eliminated. This can only done by the oppressors themselves, since all the "legitimate" power and authority are on their side; Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi to the contrary, that change can never be achieved by the oppressed, though as King proclaimed they can attempt to induce a more egalitarian sentiment in their oppressors–by, as he perfectly well knew, *subjecting themselves to violence.* But that is ultimately the only non-violent remedy for systematic oppression.

Law

Inter Armas Silent Leges

The founding of every nation-state consists of a huge sweeping under the rug of what used to be violence, turned into law as a settlement of conflict. However, it is essential to distinguish the Rule of Law from what is colloquially known as "Law and Order," for the latter is in most of its usages the ideology of repression. The Rule of Law, as Rousseau succinctly put it, is that "power shall never be great enough for violence, and shall always be exercised by virtue of rank and law…" (*The Social Contract*, Bk. II, Ch. 11, trans. G.D.H. Cole).[10] That is, no one outside the legitimate authority exercises effective power, and the wielders of that authority follow only just procedures. Thus for example there is no rule of law in Israel today, as, e.g., the State responds to encroachments on the rights of Palestinians by retroactively or prospectively authorizing them. In the United States, similarly, the worst offenders against the Rule of Law are the forces of law and order, namely the police who traduce the law in order to produce "order." Crime by citizens is random and human (except in times of rebellion, or when criminal organizations outpass the state, as in contemporary Mexico, Afghanistan, or Pakistan) ; crime by the police, no matter what its justification, is systemic and thus strikes at the heart of the Rule of Law: it sets law against The Law.

It is for this reason that we often say, tritely but truly, better one hundred guilty men go free than that one innocent man be convicted. The former number might herald a breakdown in "law and order," the latter almost certainly entails a breakdown in the Rule of Law, since it could not ordinarily happen except at the behest of the authorities: illegality committed in the name of legality. Police corruption, militarization, prosecutorial overzealousness, lying and falsification of evidence in criminal proceedings, all in the name of "law and order," undermine

the Rule of Law. Contravening Plato's prescription that the "auxiliaries" must be under civilian control, the police become an occupying army out of all effective control in various locales. (Where there is widespread civil conflict, as in Israel and its Bantustan in Gaza, or a police state that needs to be maintained, as in Franco's Spain, this will also be true of the authorized military forces as well.) In a society divided by the perceived hostilities of class, or race, nationality, or religion, "order" is maintained precisely by not following the rules of due process.

No doubt breakdowns in law and order or what are perceived to be such breakdowns, often at the contrivance of sensationalizing media in collaboration with the authorities,[11] really do occur, as for example in New York City or Chicago during the 70's. But such breakdowns in law and order usually indicate some underlying condition. In the US, for example, violence has always existed at a much higher level than elsewhere for reasons both historical and social (e.g., the forcible expansion of the United States over an inhabited Continent; the development of a heartless capitalism that tolerates conditions of mass disenfranchisement, poverty, etc.) If there were no black persons it would still be the most violent of advanced industrial societies, with the possible exception of contemporary China. And as to violent crime, beyond the historical reasons addressed above, one further, contemporary source of *lethal* violence is the withdrawal of the primary requirement of law and order, not to mention the Rule of Law, from the State: and its cession, as the institutionalization of lawlessness, to the N.R.A., not to mention the pushers of the truly terrifying world of video games. In sum, the "culture" of white people is the problem; only our transformation as a people, our repudiation of lawlessness, can be the solution.

Notes

[1] Ordinarily, "colonialism" refers to the conquest of and continued domain over an indigenous population by an alien power, an invader. Thus in North America the relationship of whites to Native Americans was and still is one of colonizers to colonized, though now modified in practice by the fertile use of sovereignty and treaties by various recognized tribes. Israel, too, has become a colonial (though Israeli Jews are hardly alien) state ruling over a colonized people; and a system of "apartheid" as well. "s for the U.S. slavery was obviously not any version of colonialism; informal and incomplete "apartheid" or apartheid-like is the proper term for the American racial system. On its appropriateness, see the definitive account of Douglas S. Massey and Nancy ". Denton, *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of an underclass* (Harvard Press, 1993). Their account has hardly lost its currency, and in some ways, such as the attack on voting rights, the situation is even worse than it was two decades ago. See also Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s* (Psychology Press, 1986; rev. 1994).

[2] A peculiarity of the American discussion of race, and thus also of this essay, is that no one knows quite what to do with the category of Asian-Americans, who though once a population of

the oppressed, and still often the victims of discrimination, are in no meaningful way any longer to be counted as "oppressed," even though "non-White."

[3] _ In fact there might well be less violence in a pure police state than in a liberal one.

[4] _ See Alyson M. Cole on *The Cult of True Victimhood* (Stanford University Press, 2007), for a definitive discussion of the American scene.

[5] _ Here and throughout I use the word "race" with tongue firmly in cheek. There are no meaningful "races" in the ordinary, every-day use of the term, but it would simply be too convoluted to be constantly explaining what per-cent of DNA, or blood type, etc., is shared by persons with different apparent skin-color; and to what extent intersexuality, voluntary or forced, renders the entire notion of "race" otiose.

[6] _ See Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream: Fact and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (Metropolitan Books, 2007).

[7] _ The depredations of Native Americans aside, we do well here to remember the savagery of much rebel behavior (often conveniently forgotten) against Loyalists during the American Revolution; and even more, the decision of Lincoln and Grant to take advantage of the North's numerical superiority by deliberately engaging the tit-for-tat slaughter of massed troops during the American Civil War.

[8] _ Marginal persons are always at one time or another, in one nation or another, the subjects of police victimization. Over time, however, the salience of marginality for treatment by the police changes. The homeless and sex workers, e.g., are still regular victims, whereas the relative position of homosexuals has improved, and white ethnic groups have all become satisfactorily "white." Presently, the mentally disabled, as well as immigrants of the wrong color are probably as likely to suffer official violence as are black persons,. Here I am concerned specifically with sanctioned violence that is associated with structured group inequality.

[9] _ On this point, see Josh Clover, "Pop and Circumstances," in *The Nation* of December 29, 2014.

[10] _ An obvious objection that the Rule of Law as I've defined it (or Rousseau) is that on the surface it is neutral among different types of regime, all of which may be based on some type of social injustice – class rule, as an instance. But even the forces of revolution usually promise to replace the old with a better version of the New – a new Rule of Law (see Engel's critique of "workers control of industry," for example). The promise may be empty, but only the kind of anarchism that has disappeared in the New Modern Era makes no promise of Law at all.

[11] _ The definitive account of this process is still Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the crisis*: *mugging, the state*, *and law and order* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1978).

Oil Militancy, Islamist Insurgency, and Nigeria's Crisis of State Legitimacy

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As Nigeria grapples with the terrorist campaign of Boko Haram, perennial political crisis rooted in a fragile consensus among the political elite, and escalating corruption, it is easy to miss the ways in which these conjoined crises map onto older fissures and problems that continue to manifest in present dysfunction. The narrative of this deepening dysfunction now explicitly invokes the possibility of Nigeria's disintegration.

Today, two insurgencies, one seemingly in remission in the oil-producing Niger Delta region, the other an Islamist terrorist campaign in the Northeast, represent the face of this existential threat to Nigeria. This essay is an attempt to enunciate the threat posed by these two centrifugal forces and to situate them in an older theme: the legitimacy deficit of the Nigerian state.

Deformed From Birth?

Modern Nigeria emerged through the merging of two British colonial territories in 1914. The amalgamation was an act of colonial fiscal and cartographic convenience. It occurred mainly because British colonizers desired a contiguous colonial territory stretching from the arid Sahel to the Atlantic Coast, and because Northern Nigeria, one of the merging units, was not paying its way while Southern Nigeria, the other British colony, generated revenue in excess of its administrative expenses. Having one big colony instead of two smaller ones would enable the buoyant section to subsidize the fiscally challenged one.

The amalgamation made little sense otherwise and has often been invoked by Nigerians as the foundation of the rancorous relationship between the two regions of Nigeria. A prominent Southwestern Nigerian leader, Obafemi Awolowo, had set the tone of questioning the existential legitimacy of the Nigerian state when he declared in 1947 that Nigeria "is a mere geographical expression."[1] Six years later, his rival in the tumultuous politics of pre-independence Nigeria and leader of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), Ahmadu Bello, enunciated this theme of the Nigerian state as a colonial fiction. In a fit of frustration at burgeoning inter-regional and interethnic bickering during one of several pre-independence constitutional conferences in 1953, he declared that the "mistake of 1914 has come to light," that the arbitrary colonial business of Nigeria's founding had returned to haunt the effort to transition colonial Nigeria into a postcolonial nation-state.[2]

The Nation and its Fragments

This subtitle is taken from Partha Chatterjee's book of the same title.[3] I have invoked it here to give graphic textual expression to the fragmentation of Nigeria along multiple fault lines. These fissures divide Nigerians across and within constitutionally recognized zones. They constitute the foundations upon which political rivalries are fought out, the platforms on which claims and counterclaims on the nation and its destiny are articulated. It is important to outline these foundational complications.

Northern Nigeria, now broken into several states and three geopolitical blocs, is a Muslim-majority region. The northwestern and much of the northeastern zones were the center of a precolonial Islamic empire called the Sokoto Caliphate, and its Muslim populations, especially those whose ancestors had been part of the caliphate, generally look to the Middle East and the wider Muslim world for solidarity and sociopolitical example. Governed in colonial times as part of the British Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, central Nigeria or the Middle Belt, which now comprises of several states, has at least three states in which Christians are in the majority and three others in which Muslims are either the majority or the population is split evenly between Muslims on one hand and Christians and traditionalists on the other.

To compound these fissures, there is a bewildering plurality of ethnicity, language, and culture, making mutual political intelligibility difficult. The role of the Hausa language as a regional lingua franca is not as paradigmatic as uninformed observers have asserted given that in at least three states in the North-central constitutional geopolitical zone Hausa is spoken and understood only by a tiny minority of citizens. Divergences in these identity markers beget differences in political, economic, and symbolic aspirations, making the concept of a northern Nigerian political imagination so fetishized in Southern Nigerian political narratives untenable or difficult to sustain.

The South, an ethnically diverse region now containing many states and three constitutional geopolitical units, is largely Christian. However, its Southwestern zone is almost evenly split between Muslims and Christians, a factor that, although not as politically consequential as the religious divide in the North, disturbs the popular, regularly recycled bromide of a Muslim North and a Christian South. The major sociopolitical influences in the South are Western and traditional African, and a clear orientation towards Atlantic cultural connections of both the precolonial and colonial genres persists.

These differences have been a source of political disagreements and suspicions between and within the two sections of Nigeria since colonial times. More importantly, they have resulted in a bifurcated national project in which two broad aspirations animated by Eastern and Western modernist solidarities and inclinations contend for political ascendance — and in which multiple minority political and religious imaginations contest perceived regional hegemonies. This fractious political picture is a source of tension, suspicion, and zero-sum conceptions of political negotiations. The two existential challenges analyzed below feed into and off of these preexisting fragmented visions.

Oil in Remission

In the Boko Haram era, the contention that there is another equally potent threat to Nigeria appears misplaced. But in chronological terms, Boko Haram followed the convulsions of a restive Southern Nigerian oil-producing region with the capacity and determination to undermine the oil economy, the lubricating mainstay of Nigerian nationhood. Beginning in the early 1990s, militancy in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta has festered and expanded over the last two decades, gradually eroding Nigeria's revenue earning capacity.[4]

This militancy is now in remission but only because of massive payouts to former militant leaders, patronage gestures such as allowances and scholarship awards to former oil insurgents, and because a Goodluck Jonathan, a member of one of the Niger Delta's ethnic groups, is the incumbent president. Former militants have temporarily relocated from their bases in creeks to urban centers and have made a public show of giving up their weapons.

In spite of this seemingly successful effort to rehabilitate the militants of the Niger Delta, it is not difficult to see that the threat of a new oil revolt lurks, that the fundamental problems and contradictions of an extractive economy remains, and that the threat posed by the nexus of rapid oil exploration and poverty is merely in remission, waiting for an opportune moment of triggering events.

The metaphor of remission also applies to the finitude of Nigeria's onshore and offshore crude oil reserves. The possibility of Nigeria's reserves running out is estimated to become an actuality as early as 2051.[5] A temporary boom in oil production, aided by both intensifying exploration and the suspension of production-crippling militancy, has put the narrative of a Nigeria without oil in remission for now. But this narrative will return if militancy resumes and if reserves begin to show signs of depletion. In the short term, before the arrival of the predicted oil doomsday, crude oil prices have fallen under the weight of overproduction, reduced consumption, and the development of alternatives to fossil fuels. The interplay between these intersecting realities portend more intense contestation over the terms of revenue distribution, over the compensatory and developmental trajectories of oil revenue allocation to the Niger Delta, and over the control of national political power and with it the allocative prerogative of governance.

In the long term, there are fundamental issues that need to be grappled with, for oil and its politics map delicately onto broader issues of national cohesion, fairness, equity, and the growing economic and social asymmetry between North and South. Previous interventions in the long running discontent and dissidence among the communities of the Niger Delta have been desperate, one-off, politically motivated acts of elite appeasement. The system of militant payoffs that exists today under the moniker of Amnesty is the latest of these ad hoc solutions. These solutions are only able to put a lid on the underlying grievances of the Niger Delta people — environmental degradation from oil spillage and oil exploration, destruction of fishing and farming, developmental neglect of the region, and an acute sense of marginality. As long as these original grievances remain and the heavy toll of oil production grows, the national fabric stands threatened.

Boko Haram and State Mortality

In 2009, the low-level, sporadically violent activities of the Boko Haram Islamist extremist group erupted into a full-blown militancy committed at different times to a nationwide implementation of Sharia law, the destruction of the secular Nigerian state, and its replacement with a state whose politics and economy are theocratically ordered.[6] Lately, this commitment has morphed; Boko Haram is now committed, if its recent campaigns are a guide, to the creation and governing of a caliphate in Nigeria's Northeast.[7] While the earlier phases of the Boko Haram insurgency posed no direct territorial and juridical challenge to Nigeria's sovereignty, the current, territorialized ambition of the group adds a deadly companion to its usual menu of terror tactics — suicide bombings, raids, shootings, massacres, and arson.

What makes Boko Haram a lethal challenge to the Nigerian State is its mysterious, seemingly irrational and indiscriminate violence. And although a fairly coherent and discernible religious ideology underpins the group's activities and pronouncements, its Islamism appears hijacked by and beholden to an ambiguous, incoherent, and shifting set of objectives. Moreover, the group's authentic wing appears implacable, making unrealistic demands and shunning offers of amnesty and negotiation.[8]

How can we understand this obdurate rejection of Nigeria's secular state? Boko Haram is connected to a long history of Islamist insurgencies dating back to the era of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Islamic kingdom of Kanem Bornu.[9] It is also connected to a tradition of Islamic dissidence that manifested in postcolonial Nigeria most prominently in the form of the Luddite sect, Maitatsine.[10] But Boko Haram is also radically disconnected from this history because it extends, confounds, and negates it. Boko Haram maintains a fairly familiar tradition of homegrown Islamist extremism but also draws from more recent global wellsprings of violent jihad and Salafi awakening.[11] It is this duality, this connection to and violent departure from existing, more familiar traditions of fringy Islam that makes Boko Haram such a mortal danger to the Nigerian body politic.

Although widespread poverty and a paucity of Western education in Northern Nigeria has made available a large population of youths with little or no functional Western education for recruitment, poverty per se is hardly at the root of the insurgency. Rather the militancy is a strange concoction brewed by a colonial and postcolonial neglect of Western education, a preexisting tradition of Islamist dissidence, and the entry, funded by middle eastern financial and ideational patronage and inspiration, of virulent foreign strains of extremist theology into Northern Nigeria over the last two and half decades.[12] The implication of this causal genealogy is that, unlike in the government's dealings with Niger Delta militants, paying off Boko Haram insurgents, or buying peace with patronage, is irrelevant and impossible. The ideological component of the militancy overrides its imbrication in the structural poverty of Northeastern Nigeria.

It is not just Nigeria's secular state and its institutions such as schools, offices, and personnel that have become fair game for Boko Haram attacks; it is the very idea of a nation-state ruled

by the secular tenet of democracy, enlightened bureaucratic governance, and an educated, free thinking, and participatory citizenry that stands in danger of being destroyed by a stubbornly contrarian vision of society. Everything we take for granted about the Nigerian state has been attacked, and the sociopolitical fabric has been strained and re-strained by Boko Haram's attacks. In coping with these dangers, Nigerians have reactivated old political narratives and fictions bordering on ethnic and religious differences and separatism, further exacerbating the negative fallouts of the ongoing insurgency.

The Challenge of State Legitimacy

The twin threats posed to Nigeria's long term stability by Boko Haram and a hibernating Niger Delta militancy are accentuated by a long standing problem of statecraft in Nigeria: a deficit of state legitimacy. There are two layers to this problem, one historical, the other instrumental. Nigeria has been plagued by a chronic absence of organic binding ties and functional idioms of national solidarity since its colonial creation in 1914. This foundational crisis of legitimacy has over the years alienated the state from citizens and constituencies — and vice versa.

This historical challenge of nation building foregrounds a more serious contemporary malaise: postcolonial dysfunction. The Nigerian state consistently erodes its own legitimacy by failing to fulfill the most rudimentary obligations of a modern government. This failure opens the door for malcontents across the political and primordial spectrums to challenge the state's juridical, territorial, and constitutional authority, hence the tendency by groups in both North and South to portray the state as illegitimate in order to justify their efforts to undermine it.

When militants in the oil producing Niger Delta launched an insurgency to fight for resource rights — a rebellion sporadically infested with criminality and carnage — they justified their struggle with the claim that the state was an illegitimate imposition and was therefore fair game for attacks and pillage. This narrative of state illegitimacy percolated in the general atmosphere of a politicized oil insurgency, which occasionally harkened back to familiar historical critiques of Nigeria's emergence in the orbit of convenient colonial cartography.

Corruption is one of Nigeria's main challenges and has in fact hampered the military effort to combat Boko Haram as defense budgets are creamed off, leaving ill-equipped and ill-compensated soldiers to face a deadly, well-armed group of extremists. This corruption thrives partly because many citizens and groups understand the state to be illegitimate, undeserving of loyalty, an entity whose resources can be appropriated for personal gratification. The preeminent casualty of this ubiquitous narrative of state illegitimacy is loyalty or patriotism, however defined.

This belief that an illegitimate state deserves neither loyalty nor protection finds expression in various acts of malfeasance across the country and in multiple religious settings and texts. There is, however, a distinctly Islamist variant of it that is prevalent in Northern Nigeria. In an essay published in 2009, Aliyu Tilde, a prominent Northern Nigerian Muslim pundit, tried to situate Boko Haram in an evolving ideological corpus in Northern Nigerian Islamic theology,

which authorized engagement with the state on the premise that secular state institutions do no command loyalty or commitment. Tilde argues that, in this realm of narrative and praxis, the notion of official corruption has no semiotic or moral resonance since the state is constructed and construed as an un-Islamic zone of illegitimacy whose possessions can be legitimately appropriated without offending Islamic canons. Tilde writes:

> The notion among some learned Islamic scholars [is]that "government" is haram and public property and finances belong to nobody, so they can be appropriated whenever possible. I came across this idea in Sokoto in the aftermath of 1983 coup. The mighty who lived fat on public funds were arrested. It was then I heard someone justifying stealing public funds in a private discussion: to, malammai sun ce halal ne cin dukiyar gwamnati tunda bata kowa ba ce [Islamic clerics say it is permitted under Islamic law to appropriate Government resources since such resources belong to no one]. My effort to present the contrary was futile.[13]

Many Nigerian Muslims, like many of their Christian compatriots, see the state and the patrimony it superintends as zones of easy largesse — perhaps even a site of divine favor where God authorizes his worshippers to profit at the expense of the government. In predominantly Christian Southern Nigeria and in the Middle Belt of Nigeria (predominantly Christian areas of the North-central zone), where Pentecostal Christianity has grown exponentially in the last three decades, some preachers provide moral legitimacy for the mechanics of corruption in ways that are analogous to the Northern, Muslim example discussed above.[14] There is thus a broad, unspoken consensus about the state's illegitimacy and how this purportedly authorizes destructive, cynical engagements with state institutions.

People who try to stand in the way of this systematic undermining of the state through theft and sabotage are taunted with the pidgin English words, *na ya papa money*?/is government money your father's property? It is a not so subtle threat to back off. It is also a profound elaboration of the notion that the state is an illegitimate orphan, belonging to no one, to be used when needed and destroyed when it stands in the way of one's parochial agenda. This view of the state removes any moral constraints on individuals and groups determined to attack or plunder it.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Niger Delta militants and a host of other ethno-nationalist groups like the O'dua Peoples Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the Arewa Youth Congress (AYC) — all of them representing Nigeria's tripod of the biggest ethnic groups, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo — partook to varying degrees in the narrative of calling into question the authority and legitimacy of the state.[15] They also attacked the symbols, institutions, and personnel of the state.

Boko Haram militants are the latest in a long line of militants, insurgents, and malcontents to treat the state as a site of illegitimacy to be attacked and undermined. Boko Haram advances, through its theology and atrocities, a profound rejection of the sovereignty of the Nigerian state. The state itself is considered a form of sacrilege, an embodiment of all that is haram. If

government is haram and its assets, including military resources, can be legitimately stolen to promote personal and religious interests, undermining that government through violence and sabotage is halal, not only permitted but a legitimate religious obligation.

Boko Haram's anti-government insurgency is partly driven by this belief that the secular Nigerian government is, by virtue of its illegitimacy, a legitimate target of violence — a sacrilegious entity destined to give way to a state governed by Sharia.

Although also contemptuous of the state's legitimacy, many Nigerians do not necessarily wish to have it replaced because that perceived illegitimacy helps to justify their appropriation of state resources for themselves, a kind of self-interested but cynical preservation of an illegitimate, perpetually weakened state. Boko Haram on the other hand considers it a religious duty to remove and replace the illegitimate state.

Restoring Legitimacy

Insurgencies and other types of challenges to the authority and sovereignty of the state fester in the context of perceived and actual crisis of state legitimacy. It is not enough to approach this problem with atmospheric, cosmetic solutions designed to preserve a brittle elite consensus and a façade of stability. A frontal engagement with the foundational questions of Nigerian nationhood is the only approach capable of restoring legitimacy to the state — whatever shape it takes in the aftermath of such an engagement.

The tide seems to have turned against Boko Haram militarily and, although, like all insurgencies driven by extremist fervor, it may continue to launch terrorist attacks on soft targets, its immediate threat to Nigeria's sovereignty and territorial integrity will dissipate over time. But this short-term stability, shaky and fraught with sporadic violence, would conceal the deeper fissures of the Nigerian nation. A diminished Boko Haram will join the Niger Delta oil insurgency and the MASSOB-led pro-Biafra movement in the list of suppressed but simmering threats to the state, with the last two being more potent because of the organic sympathy they enjoy and their connections to histories of marginalization and historical injuries. The fundamental questions that animate these movements or provide them with rhetorical fodder need to be addressed, and this is the supreme challenge before stakeholders in the Nigerian state project.

First, there needs to be a serious, unfettered discussion around the question of whether Nigerian groups and ethnic nationalities want to remain together as one country and if so under what type of structural arrangement this coexistence should be constructed. The legitimacy burden of the colonial origin of the Nigerian state is both real and rhetorical — real because Nigeria was crafted without the consultative input of the groups that would constitute it; rhetorical because that foundational verity has become an overarching alibi for different projects seeking to undermine the state in favor of alternative parochial political imaginations. Evidence from Nigeria's vibrant online and physical discursive spaces suggest that the overwhelming sentiment across the political and ethno-religious divides favor an arrangement

that grants considerable economic and political autonomy to regions and states and preserves only a weakened common center charged with national defense, foreign policy, and international trade. Still, other sentiments and preferences cannot be ruled out without an honest, vigorous, and unrestricted deliberation on the possible trajectories of national coexistence. Only a resolution of this foundational question can arrest the crisis of illegitimacy analyzed above.

Second, once the terms and articles of continued national coexistence have been worked out, a massive program of national reorientation and expansion of Western education will have to be undertaken. One of the problems dividing the North and the South of the country is that of diverging orientations and aspirations. This problem turns on differential levels of Western education and the resultant uneven distribution of modernist, secular institutions. The outcome of this asymmetry is a bifurcated political, cultural, and aspirational modernity that destroys national solidarity. Symbolic and educational investments in bridging this divide has to be part of a long term strategy for saving the Nigerian state and building it up as a legitimate entity in the eyes of citizens and constituents.

Notes

[1] Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 47-48.

[2] *House of Representatives: Official Reports of Debates*, March 31, Second Session March 3-April 1, 1953 (Lagos: Government Printer, 1953), p. 1053.

[3] Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[4] For an analysis of the domestic and trans-national factors that birthed militancy in the Niger Delta, see Ike Okonta and Oronto Dauglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil* (London: Verso, 3003); For a more focused study of youth militancy in the Niger Delta, see Oluwatoyin O. Oluwaniyi, "Oil and Youth Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 45: 3 (2010), 309-325.

[5] In 2008, a report issued by Nigeria's Petroleum Product Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) in 2008 provided this estimated expiration date, which has remained largely unchanged given current production levels. See Carmen Gentile, "Nigeria's Oil Industry Good for 40 More Years," *Energy-daily.com*, March 7, 2008, Online: https://www.energy-daily.com/reports/Nigerian_Oil_Industry_Good_For_40_More_Years_999.html. Retrieved on March 2, 2015.

[6] For a detailed discussion of the theological and programmatic aspects of Boko Haram, see Moses E. Ochonu, *Africa in Fragments: Essays on Nigeria, Africa, and Global Africanity* (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2014), chapter 18.

[7] Boko Haram declared a caliphate in Northeastern Nigeria in August 2014, with a capital in

Gwoza, a strategic town it had just captured. Subsequently, videos and reports emerged of the group's attempt to institute Sharia law, consolidate its hold on territories it held, expand, and establish institutions it claimed would foster Islamic governance.

[8] In April 2013, Boko Haram rejected and ridiculed an offer of amnesty presented by the Nigerian Government. See "Nigeria's Boko Haram Rejects Jonathan's Amnesty Idea," *BBC.com*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22105476. Retrieved on March 2, 2015. In November 2014, an effort to negotiate a ceasefire with Boko Haram foundered when the group publicly disowned the team claiming to represent it at the talks in Chad.

[9] For a history of the Sokoto Caliphate, see Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London" Longman, 1967); for a comprehensive discussion of the history of Islamic rebellion and insurgencies in Muslim Northern Nigeria, see Murray Last, "From Dissent to Dissidence: The Genesis and Development of Reformist Islamic Groups in Northern Nigeria," paper presented at the African History Seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, March 6, 2013. Online.

[10] Several studies of Maitatsine have been published but a good introduction, which also covers the group's theological beliefs is Niels Kastfelt, "Rumours of Maitatsine: A Note on Political Culture in Northern Nigeria," *African Affairs* 88:350 (1989), 83-90.

[11] Boko Haram's theological mainstay is Salafism. The founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, idolized Ibn Taimiyya, a thirteenth century Sunni scholar known for advocating a return to, and total imitation of, the ways of al-Salaf, the original Meccan seventh century Muslim congregation. As a testament to this Salafist foreign influence, Yusuf named the sect's founding mosque in the city of Miduguri Ibn Taimiyya Masjid. Yusuf was known for quoting copiously from the works of Ibn Taimiyya in his preaching and in his debates with theological opponents.

[12] For a recent history of the theological ferment that produced Salafist groups like Boko Haram, see Moses E. Ochonu, *Africa in Fragments*, 154-170. For comparison to a recent postcolonial Islamist insurgency See Moses Ochonu, "Boko Haram is Hardly a New Phenomenon," *TIME* magazine February 17, 2015: https://time.com/3712517/boko-haram-history/. Retrieved on March 2, 2015.

[13] Aliyu Tilde, *We are Boko Haram* https://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/aliyu-u-tilde/we-are-boko-haram.html (Retrieved on August 18, 2010). The Hausa portion of the quote was translated by me.

[14] See Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: the Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009) for a discussion of how Pentecostalism is both a response to rising political corruption and, at times, a paradoxical enabler of such corruption.

[15] For a comparative study on Nigeria's ethnic militias, see Moses Metumara Duruji, *Ethnic Militias and Sub-Nationalism in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of MASSOB and OPC* (PhD Thesis, Sociology, Covenant University, Nigeria, 2013).

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Karl Marx and Intersectionality

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In the late twentieth century, a theoretical discourse of intersectionality became almost hegemonic in many sectors of radical intellectual life. In this discourse, which concerned social issues and movements around race, gender, class, sexuality, and other forms of oppression, it was often said we should avoid any kind of class reductionism or essentialism in which gender and race are subsumed under the category of class.

At most, it was said, movements around race, gender, sexuality, or class can intersect with each other, but cannot easily coalesce into a single movement against the power structure and the capitalist system that, according to Marxists, stands behind it. Thus, the actual intersectionality of these social movements — as opposed to their separateness — was usually seen as rather limited, both as reality and as possibility. Saying otherwise ran the danger of falling into the abyss of reductionism or essentialism.

Let us take the example of racial oppression and its potential intersectionality with class oppression. Slogans popular in earlier periods, like “Black and white, unite and fight,” receded somewhat in the wake of intersectionality. To some extent, this was a positive development, in that it recognized the uniqueness of the oppression and the creativity of the struggles of African-Americans for self-liberation, and the concomitant failure in many instances of white labor to unite with Black labor due to the deep racism of U.S. society, a racism to which white workers were not immune. At another level, however, the new stance was problematic, since some varieties of intersectionality theory tended to deny any serious possibility of class unity against capital across racial lines.

Where does this leave the discussion of Karl Marx, the greatest thinker in terms of both capitalism and the possibility of overcoming it?

If Marx is to be claimed as a contemporary thinker, as I think we would want to do, I believe it is imperative not to sweep the issues around intersectionality under the rug[pullquote]If Marx is to be claimed as a contemporary thinker . . . I believe it is imperative not to sweep the issues around intersectionality under the rug[/pullquote] when dealing with Marx’s thought. To be sure, Marx’s main concentration and most original writings concerned the nature of capitalism and the possibility of its transcendence, and of the modern proletariat as the vehicle for that transcendence. Provided, of course, that those workers were connected — albeit not in a hierarchical, vanguardist manner — to the far-reaching dialectical critique of capital that Marxist theory and politics offered.

But what did Marx actually have to say about the inter-relationship of race, gender, and class?

Actually, quite a lot. Unfortunately, the post-Marx Marxists who formalized his thought were often unaware of this, or worse, in some cases rejected outright Marx's thought on race and gender.

Take, for example, his writings on race and class and their relationship to capital. Even before the *Communist Manifesto,* the young Marx theorized that modern capitalism existed on the foundation of Black slave labor: "Direct slavery is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry" (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* [hereafter MECW] 38, pp. 101-2, trans. slightly altered). Thus, it was not only a question of capital's exploitation of legally free wage labor inside Britain, the leading industrial power of the day, but also one of a wider set of relationships that involved a type of unfree labor, slave labor, organized in a highly modern capitalist sense, one that had marked differences from Roman or other earlier forms of slavery.

As Marx wrote in the 1861-63 preparatory manuscript for his magnum opus, *Capital*, the relentless pressure of value production, of capital accumulation, gave this modern capitalist form of slavery a ruthless, almost genocidal character, working Africans to death: "If the capitalist sets the worker to work for e.g. 20 hours today, tomorrow he will be incapable of working the normal labor time of 12 hours or perhaps any labor time at all. If the overwork extends over a long period, the worker will perhaps only preserve himself and therefore his labor capacity for 7 years instead of the 20 or 30 years for which he might otherwise have preserved it.… This is still at this moment the case in Cuba, where after 12 hours in the fields the Negroes have a further two hours of manufacturing labor to perform in connection with the preparation of sugar or tobacco" (MECW 30, pp. 182-83).

In Vol. I of *Capita*l, Marx also addressed the subjective factors concerning race, class, and revolution in terms of the changing social consciousness of white industrial labor in the U.S., here during the revolutionary era that followed the Civil War: "In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. *Labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin.* However, a new life immediately arose from the death of slavery" (Marx, *Capital* I, Fowkes trans., NY: Penguin 1977, p. 414, emphasis added).

For Marx, uprooting slavery and racism in America was not only a political question of constitutional amendments and civil rights bills, but also one that concerned the economic structures of society. Therefore, he also refers in *Capital* to the fight to divide up the large slave plantations into land grants of forty acres and a mule to each freed slave, writing that "after the abolition of slavery, a radical transformation in the existing relations of capital and landed property is on the agenda" in the U.S. (*Capital* I, pp. 93). Only such an economic transformation, not achieved in the U.S. to this day, could uproot the material foundations of racial oppression.

I want to emphasize that every example I have quoted so far has come from Marx's "economic"

writings. Of course, he writes a lot more on race and revolution elsewhere, whether in journalism or letters. One prominent example I could mention is his discussion in a letter to Engels of John Brown's 1859 raid in Virginia, where Marx enthuses over the possibility of a "slave revolution" (MECW 41, p. 4, trans. altered). Here we find Marx extolling the revolutionary subjectivity of African-Americans.

What about the example of Marx and gender? Heather Brown has published an excellent book on this topic (*Marx on Gender and the Family*, Leiden: Brill, 2012), and because of this I will be much briefer than I was with race. However, I would like to mention, for example, Marx's late *Ethnological Notebooks*, where he examined a variety of precapitalist societies and their communal, collectivist social relations, from the Iroquois and other Native Americans, to the very early Greco-Roman societies. His conclusion was that many preliterate societies around the world exhibited a far greater degree of women's participation and social power, including in political leadership, than is found in modern ones. At the same time, and here unlike Engels and others since, Marx did not idealize these early social relations, because (1) even in these societies, there were many indications that women remained to a degree subordinate to men, and (2) the type of collectivism found in these societies did not leave room for individual freedom and self-development in the modern sense.

As Raya Dunayevskaya has suggested, in these late writings, after *Capital* and just before his death, Marx had returned to the radicalism of the 1840s, in particular that of the *1844 Manuscripts* where he first laid out the dialectical humanist categories that were to frame his lifework. To take another example on gender, Marx in 1844 discussed not only capital, class, alienation, and humanism, but also gender, seeing what he called the "relationship of man to woman" as a fundamental yardstick with which to measure overall social progress, to wit: "Therefore, on the basis of this relationship, we can judge the whole stage of development of the human being. From the character of this relationship it follows to what degree the *human being* has become and recognized himself or herself as a *species being*; a *human being*" (MECW 3, pp. 295-96, trans. altered). As Dunayevskaya also wrote, here "Marx extended the concept of Alienation to the Man/Woman relationship and to all life under capitalism" (*Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution*, NJ: Humanities Press, 1985, p. 10).

While he certainly didn't answer all of the questions that press down on us as revolutionaries today, I think we can say that for Marx, race, class, and gender were concrete categories that intersected in various ways — and sometimes coalesced in a revolutionary fashion — across the historical modes of production that he analyzed.

As Marxist-Humanists, we have tried to carry forth this aspect of Marx, not only by a direct confrontation with his writings, some of them sidelined in the dominant interpretations, but also mediated through the writings and struggles of the founders of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S., the philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya, author of *Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution* and of *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard*, and the Black civil rights and labor activist Charles Denby (Simon Owens), author of *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*. Recently, Jacqueline Jones's *Dreadful Deceit*, an acclaimed new book on race

in America, has brought Denby's life and work to a wider public than ever before, garnering mentions in leading daily newspapers.

In conclusion, I would like to quote from our Convention Call on Jones's book: "In analyzing Denby's actions and ideas, Jones stresses the interrelation of race, class, and Marxist-Humanism. She notes Denby's perception of white working class racism as the major impediment to social revolution in America, writing of 'those workers who insisted as identifying themselves as white in opposition to their Black co-workers.' At the same time, she chronicles his lifelong quest, sometimes successful, to create working class solidarity across racial lines."

Not only that, but Jones also grasps, although not fully, how the Marxist-Humanist tradition sees the relationship of philosophy to organization and activism, here in contrast to another figure in Marxism and Black liberation, C.L.R. James. Again quoting from our Convention Call, we write that in Jones's book, Dunayevskaya and Denby's "commitment to 'the role of philosophy in guiding workers to self-understanding, as opposed to simply collecting workers' stories and letting those stories point toward the revolution' is portrayed as the major cause of their split with C.L.R. James in 1955."

And that too, is a question for our times, directly connected to the theme of our Convention this weekend, "From Philosophy to Organization and Back."

This essay is adapted from a presentation to a panel on "Critical Perspectives on Intersectionality: Addressing Struggles over Race, Gender, Class, and Ecology," Loyola University Chicago, July 25, 2014 https://www.internationalmarxisthumanist.org/events/chicago-critical-perspectives-intersectionality-addressing-struggles-race-gender-class-ecology

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Toward a Radical Climate Movement

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Climate change is unlike any other man-made challenge that society has had to confront. Hunger, poverty and unemployment are but a few examples of such issues that have been grappled with for centuries. And, although it would be abominable if these same human indignities we struggle to overcome today were to go unresolved long into the future, human civilization is in no way dependent upon their eradication. It is in this respect that climate change is qualitatively different.

The question that looms over the heads of climate researchers is how much additional warming is allowable before positive feedbacks in the climate system establish a set of self-reinforcing feedback loops. This dire situation is commonly referred to as 'runaway' climate change, and once initiated, efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions become futile as a means to preserve a habitable future. An example of a positive feedback that is being witnessed today is the release of methane gas from the Siberian permafrost. As the atmosphere continues to warm due to greenhouse emissions, the permafrost has begun to melt and release stored methane deposits. Once in the atmosphere, this methane speeds up the global warming process, in turn amplifying existing positive feedbacks while also triggering previously dormant ones. It is this fragility of the climate system that differentiates climate change from all other social challenges, by placing a time limit on society's ability to act.

Although we do not know the specific amount of warming that will trigger a runaway scenario, international bodies including the United Nations agree that an increase of more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures is a threshold that we should avoid. That is to say, once this threshold is passed the climate system will become unstable, making it susceptible to sharp temperature increases that bring us closer to the climate tipping point. However a growing number of researchers challenge this widely cited threshold as being 'safe.' Basing their observations on observable data in the natural environment, they contend that climate destabilization is far more likely to occur at approximately 1.5 degrees Centigrade; just a few tenths of a degree above the current global average.[1] Whichever temperature assessment for climate destabilization is correct, it is strikingly clear that aggressive public policy is needed to immediately curb greenhouse gas emissions and foster a transition to a world that is predominantly powered by renewable energy.

Given the failure of government to meet its obligation to mitigate climate change, it is clear that political protest is a tactic that must be pursued by the environmental justice community. Indeed, the historical record shows that a social movement is the most effective vehicle for forcing policy makers to respond to social problems.[2] The recent International Day of Climate Action is a step in the right direction, and its attendance of over 300,000 participants in New

York City alone should give us hope that such a social movement is possible. Perhaps equally significant is the fact that Pope Francis has identified climate change as a social issue that demands immediate action. That such a well-respected public figure is calling on ordinary people to respond to the needs of the environment lends additional credence to the idea that a social movement which addresses climate change is possible. But I want to caution that it is not enough to demand *more* action on climate change. Such a singular focus on the environment confines any resulting public policy to the same neoliberal logics that have up until now, greatly constrained public policy aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, a solution to climate change lies in the ability of a social movement to effectively articulate a set of demands that address the climate crisis while also striking at the heart of neoliberalism.[pullquote]a solution to climate change lies in the ability of a social movement to effectively articulate a set of demands that address the climate crisis while also striking at the heart of neoliberalism.[/pullquote]

What's the Problem with Neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism is best understood as a coup d'etat against Keynesian political economy by elites who view social democracy as an impediment to their ability to accumulate wealth. Whereas the Keynesian era was defined by a federal government that engaged in the redistributional provision of social goods and services and regulatory interventions in the market economy that serve as a counter-balance to the vulgarities that are inherently produced by private markets, neoliberalism is a rejection of this balance; instead seeking the privatization and financialization of everything[3]. In other words, it is the wholesale retreat of the federal government from its social functions. It is for this reason that David Harvey charges neoliberalism with being not so much an *economic model,* as it is a *political project* that aims to restore class power to capitalist elites.[4] As a consequence of neoliberal restructuring of the state, the provision of social goods and services is devolved to state and municipal governments that typically lack the institutional and budgetary capacity to carry out such programs. Meanwhile, the primary objective of the federal government is to serve private ends through the facilitation and expansion of markets. It is this failed dualism of devolution on the one hand, and privatization and financialization on the other that has greatly crippled America's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This essay reviews these attempts in order to demonstrate that a demand for more action on climate change must be coupled with a strategy to redirect the state away from neoliberal objectives and toward public ends.

The Devolution of America's Climate Policy

In response to relative inaction at the federal level, a growing number of states and municipalities are attempting to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.[5] At the state-level, 'green' standards have been imposed on products and buildings. Similar rules aimed at maximizing energy efficiency have also been placed on public sector purchasing. And although many state regulations are fairly passive, the State of California has made great strides in its efforts to reduce its carbon emissions by placing strict regulations on its automobile and other industries. However, despite the efforts of several states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,

the brunt of America's climate change policy exists at the municipal level, and these efforts have been rapidly increasing since the early 2000's.[6]

Municipal-level efforts to combat climate change take advantage of locally-based policy instruments that include land-use regulations as well as codes and ordinances that aim to reduce energy consumption.[7][8] Examples of such policies include the mandated use of energy-efficient lighting and insulation in new building construction and the development of municipal bike lanes to reduce the use of motor vehicles. More comprehensive, budget-intensive ways that municipalities are attempting to reduce their carbon footprint include the construction of mass-transportation systems; the replacing of all existing municipal vehicles with more fuel-efficient options; and the development of renewable energy infrastructure capable of meeting residential and municipal energy needs.[9] But although many of these efforts at the municipal and state levels are laudable and in some instances have more ambitious emissions reductions targets than the federal government,[10] their actual contribution to greenhouse gas reductions has been negligible.

Close inspection of sub-national climate policy reveals that only about half of all fifty states have managed to develop a workable strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions,[11] and most of these efforts have only modest emissions targets. Problematically, even less has been achieved at the municipal-level where the majority of America's climate change mitigation efforts are situated. A comprehensive review of local mitigation efforts revealed that the majority of municipalities that are associated with one or both of the two of the largest organizations that represent and advocate for municipalities working to reduce greenhouse emissions have not moved beyond the planning stage to actual policy implementation.[12] However troubling these findings are, they are not surprising given the neoliberal context within which state and municipal mitigation efforts exist. Indeed, neoliberalism imposes structural constraints that greatly limit the ability of sub-national scales of government to adequately regulate industrial carbon emissions, pursue policies that reduce the use of fossil fuels, or to facilitate a transition to renewable-based energy sources.

The withdrawal of federal support for state and municipal budgets has greatly undermined sub-national efforts to mitigate climate change. Because state and local governments rarely have the operating budgets to allow for the successful implementation of even modest policy initiatives that aim to curb carbon emissions, it is inconceivable that more ambitious projects such as the development of mass-transit or the construction of renewable energy infrastructure will be developed across the US. In response to these budgetary challenges imposed on them by the neoliberal state, municipal (and state) governments have gone from being managers of budgets and government agencies to becoming increasingly entrepreneurial, turning to the private sector in pursuit of revenue. [13] As such, great care is placed on maintaining a pro-growth, pro-business environment in order to increase the local tax base and benefit from the spillover effects that are generated by local industry. Not surprisingly, the elevated reliance that states and municipalities have come to have on the private sector translates to a general unwillingness to enact strict regulations on greenhouse gas emissions or to introduce steep corporate taxes that could potentially fund climate initiatives. We see then that a fundamental

contradiction exists between devolved climate policy and the efforts of states and municipalities to be 'entrepreneurial' in their quest to avoid budget deficits and provide some degree of social services. However, it is important to note that even if these budgetary and regulatory obstacles were overcome, sub-national climate initiatives like California's strict regulation of the automobile industry are only beneficial if most or all other states adopt similar regulatory measures. Therefore, federally-directed climate change mitigation policy is far more efficient because it does not require political consensus from every state and every municipality across the country in order for it to be implemented nationwide.

The Financialization of Greenhouse Gas Reductions

Very little has been done at the federal level to promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. With the exception of a handful of meager regulations, federal policy has done much more to facilitate the aggressive expansion of the fossil fuel industry than it has to force a rapid transition to a post-carbon energy economy. However, a growing number of federal policy makers are interested in developing a nation-wide cap and trade system that will serve as the cornerstone of American climate change mitigation policy. This widespread support for cap and trade fits within the neoliberal discourse because it is skirts direct government intervention in the market economy by instead creating a financial market where carbon can be bought and sold with the presumption that such activity will lead to a reduction in carbon emissions. Given its growing popularity among US policy makers is important to review its severe limitations as a mechanism for mitigating climate change. For unless a social movement is able to redirect the state to pursue proven, non-market policy interventions in the market economy, it is almost certain that if the demand for more action on climate change grows loud enough, it will be met with a nation-wide cap and trade system.

Cap and trade, also referred to as 'carbon trading,' places a cap on the allowable amount of carbon emissions an individual firm or industry can emit during a given time period. This cap is set by a governing body such as a federal government, a regional body or by the Kyoto Protocol. Once the cap on emissions is set, carbon credits are issued to firms according to a baseline estimate of their carbon emissions. The principle behind these credits is to issue to each firm, less credits than are equal to the amount of carbon emissions that firm is currently emitting. In other words, a carbon credit is equal to one ton of carbon.[14] Therefore, a firm that is assessed to be emitting ten tons of carbon emissions might only be issued eight permits. As such, the firm has several options before the time limit for reductions is up: 1) it can take internal measures to reduce its emissions by two tons; 2) it can reduce its emissions by more than two tons, allowing it to sell its surplus credits on the market to other firms that have failed to meet their emissions reductions requirement; 3) it can purchase two additional carbon credits to excuse their lack of mandated emissions reductions; or 4) it can 'offset' its reduction requirements by investing in a project – typically in the Global South – that is designed to reduce carbon emissions, allowing these reductions to be counted as the firm's own. This last option, referred to as 'carbon offsetting' is the most popular approach within existing cap and trade systems.

Despite its widespread support and popularization by the Kyoto Protocol, cap and trade suffers several weaknesses and vulnerabilities that make it an insufficient and financially volatile method of climate change mitigation. Cap and trade is highly vulnerable to multiple forms of corruption that greatly undermine its ability to reduce carbon emissions. The European Union's Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS) has demonstrated that corporate influence over the allocation of carbon permits can lead to their severe over-allocation. As a result, some of the worst polluting industries have had their emissions output increase rather than decrease,[15] and in one particular instance the price of carbon suddenly dropped by over 60% due to market saturation.[16] Similarly, existing cap and trade schemes including the EU-ETS have revealed the ease by which firms have been able to overestimate their baseline carbon emissions in order to receive more carbon credits than their actual emissions warrant. Incredibly, such over-allocation on carbon permits have led to windfall profits in the billions of dollars (usd).[17][18]

Carbon offsetting has its own set of unique vulnerabilities to corruption. For example, a great deal of concern exists over the ease by which offset projects can be recorded as complete without ever being developed.[19] Related to fictitious offsetting is the practice of 'double counting' or 'recycling' whereby multiple actors claim responsibility for the same offset project.[20][21] However, as problematic as this fraudulent activity within offset markets is, what is perhaps most troubling about offsetting is that it maintains a 'business-as-usual' emissions path in the Global North. In order to avert the destabilization of the climate system, the Global North in particular, cannot maintain its current emissions path.[22] [23]And yet, carbon offsetting is based on the premise that it is cheaper, and as such, more desirable for firms in the Global North to invest in greenhouse gas reducing projects in the Global South where such investments are cheaper, rather than to reduce their own carbon emissions. For example, most recorded carbon emissions in the European Union are a result of offset projects rather than actual greenhouse gas reductions in the EU.[24] Even more, Australia has proposed to reduce the entirety of its greenhouse gas emissions through offsets rather than changes in domestic energy consumption and production.[25] Indeed, the favored mechanism of offsetting actually encourages carbon-intensive production and consumption in the parts of the world that are most responsible for global climate change.

Beyond its inability to force the aggressive and timely reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions that must be made in order to avert catastrophic climate change, cap and trade also poses a threat to the global financial system. Carbon markets are becoming increasingly dominated by brokers, large financial firms and investment funds looking to cash in to the speculative opportunities that exist within these markets.[26] In fact, the majority of carbon trading today is being done by speculators who are pursuing capital gains rather than assisting companies in their compliance with mandated caps on emissions. This growing speculative activity is fueling concerns over the creation of a bubble economy within carbon markets that could precipitate market failure.[27] Additional concern also exists over the ways in which carbon offsets, which are essentially a form of financial derivatives, are being turned into financial securities not dissimilar from the subprime mortgage-backed securities that caused systemic failure throughout global financial markets in beginning in late-2007. This is because

carbon offsets are being turned into carbon-backed securities that are bundled, split up into tranches based on the risk associated with the completion of offset projects, and sold to investors on secondary markets. Due to the risk associated with the actual completion of offsets projects, these securities are being referred to as 'subprime carbon.'[28] Although subprime carbon does not pose a systemic threat to financial markets today, some estimates value the market share of carbon derivatives to be valued at over $3 trillion dollars by the year 2020 if countries including the United States develop their own cap and trade system.[29] Thus, should cap and trade be pursued as the dominant global approach to greenhouse gas reductions, it is conceivable that these risky financial instruments could severely threaten the health of global financial markets.

Going Forward

It is clear that we cannot allow efforts to mitigate climate change to be dictated by the logics of neoliberalism if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Therefore, it is not enough for a social movement to simply demand more action on climate change. Rather, the success of a social movement that confronts climate change will be measured according to its ability to command the federal government to intervene in the political economy not on behalf of private interests, but instead in the interest ordinary people[pullquote]the success of a social movement that confronts climate change will be measured according to its ability to command the federal government to intervene in the political economy not on behalf of private interests, but instead in the interest ordinary people [/pullquote]and the preservation of the natural environment. In other words, our primary objective must be to shatter the monopolistic claim that elites maintain over the organs of public policy, by redirecting the objectives of the state away from neoliberal imperatives and toward public ends.

A fundamental question that arises in response to this political strategy is whether or not a social movement that is organized around the issue of climate change is capable of achieving the task at hand. Political elites have a vested interest in maintaining the existing hegemony of neoliberal political economy, and as such, a groundswell of public support will be needed to overcome their political influence. Historically, the most practical means by which to build a mass-movement is by appealing to people's economic self-interest, and the rapid national and international growth of Occupy Wall Street is a testament to this observation. Therefore, I contend that if this social movement is going to be successful, it must transform environmentally-specific demands into demands that simultaneously address climate change *and* the economic needs of ordinary people.

Here are two examples that help to contextualize my recommendation: 1) the introduction of a carbon tax is often presented by environmentalists as being a more direct and potentially more aggressive approach to reducing national and international carbon emissions compared to cap and trade.[30] [31] However, the notion of a carbon tax remains extremely ambiguous for most people, and there are justifiable concerns over the ways in which carbon taxes disproportionately affect lower income people. Taking these concerns into consideration, rather than demanding a carbon tax, why not demand a steep progressive tax on wealth and

income along with a flat tax on financial transactions? Not only does this approach help to reduce income inequality by setting an effective ceiling on high incomes, but the revenue from these taxes can be spent on a 'green' public works program. This program would put tens of millions of people to work building and installing the necessary infrastructure for a transition to a renewables-based energy economy while also developing a high-speed national rail system, and even establishing state-supported worker-owned cooperatives tasked with servicing and operating this new infrastructure.[32] 2) Another example of a climate-specific demand that can be reworked into a demand that addresses both environmental and economic justice concerns is the removal of fossil fuel subsidies. Although in principle this demand is logical, we must consider the effect that it would have on working people as the cost of energy immediately rises.

To avoid these negative outcomes, a far more effective demand is the nationalization of the energy industry. Not only could public control of the energy industry provide people with cheap energy, but with the proper legal mandate all surplus that is generated through the sale of energy will be directly funneled into the research and development of renewable energy; in other words, the sale of traditional energy will directly fund its replacement.

The existential threat of climate change and our failure to confront it has the tendency to induce an acute form of political pessimism. My reason for writing this essay is to to dispel such hopelessness by identifying the obstacles that have been standing in the way of our success at tackling climate change. Although our time to act is running out, the mitigation of climate change is still well within reach. Therefore, our task now is to forge a social movement that confronts climate change in a way that appeals to the economic needs of ordinary people while striking at the heart of neoliberal political economy.

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Discarding Simmel: Public Property, Neoliberalism, and Potlatch Capitalism

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Every year the university library at Cortland distributes lists of journals that it proposes to dispense with due to budget constraints and the department of sociology/anthropology advocates for their preservation. The titles they wish to eradicate run the gamut from ASA 'flagship' publications down to niche periodicals. This is the same library that, when I arrived in 2005, was in the process of discarding thousands of books and the same library that, when I submitted a book requisition form, rejected it on the basis that the budget for books in 2008 was exactly nil. The book disposal project is especially noteworthy in hindsight.

Normally, when you find some "free books" offered up in your university library you expect to find a smattering of dog-eared sci-fi classics and a maybe a dozen old biology or geology textbooks. At our university, by contrast, the 2005 giveaway was a bonanza of consternation – the works of George Herbert Mead, a pristine five-volume edition of *The Spectator*, many collected works by various authors, multi-volume intellectual histories, and, among gems too numerous to mention, Georg Simmel's *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* (1920). This particular copy was, as far as I can tell, once owned by a Dr. Naftali Herzel Landa, passed through Harpur College before finding its way to Cortland where it was finally discarded in a bonfire of neoliberal austerity. If you like your institutions 'lean and mean' Cortland is your kind of place.

One should resist the temptation to applaud the book giveaway based on an interpretation that locates a hidden dimension of devaluation in this gesture: these materials lack value, they are not being used, and, if you want them, they're yours for the taking. True, waste, throwing stuff out without regard for potential value or use, represents a hidden escape route from the semi-closed circuits of production, distribution, consumption, and accumulation. However, these books were, while admittedly 'worthless' (not serving as material carriers of value) and underutilized, they were nonetheless useable for generations to come within the public sphere, rather than locked up in private collections or reentering circuits of exchange. Indeed, a library is only a space of potential liberation and freedom to the extent that it is filled with 'waste.' Did Cortland simply run out of space and simply clear out the 'dead wood'?

I was not privy to the decision to discard the library's holdings but in the era of austerity the zealous destruction of collective resources is a form of *signaling* where the old mentality of value martyrdom (Marx, [1859] 1970) is displaced by the fanatical destruction of an entire social order (Hegel, [1821] 1991) as a means to raise value from the dead (see also Soederberg, 2008). As Chris Hedges puts it, "We now live in a nation where doctors destroy

health, lawyers destroy justice, universities destroy knowledge, governments destroy freedom, the press destroys information, religion destroys morals, and our banks destroy the economy" (quoted in Grioux, 2013). In short, there is money to be made in the systematic destruction of social systems (both internally and externally). When we view this form of mass destructiveness from the standpoint of the ritual sublimation of goods into authority, we discover something new about neoliberal austerity.

Potlatch Capitalism

We can identify two circuits of virtual capital: (a) the European style of professional, bank-driven investment in debt on public markets with a balance sheet orientation to accounting and (b) the American style of amateur, complex, speculation in equities on private markets with an income statement orientation to accounting (Krier, 2008: 135). Symbiotically entangled within these circuits, its heart of darkness if you will, is an ideology and practice known as 'speculative management' (Krier, 2005) that is of interest not only to political economy but also to the critical sociology of institutional analyses. Speculative management involves the destruction of capital, fixed and fluid, in order to raise prices even as the firm is ultimately ruined. What interests us, here, in the overarching logic of neoliberal austerity is the use of a conflagration as a form of signaling within the nebula of the symbolic economy, transforming material stuff into a form of authority, prestige, and distinctiveness.

Mid-level state schools operate between prestige and mass education, as Donoghue says:

"The institutions at the opposite ends of the higher education spectrum – the for-profits and the elite universities – will occupy the key positions in the future, for each will exert tremendous influence on all the colleges in between the extremes. Each of the schools in between will be pushed to define itself either as a proving ground for the business community or as a place where students can acquire prestige marker, an index of their social status (2008: 93)."

It seems that a third way has been charted by schools unwilling or unable to compete at the extreme ends of the elite-mill spectrum, by turning to 'student life' and effervescent experiences such that the 'return on investment' is reduced to T-shirts and other paraphernalia bearing school emblems qua tourist souvenirs and mementos from a more enjoyable time and place before life was reduced to a random string of pointless jobs. Of course, all this enjoyment comes at the price of tuition hikes; more debt; hits to non-spectacle infrastructure budgets; increasing reliance on low-wage adjuncts; the decimation of tenure lines and retrenchment; administrative bloat; weak collective bargaining (see Upchurch and Mathers, 2012); public-private synergies (i.e., the corporatization of the university); wage stagnation; nearly infinite opportunities for unpaid labor; growing class sizes; massive online McEducation nonsense; and deregulated growth and/or entropy, etc.

Speculative management at the level of for-profit firms, the spirit of potlatch, extends into the non-profit sphere as potlatch administration where the conflagration can be read from the Hegelian angle as the "burnt offering" for a new spirit. The university is burnt down and

resurrected as a metaphorical 'Pauline body' exhibiting "wounds and all" (Ehrman, 2014: 182) simultaneously made up of a finer, ethereal and enigmatic substance worthy of everlasting life in the spectacle economy. Insofar as Cortland and its library can survive in this new era, it must signal its commitment to the new imaginary by getting lean and mean (taken to an extreme it might be reduced to an emaciated figure of meaningless suffering, existing as nothing more than an online interlibrary loan portal) and shifting its focus from information to 'life, immortal student life' and caffeine dispensation. Ironically, the Nazis were deprived of the opportunity to toss Simmel's *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* into their antisemitic bonfires back in the 1930s but where the Nazis failed our neoliberal institution succeeded in getting Simmel out of circulation.

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Regarding the Spectacle: Debord in Retrospect

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After almost half a century it's time for a serious reassessment of the place of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* in radical and revolutionary thought. We should therefore be grateful to Ken Knabb for his excellent new edition of this work in English translation.[1] His translation is very competent and readable, and the extensive notes he added are very helpful to the reader. In the original edition, Debord quoted or alluded to numerous sources without attribution, and Knabb has conscientiously tracked these down, and not only cited the sources, but often added useful information on their significance.

This is particularly true in the case of Debord's extensive references to Hegel and Marx. Knabb also presents helpful historical background on revolutions, revolutionary movements, and historical events and developments, when this information sheds light on Debord's text. He also includes good bibliographical information on left, labor and revolutionary events, and citations from other Situationist texts that expand and clarify some of Debord's ideas. This edition will be particularly useful to readers who come to the work without extensive theoretical and historical background, and will help them get into the required reading for anyone who wants to understand the work's context in Western radical and revolutionary theory.

Whether or not Debord's book is, as Knabb claims, "arguably the most important radical book of the twentieth century," its author deserves credit for helping many catch up with the major transformations that had taken place in the system of domination. Specifically, he showed that the system had to shift its focus from a preoccupation with the repressive state and authoritarian ideology as the salient mechanisms of domination and focus more intently on the role of the commodity and the consumptionist imaginary. He was not alone in inspiring this shift in perspective. Foucault criticized the regressive nature of "the repressive hypothesis," in which power is always seen as being classical authoritarian and imposed from above, and Marcuse and the Frankfurt School introduced the ideas of the capture of desire through cooptative "repressive desublimation" and of the key role of the "culture industry" in late capitalism.

Yet, it was Debord's image of "the spectacle" that conveyed most compellingly the central role of commodity fetishism and the mass media in the contemporary system of domination. Debord's tirade against the spectacle was very timely. The first generation that had been thoroughly socialized by electronic media was just coming of age, ready to break the disciplinary bonds of the obsolete industrial era and to usher in the dawning age of domination

by digital media and drones. And just as the work appeared, the radical Left in the U.S. was in the process of self-destructing, even as it chanted in a self-absorbed zombie-like trance, "The Whole World is Watching." The Situationists, and especially Debord, deserve recognition for their prophetic role at this turning point in world history.

Yet, as we look back at the role of the Situationists in this crucial historical moment, we find that that they were extremely weak in the area of socially transformative practice. This becomes clear if we look at the kind of practice that is described in Situationist texts, and even more so if we look at what it has meant in practice to be a Situationist (or a post-Situationist, or Situationist-influenced) over the past half-century. We find that its influence has been overwhelmingly in the area of cultural critique and *détournement* – image subversion, or what many would now call culture jamming. Admittedly, this is the movement's greatest strength, and is an important one. It had a major impact historically in inspiring dissidents to break decisively with the dominant culture, to engage with that culture on the terrain of the imaginary, and in the process to create an oppositional milieu.

But the greatest weakness of the movement is related precisely to this strength. In many ways it became lost in its own negative moment of critical ironic distance, and thus opened itself up to marginalization, aestheticization, and self-absorbed adventurism. In the end, the desperately needed positive moment of engagement in processes of social and ecological regeneration was simply missing in any meaningful sense. The Situationists certainly made an important positive political contribution at on the theoretical level, but their contribution never entered significantly into the sphere of "ethical substantiality" – the embodiment of liberatory theoretical ideals in a growing and developing free community.

The Society of the Spectacle is in essence an attempt to explore the social imaginary in late, consumptionist capitalism through the conceptual grid of "the spectacle." But while this conceptualization has been extremely valuable in directing attention to crucial aspects of this imaginary, it misleads in some ways by neglecting other aspects. For example, while Debord's self-proclaimed project is to defend the embattled subject against the forces that crush it, the focus on a monstrous and monolithic "spectacle" rather than the larger, more complex, and in some ways highly self-contradictory social imaginary leads in very significant ways to a failure to give subjectivity its due. This is exhibited especially in Debord's almost absolute reduction of the late modern subject to the status of passive spectator. He depicts the subject as almost entirely helpless in the face of the overwhelming power of the spectacle. Indeed, he states explicitly that the spectacle is a force that is "totally colonizing."

In reality, the situation is considerably more complicated than this. Debord fails to delve deeply enough into the nature of "consuming desire." He sometimes defines the problem as a domination of experience by "appearances," so that core evil of the spectacle is that it is "an *affirmation* of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances." (10) But, in actual fact, all phenomena are appearances (that is in fact the meaning of the word "phenomenon"). The relevant issue is how these appearances or phenomena function in the psychical economy. According to Debord's analysis, the subject is a being who "contemplates"

these appearances, a formulation that reinforces the image of the passive subject. But, in reality, the social (and "individual") imagination operates through processes of projection, identification, and introjection (among others) that are far from "contemplative." Furthermore, it is true as Debord says that the positive moment of these processes is the *affirmation* of the image or "appearance," so that the spectacle is the realm of "the good." But there is in this dialectic of the imaginary a simultaneous negative moment in which these 'appearances" are necessarily rejected as inadequate, unacceptable, and unfulfilling.

The impasse of desire is not grounded in the nature of appearances as appearances, but rather in the false promises inherent in these consumptionist images. In the society of mass consumption, and to a large degree in capitalist and patriarchal societies in general, the promise of ego-activity is that the appropriation of the object will fill an ontological void, a structural lack in the subject. The problematic of "having the object" is inseparable from the fundamental fantasy of an ego that achieves full *being* through this such *having*. Debord reduces the object to "mere appearances" because he never fully recognizes the ways in which the consumptionist images that constitute the spectacle are not only impositions by the system of power, but extensions of processes of projection and identification that have been fundamental to the civilized (patriarchal) ego long before the emergence of the consumer society in late capitalism.

Furthermore, Debord's idea of the spectacle as a totalizing power of commodification leads him to ignore social phenomena that escape its hegemony. On the one hand, he underestimates the significance of quite powerful forces that constitute a counter-spectacle based on nationalism, racism, patriarchy and religious fundamentalism. These forces have over the last half-century proven themselves to be more tenacious than Debord would have suspected. On the other hand, he also neglects the dimensions of personal and communal life that the spectacle does not succeed in colonizing. He thus overlooks much of what might constitute a material and spiritual basis for challenging the hegemony of the spectacle (as will be discussed further).

Most previous social theorists had badly neglected the role of the social imaginary, and Debord deserves recognition for correcting this deficiency. However, he tends to fall into the opposite error and to neglect the role in the system of domination of dimensions other than the imaginary. In his account, the spectacle tends to become a relatively autonomous power over society. However, in reality, the dominant social imaginary is dialectically co-determined by "spectacular" institutions, ideology and ethos, by which is meant, fundamentally, *consumptionist* institutions, ideology and ethos. The consumptionist universe is constituted in part by the institutional system of electronic media, including television, radio, film, and now, above all, the internet. It is constituted by the vast ideological system of advertising and marketing. It is constituted by a system of consumptionist spaces, including the mall, the department store, the boutique, the shopping center, the "plaza." And, as must not be underestimated, it is constituted by the performances of the consumers themselves, their consumptionist interactions, relationships, gestures, and acts. The ethos, the sphere of practice, is also deeply spectacularized. Furthermore, there is a constant dialectic between the consumptionist and productionist spheres of society, that is, a dialectic of both consumptionist

and productionist institutional, ideological, imaginary, and ethotic (practical) structures. These productionist spheres of determination do not fit well into Debord's analysis of the spectacular society.

Such complexities emerge to some degree in *The Society of the Spectacle* when Debord contrasts the "concentrated" and the "diffuse" spectacle. The former is "primarily associated with bureaucratic capitalism," but may act as "a technique for reinforcing state power in more backward mixed economies or even adopted by advanced capitalism during certain moments of crisis" (64) The latter is "associated with commodity abundance, with the undisturbed development of modern capitalism." (65) Debord uses the word "spectacle" here to refer to two divergent forms of the social imaginary: the statist/nationalist imaginary which is largely a productionist phenomenon, and the consumptionist imaginary that is the topic of the vast majority of his analysis. The two forms always coexist in late capitalist society, and though the consumptionist imaginary is increasingly dominant, the entire social sphere of consumption depends on the entire social sphere of production, so the productionist imaginary will always play an important social role. The statist/nationalist imaginary is strongly resurgent in time of social crisis, above all as soon as war is declared (war is indeed "the health of the state," and also of its ideology and imaginary). A grasp of this dialectic of spheres and sub-spheres is essential to understanding the dynamics of the system of domination; however, Debord, with his disproportionate focus on the consumptionist imaginary, is not of much help in comprehending this dialectic.

Another serious problem is that Debord never seems to recognize, much less theorize, the patriarchal and gender aspects of commodification and spectacularization. His relative blindness, and even susceptibility, to patriarchal values and sensibility, prevents him from recognizing how central sexual exploitation is to the dominant imaginary. His masculinist and Promethean proclivities can also be seen strikingly in such assertions as that "the *subject* of history . . . can be nothing other than the self-production of the living — living people becoming masters and possessors of their own historical world." (74) Yes, we do have a problem of lacking agency in history, and this is in large part why revolutionary change is necessary (the bad news is that we are the Undead on the way to becoming the Dead). However, there is a very great difference between human beings *overcoming alienation* from "their own historical world" and their becoming its *masters and possessors*. In fact, the latter, an impossible goal that lies at the heart (or heartlessness) of the project of civilization, results in a necessary alienation from a historical and natural reality that, to the extent that it constitutes our social and material being, cannot ultimately be "mastered."

This issue of Prometheanism relates to one of the most disquieting aspects of Debord's analysis: the extent to which it is pervaded by Eurocentric and civilizationist ideology. For example, he claims that "*economic necessity*" was "the unchanging basis of earlier societies" (51) repeating the tired platitude that "pre-civilized" societies were preoccupied with mere "survival."[2] Granted, he thinks this is a kind of compliment to these societies, in that their healthier concern for "satisfaction of primary human needs" is replaced by late capitalism's insane obsession with "the incessant fabrication of pseudo-needs." However, his analysis still

perpetuates the tendency to attribute to pre-capitalist societies a poverty of needs, in that they are allegedly founded on a "basis" of primary ones. This is reductionist, in that it ignores the no less significant basis of these societies in a social imaginary in which "primary needs" are imagined in relation to a complex cosmology, a complex gift economy, and a complex system of kinship that encompasses both the human community and the natural world.

Similarly, Debord perpetuates the White Mythology of the unchanging Primitive Other. He contends that the "cyclical time" of indigenous societies "was the really lived time of unchanging illusions," (155) thus, like Hegel, banishing such societies from World History, the realm of "where the action is." However, in reality, one finds in primal societies a constant dialectic between natural realities and cultural realities, a dialectic in which both change and evolve. If in one sense it is true, as Marx said, that we still live in pre-history it is equally true in another sense, as Hegel, Marx and civilized thought in general have not comprehended, that no one ever lived in pre-history.

If Debord in some ways negates the historical agency of indigenous and traditional peoples, in other ways he denies the agency of the masses of people who live under the existing system of domination. He claims that "the lack of general historical life also means that individual life as yet has no history," and that as a result, the "individual experience of a disconnected everyday life remains without language, without concepts, and without critical access to its own past, which has nowhere been recorded. Uncommunicated, misunderstood and forgotten, it is smothered by the spectacle's false memory of the unmemorable." (157) In such passages, Debord seems to take much too literally the old revolutionary motto "we are nothing, we will be all." For him, the masses have no agency at all, while after the revolution, their agency will somehow expand to infinity.

The question of the meaning of this "somehow" is of course quite crucial to his project. One of the central preoccupations of *The Society of the Spectacle* is the seemingly eternal question of the nature of the "revolutionary subject" and the possibility of its emergence in the foreseeable future. It is unfortunate that this work has been so disproportionately influential among Situationist texts, since it gives a misleading impression of where the movement, and Debord himself, stood on this issue. If one reads it in isolation, one learns that that Debord and the Situationist placed all their world-historical bets on something called "Worker Councils." But it is not at all clear from the text what Debord even *means* by such "councils." The uninformed reader might be forgiven if he or she jumps to the conclusion that they are some kind of "councils" that are elected by and composed of "workers." But this conclusion would be only half true concerning the "worker' part and close to not true at all on the "council" part, if this word is interpreted conventionally.

If one looks at discussions of this topic over a spectrum of Situationist texts (the collection in Knabb's *Situationist International Anthology* is highly recommended[3]) one finds that it is a more revolutionary and a more realistic idea than it appears. First, despite the usual term "worker," the Situationists recognized the importance of organizations in both the *workplace* and in the *local community*. Secondly, they define the "council" not as an elected

representative body, but rather as a democratic, participatory *assembly* of workers or local community members. For example, in "The Beginning of an Era" they state that "the next revolution will recognize as councils only sovereign rank-and-file general assemblies, in the enterprises and the neighborhoods, whose delegates are answerable to those assemblies alone and always subject to recall by them."[4] In "Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization" the "council as permanent *basic unit" is described as "*the assembly in which all the workers of an enterprise (workshop and factory councils) and all the inhabitants of an urban district who have rallied to the revolution (street councils, neighborhood councils) must participate."[5] I cite these texts to stress the ways in which Situationism is part of a living liberatory tradition that has continued to develop beyond the Situationist moment, and to correct the often marginalizing, disengaging effects of the *Society of the Spectacle* when read in isolation.

Unfortunately, Debord was not very helpful in opening up paths of development of this liberatory tradition. What was missing in his analysis was an appreciation of what is lost when society succumbs to the spectacle and to forms of domination in general, and of how it might be found again. What is the nature of the "Society of the Non-Spectacle?" What kind of life is it that can be "directly lived," as Debord describes it in certain vague allusions? He neglects the question of what it is that human beings care most about most deeply, and which might lead us not only to rebel against the failures of the dominant order, but to begin creating a new one. We know that it is neither some godlike ability to create ourselves out of nothing, nor some Promethean power to "master" history or nature. Rather, it is the freedom of each person, of each community, and of all of life on earth to flourish. This has been the preoccupation of the communitarian anarchist tradition, especially as developed by theorists like Elisée Reclus and Gustav Landauer, and it is the central focus of the ethics and politics of care that has been most fully developed in ecofeminist thought. If only the Situationists *dérives* had taken them occasionally to pre-schools, to hospices, to community gardens, or to the wilderness! The most "directly lived" truths for beings who happen to inhabit the earth are the truths of being born, of living, of growing and flourishing, of giving birth, of creating and expressing, of declining and dying, of generation and regeneration.

But one finds no such ethics and politics of care in Debord, nor does one find a deep appreciation for the richness of local and regional cultures or bioregions. Perhaps even more surprisingly, there is little recognition of the subversive and emancipatory and utopian dimensions of historical or present-day popular culture. One would never guess from Debord's account of the "totally colonized world" that there is such a long and living history of subversive folksongs, labor songs and political music, radical poetry, subversive language and slang, people's history, radical and revolutionary stories and legends, dissident rituals, rites and celebrations. It is in such a culture (which is not merely "prefigurative" but "figurative") that we find that the hoped-for world already exists as (in Durruti's words) "a new world in our hearts." Did the Situations have a new world in their hearts?

The main story for Debord is the dominance of the spectacle and passivity of the masses, while in the real world it is the story of the struggle between a rich popular imagination, grassroots

creativity, love of the community, and dreams of freedom on the one hand, and the destructive processes of cooptation and commodification by the machine of domination on the other. The spectacle does not simply dominate from above. Vampire-like, it feeds on the creative blood of persons and communities. This is one reason why the predatory spectacle is far less stupid and in some ways even more insidiously voracious than it is in Debord's depiction. The (painfully) good news is that as it drains the life blood from society it appears increasingly more alien to what is human and increasingly less capable of fulfilling the deepest needs and aspirations of human communities. Its vampire-nature becomes—what might we say?—*a public secret.*

Thus, at the same time that it becomes more powerful it becomes in other ways more fragile and vulnerable. Nevertheless, it can still not be dealt a fatal blow using the weapons favored by the Situationists, which in reality remain the "arms of critique," the arms of *détournement*, of subversion of images. We are left with "*je détourne bien—mais quand même*." What is necessary is a radical *retournement,* a turning-around in all the fundamental spheres of social determination—institutional , ideological imaginary, and ethotic. The ultimate challenge to the empire of illusion is the real of nature, life, and the human spirit as these are expressed in the unfolding powers of the free community.

Notes

[1] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014). Citations are included in the text, and refer to the 221 theses that make up the work.

[2] His book came out a year after Marshall Sahlins introduced his "original affluent societies" thesis in 1966.

[3] Ken Knabb, ed. *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets; 2007)

[4] https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/12.era2.htm.

[5] https://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/12.councils.htm.

Refusing Whitfield and Rethinking Marcuse: 50 Years After One Dimensional Man and Other Things

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It has been my view for some time now that academic discourse and inquiry should be a communal enterprise. There is no room or time for the hyper competitiveness that we see between some individual scholars as each seeks to elevate him or herself above the other for academic prestige. In my mind, scholars should see themselves as part of a community of inquirers seeking to understand and improve the human condition. For this reason, I have put forth every effort to avoid getting into polemics with my fellow scholars. However, there comes a time when too much is at stake to avoid a moment of intellectual combat. There are times when it does no one any good for one to remain silent while egregious errors are committed by a fellow intellectual traveler.

It is for this reason that I must now break my silence regarding an article published in the fall of 2014 in Dissent by Professor Stephen Whitfield. Whitfield's article "Refusing Marcuse: 50 Years After One-Dimensional Man seems to be a response to a conference on One-Dimensional Man held at Brandeis University in the fall of 2014. Whitfield was one of the presenters there. Whitfield's article should be refused not because it is anti-Marcuse, but instead, because almost every paragraph gets it wrong. In this article I will examine Whitfield's article almost paragraph by paragraph to show that it is way under researched and completely misguided. At the end of the day I hope that the reader will see that contrary to Whitfield's view, Marcuse is still very relevant or at least worth careful study. I cannot lay out detailed arguments about the relevance of Marcuse in the space of this paper. That will have to wait for another time. The point of this article is to address the completely misguided claims by Whitfield so that the reader will be encouraged to read Marcuse for him or herself.

The first three paragraphs of Whitfield's article are introductory and not problematic. The problems start in the fourth paragraph and continue spiral out of control for the remainder of the seven page article. Whitfield attempts to explain Marcuse's book One-Dimensional Man and Marcuse's call for a Great Refusal by contextualizing Marcuse's political orientation. This is done in such a way that it is clear that Whitfield is attempting to conceal through his own one-dimensional thinking the real fundamental social and political problems in the US at the time that Marcuse was writing. Whitfield claims that Marcuse's politics can be "better explained by his experience of living in Weimar Germany." [P. 2] He writes: "The sense that radical transformation was needed in Weimar Germany was an almost rational response to the economic flameout and moral degradation that followed defeat in the military slaughter that

began a century ago." [p. 2] Whitfield goes on to situate the development of the entire Frankfurt School in this context.

It is correct to be sensitive to the social/political context that gave birth to the critical theory of Marcuse and the Frankfurt School. However, the social/political context that gave birth to Marcuse and the Frankfurt School was not just Weimar Germany, it was advanced industrial, capitalist society. This would include the US. Whitfield seems to be under the impression that critical theory only applied to the situation in Weimar Germany. Somehow the US was more morally advanced with its sexism, homophobia, racism and segregation, exploitation, poverty, flaunting of military might, etc.

The last sentence of the fourth paragraph is quite astonishing. Whitfield writes: "Marcuse assigned himself the task of telling his readers how little autonomy they really enjoyed, that their economic security was in fact a form of servitude to irrational and impersonal forces designed to maximize productivity at the expense of pleasure." [. 2] Is Whitfield implying that all persons in the US and other advanced nations have or had "economic security"? Isn't Marcuse's critique based on the fact that so few people have economic security? Today, even a greater portion of the human population suffers from economic insecurity. This has been established by quite a few recent economic studies, most visible of which is Thomas Piketty's book Capital in the Twenty-First Century just published last spring. The project launched by Marcuse and the Frankfurt School was based on a question about the social, political, cultural, and psychological mechanisms that make people complicit in their economic insecurity. "Why is there very little resistance to the system that creates economic insecurity for so many people?" Further, Marcuse was very aware of the way in which a certain degree of autonomy could be used to prohibit the development of greater autonomy. The question remains, "how autonomous can people who are economically insecure be?"

Some of the issues that Whitfield raises indicate that he has some interest in encouraging people to refuse Marcuse by discrediting Marcuse. He tends to focus on things that seem completely irrelevant. He mentions that Marcuse's intellectual influences do not include dreamers and visionaries who populated the American left. Marcuse also does not mention any American industrialist or politician. Instead, Marcuse cites Heidegger, Quine, Wittgenstein, Hegel and Marx. Well, Marcuse was a philosopher, and given the nature of his analysis he did not have to mention such persons.

The next attack is on the heavily theoretical nature of Marcuse's work and the difficulty of its prose. Whitfield says that no one can claim that Marcuse's work is under-theorized. This is true. What Whitfield leaves out is the degree to which Marcuse was influenced by actual events unfolding in America and other parts of the world. It was Marcuse's political engagement and his relationship with student activists that influenced much of his theorizing. Marcuse exhibited a sensitivity to social and political conditions that was lacking among his Frankfurt School colleagues. For example; it was Angela Davis who made Marcuse aware of the urgency of the black struggle for liberation. The tone of Whitfield's article seems to suggest that things were not all that bad in the US when Marcuse was writing. The result is that he has to ignore

the black struggle for liberation all together, much like the Frankfurt School (excluding Marcuse). Although Marcuse did not deal with race directly, in his work he was sensitive to the multiplicity of liberation struggles around him.

It is widely known among scholars of critical theory that Angela Davis was Marcuse's student. What is less known or considered is the degree to which he was her student. Angela Davis was studying with Adorno in Frankfurt when the Civil Rights movement reached a peak. She was torn between her desire to pursue her academic work in Frankfurt and her desire to participate in the struggle of her people in the US. Adorno was not sympathetic to Davis' desire to return to the US to help black people in their struggle. It was Marcuse who supported her decision to return to the US and engage in the liberation struggle. So, Davis continued her academic work with Marcuse in California. In a letter written by Marcuse to Angela Davis in 1970 Marcuse talks about what he learned from Davis. This is a very informative letter. I cannot go into the details in the space of this paper. Simply put, Marcuse admits that it was Davis who made him advance his own thinking regarding the philosophical idea of freedom as well as the unity of theory and practice. Marcuse also discusses the importance of Davis' activism in several interviews. He mentions the importance of Davis' work for the liberation of black and all people. Again and again he explains the importance of the unity of theory and practice as well as the struggle to bring to fruition the philosophical idea of freedom.

Another example of Whitfield's attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Marcuse's critique of advanced industrial society is the following statement: "Perhaps Marcuse benefited from the presumption in some quarters that a ponderous style is synonymous with wisdom." [p. 2] This sounds like Marcuse gained popularity through some kind of linguistic trickery. The implication is that there is no wisdom or truth in Marcuse's analysis, only the appearance of wisdom or truth through ponderous linguistic expression. If this is true, then almost all philosophers and a wide range of other theorists should be able to rise to Marcuse's former level of popularity. Also, Marcuse was a philosopher not a novelists or sports writer. Later on in the article Whitfield mentions the fact that Marcuse's popularity was eclipsed by his colleagues Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. No one's style is more ponderous than Adorno's. For some reason Whitfield is not bothered by this. He seems to just use the more recent popularity of Adorno and Benjamin to discredit Marcuse. There are also many people who find Marcuse's writing much more assessable than Adorno's.

It is not clear whether Whitfield's attempt to discredit Marcuse is based on what he may perceive as the inadequacy of Marcuse's arguments in *One-Dimensional Man* or on Marcuse's fall from fame. It seems to be more of the latter since none of Marcuse's actual arguments are discussed. Whitfield asks: "But in the decades since the New Left crested and collapsed, has the stature of any intellectual fallen more dramatically than that of Herbert Marcuse?" [p. 3] After raising this irrelevant question, Whitfield does recognize that there have been recent efforts to revive and rethink Marcuse's work. With respect to one of these efforts he says the following: "An International Herbert Marcuse Society still holds biennial conferences, and anthologies and monographs on his work continue to appear. But they are not central to academic discourse and tend to be reviewed only in specialized journals." [p. 3]

This statement indicates that Whitfield knows that the IHMS exists, but it does not indicate that he knows anything about the society or academic journals. It seems to me that most work produced by academics are reviewed in specialized journals. I know that Marcuse's own work in the 1960s transcended specialized journals. But again, Whitfield entire assessment of Marcuse seems to be based on the popularity of Marcuse's work and not it's content. It should not surprise anyone that a book about one-dimensional man is not that popular in a one-dimensional society. Further, there are members of the IHMS who have published quite extensively in a wide range of journals and have published books on a wide range of topics.

Regarding the IHMS, this group was formed in 2005 with 25-30 members. Today it has hundreds of members from all over the world. In 2011 there were at least 300 presenters and close to 1,300 persons who participated in the conference altogether. The participants in the 2011 conference came from all over the US and over 20 other countries. In 2013 there were hundreds of participants at the IHMS meeting at the University of Kentucky with people from more than a dozen countries. Dissertations on Marcuse are being written all over the world. Members of the IHMS are being invited on a regular basis now to lecture on Marcuse all over the US and other parts of the world. There has been an increase in sessions on Marcuse at various conferences throughout the world. It is very clear that interest in Marcuse is on the rise. The question of the centrality of this work to academic discourse remains to be seen since this revival is rather recent. However, we still need Whitfield to explain to us exactly what it means to be central to academic discourse. It seems that Whitfield has read the writing on the wall and has become aware that there is new interest in Marcuse's work. Perhaps the purpose of his article is to nip this return to Marcuse in the bud. It will be hard to convince people who have carefully read Marcuse that he is no longer relevant.

It must also be stated that the mission of the IHMS is not based on some sense of nostalgia since so many of its members were not children of the 1960s. Many of us younger scholars have recently turned to Marcuse because we have found his work to be philosophically, politically, and prophetically relevant today. His is not a philosophy of the past but of the present as we have shown in some of our own work. Further, our goal is not simply a resurrection of Marcuse. We are not Marcuse's disciples, but, critical interlocutors. For this reason, we have attempted to put Marcuse in conversation with other recent thinkers, even using some of them as a corrective to Marcuse. In my own work I have put Marcuse in conversation with, Axel Honneth, Habermas, Rawls, Derrida, Foucault, Alain Locke, H.G. Gadamer and others. The 2011 conference at the University of Pennsylvania was entitled "Critical Refusals". The purpose of this title was to expand Marcuse's notion of the Great Refusal" to include a wide range of contemporary social/political, and philosophical struggles. At this conference there were sessions on gender, critical race theory, queer theory, poverty, sustainability, environmentalism, etc.

As mentioned before, Whitfield seems to celebrate the decline of Marcuse's popularity and the rise of Benjamin and Adorno. He asserts that Benjamin and Adorno "dealt directly, explicitly and frequently with cultural questions, and far less with political ones." This claim is false and it discloses Whitfield's lack of familiarity with the work of Benjamin and Adorno, as well as

Marcuse's. Even though it seems that the critique of culture is primary for Benjamin and Adorno, it is clear from their writings that the cultural critique is motivated by political questions and problems. Here, Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse are all on the same page. Whitfield neglects to mention Marcuse's very important works on culture, and that his first and last writings were on aesthetics. All three of these critical theorists were following the lead of Antonio Gramsci in recognizing that an analysis of the economic and the political demanded an analysis of culture. In this way all three thinkers overcame the impasse produced by the base/superstructure dichotomy in the work of Marx. They recognized a dialectical relationship between the economic base and the political and cultural superstructure. The critique of culture by Adorno and Benjamin is very radical and can be read side by side with Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man. From time to time Marcuse would mention the closeness between himself, Benjamin, and Adorno concerning the critique of culture. He cites Benjamin once and Adorno several times in One-Dimensional Man.

Whitfield attempts to make a distinction between the works of Benjamin and Adorno and those of Marcuse by claiming that Marcuse's work is associated with the crisis of Marxism. His claim is true but problematic in two ways. First, the entire Frankfurt School is associated with the crisis of Marxism. This is made clear by the many histories of the Frankfurt School as well as by volumes on individual members of the Frankfurt School. Secondly, Whitfield has a very narrow view of what the crisis of Marxism is. He writes: The "crisis" could be defined as Marxism's historical entanglement with the tyrannies of Stalinism and Maoism, or its imminent demise given the capacity of capitalism to generate mass acceptance and even allegiance that doomed any hope of systematic change." [p. 3] The above passage does point to a crisis of Marxism, however, it is a crisis of only one branch of Marxism. Marcuse and the Frankfurt School represent a whole different branch of Marxism which was called by Maurice Merleau-Ponty "Western Marxism". This is a tradition of Marxism that includes, Karl Korch, Georg Lukács, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, the Frankfurt School and many others.

The second problem with the above claim by Whitfield is that he ignores another side of the crisis of Marxism, that is, the Marxist analysis of advanced society omits several important struggles for social change that go beyond the boundary of the economic struggle. This problem has been the focus of second, third, and fourth generation critical theorists. Here, Marcuse is on board with a lot of contemporary theorists. Many recent theorists have tried to expand the most important insights of Marxism so as to include an analysis of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

In his ongoing attempt to discredit Marcuse, Whitfield uses every available weapon. He mentions a visit to Brandeis in 2008 by Daniel Cohn-Bendit on the 40th anniversary of the near disintegration of the Fifth Republic. Whitfield reports that Cohn-Bendit said to him that in the 60s they read too much Marcuse when they should have been reading Hannah Arendt. Whitfield is correct to assert that the lament of that generation invites more than one interpretation. However, there were multiple interpretations. I too recommend reading Arendt but not to merely discredit Marcuse. Reading Arendt and Marcuse together can be very fruitful. It is not an either/or call. A reading of Marcuse and Arendt together can be very

rewarding and it is the subject of a new book by Chris Holman entitled Politics as Radical Creation: Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt on Political Performativity. This is the kind of work that a new generation of Marcuse scholars is doing. Whitfield seems to be unaware of this recent scholarship.

On page four of Whitfield's article he makes a couple of claims that signifies a complete misunderstanding of Marcuse's entire project. He makes the claim that Marcuse's revolutionary faith was limited after the proletariat failed to stop Nazism. His support for this claim lies in the list of potential revolutionary candidates to whom Marcuse refers in his works. Whitefield writes that Marcuse's revolutionary faith:

"was invested in "the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted," and even in "the unemployed and unemployable." To this baggy list, he would add oppositionists who were marked neither by homogeneity nor unity: the middle-class white youth who formed the New Left in Europe as well as the United States; the black underclass in the ghettoes; the National Liberation Front in Vietnam; and the Cuban revolutionaries. [p 4]

One has to ask what is the point here? It is clear from Whitfield's own statements that Marcuse's revolutionary faith was not limited, it was expanded. This is one of the unique things about Marcuse's version of critical theory, and it is what distinguishes him from the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer. There is a large and growing body on Marcuse's never ending search for revolutionary subjectivity. Marcuse never gives up on the proletariat but expands the concept of the working class. He also sees other social struggles as legitimate sites of struggle and necessary for social transformation. Marcuse's new position on the proletariat was made clear by him is many essays and books. Also, Marcuse had developed several good arguments as to why the groups listed in the above quote should be taken seriously as catalysts groups for social change. All of these groups had in some way been victimized by capitalism and other forms of social domination.

In the same paragraph from which the above quote is taken, Whitfield says the following:

Scarcely a decade after the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale had topped the non-fiction best-seller list with The Power of Positive Thinking (1952), Marcuse invoked the virtues of negative thinking, as a counterweight to "the most efficient system of domination," which was how he described democracy. [p. 4]

This passage just might be the clearest indication of Whitfield's tremendous misunderstanding of Marcuse's project. First, there is no need for a critical theorist to ask why compare Marcuse to Norman Vincent Peale. This is very problematic in itself and would take too much time to address. Secondly, what Marcuse called "negative thinking" is really two-dimensional thinking, or dialectical thinking. Marcuse's clearest description of his notion of negative thinking is in the 1960 Preface to his second book on Hegel entitled Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory. Simply put, negative thinking is in a Hegelian sense the negation of a negation which makes a positive. Hence, it is Marcuse, not Norman Vincent Peale who is the

champion of positive thinking. Marcuse believed that the capitalist system as well as other forms of oppression and repression that existed in our society negated critical consciousness as well as freedom. Negative thinking negates this original negation. This type of thinking sees in the present oppressive order the potential for liberation. For example, we have the capacity at this very moment to end world hunger. However, the distribution of resources makes poverty and hunger an ongoing reality. It is one-dimensional thinking, the view that the present facts are absolute and eternal that prevents us from actualizing the real potential that we have to end world hunger. This idea permeates almost all of Marcuse's writings, even Eros and Civilization which Whitfield referred to earlier in his article.

Whitfield also misunderstands Marcuse's view of democracy. Marcuse is not anti-democracy but pro-democracy. However, according to Marcuse, we do not yet have a democracy. In 1968 Marcuse participated in a panel discussion on democracy in New York. In that discussion Marcuse said that democracy may have a future but it does not have a present. He had already claimed in One-Dimensional Man that the ability to vote does not abolish the masters or the slaves. His point is that democracy is not reducible to merely voting. This view has been backed by a huge literature on democracy by philosophers and political scientist. Later in this discussion Marcuse lays out some of the necessary conditions for democracy.

Most disturbing is Whitfield's tendency to twist language or invoke terms that for him legitimates his position. This allows him to make claims with no argument or appeal to Marcuse's texts. He writes:

Most devastating for his reputation as a seer, however, was his failure to anticipate the significance of the reaction to the sixties that the right would soon advance and benefit from. [p. 4]

Whitfield goes on to mention that two years after Marcuse's death Ronald Reagan became President of the US. Again, this view is based on a complete disregard for Marcuse's project. I assume that when Whitfield refers to Marcuse as a seer, he has in mind many of Marcuse's followers. However, we must remember that Marcuse never saw himself as a seer. So, the failure is not his, he was only a critical theorist. However, Marcuse was very much aware of reactive forces on the right. To some degree, the theme of One-Dimensional Man is that capitalism has a way of adapting to emancipatory movements. Further, Whitfield completely ignores Marcuse's warnings in Counter Revolution and Revolt. As a dialectical thinker, Marcuse was always aware of the development of reactionary forces in tandem with liberatory forces.

In the interest of space I have to skip over a few other errors in Whitfield's article. I think that by now there is not much use in addressing every flaw. More than enough has been said to legitimate refusing Whitfield. However, there are a couple more things that should be mentioned. On page five of his article, Whitfield contrast One-Dimensional Man with Eros and Civilization. His purpose is to show that there is an inconsistency between the two books. This is not true. The two books represent two sides of a dialectic where at one moment Marcuse

focuses on the possibility for liberation wherein the other is focused on the development of reactionary forces that may subdue emancipatory forces. Whitfield is also confused about the inspirational sources for both books. He writes:

The effort to trace the radical implications of Freud inspired the earlier volume, and the relevance of Marx to advanced industrial society marked the work that was published in 1964. The site of one book was the bedroom, of the other the boardroom. Nor are Eros and Civilization and One-Dimensional Man consistent. [p. 5]

The influence of Marx and Freud is present in both books. One of the main attractions of Freud was that he provided Marcuse and the Frankfurt School with the tools for understanding why persons who would benefit most from social change may be the first to resist it. Even in One-Dimensional Man Marcuse uses Freud to go beyond Freud. He discusses the way in which the Freudian notion of introjection has been surpassed by a form of mimesis wherein the victims of capitalist society actually identify with and mimic the values of their oppressors. Eros and Civilization is more Marxist than it appears. First, at the time that Marcuse wrote Eros and Civilization the Frankfurt School was under observation by the US government. They intentionally avoided Marxist language. In fact, the term critical theory was invented by Marcuse and Horkheimer to avoid the label of neo-Marxism. More strikingly, there are elements of Marx's Grundrisse throughout Eros and Civilization. Marcuse's discussion of machines and technology as well as his discussion of scarcity and the hierarchical distribution of scarcity are all drawn from Marx's discussion of technology and machinery in the Grundrisse.

To sum up, Whitfield portrays Marcuse as pessimistic. This view is refuted simply by Marcuse's never ending search for emancipatory possibilities. To look for such possibilities beyond the proletariat is not pessimism but a form a social awareness that discloses the multiple forms of oppression in our society and the multiple forms of struggle against it. Further, in thinking that the "Civil Rights Act accelerated the formal decomposition of white supremacy," Whitfield shows that he has not followed recent race relations. It is true that things are a lot better. However, white supremacy has many new ways of asserting itself. The literature on this as well as the everyday examples are enormous. Whitfield also mentions the feminist response to Marcuse. He sees this response as negative, and indeed, some of it was. However, he fails to discuss Marcuse's own support of feminism and the feminist who have been influenced by Marcuse. Nina Power's One-Dimensional Woman is an example of recent feminist work inspired by Marcuse. Marcuse himself wrote essays on feminism and often discussed the women's Liberation Movement in interviews. For Marcuse, women became one of the catalyst groups who may bring about social transformation and a better society.

Whitfield basically claims that Marcuse's critical theory did not anticipate recent developments in capitalism. Hence, "the intellectual and moral legacy of Herbert Marcuse won't be due for a revival anytime soon." [p.7] This position is puzzling. What was One-Dimensional Man about if not about the ability of the system to adapt and maintain itself?

Marcuse's critique of capitalism is as relevant today as it ever was. The recent book by economist Thomas Piketty in an odd way supports the need for a Marcuse revival. Using empirical data, Piketty shows that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing and that this trend may very well continue. However, Piketty's book is just a report and not a critique. In an attempt to avoid being labeled Marxist, Piketty seems to report the facts without a critique of the social conditions by which these facts are produced and maintained. This book has become a best seller not because Piketty is saying anything new, but because what Marxist have been saying for 200 years is finally given some legitimacy by one of our High Priest of our society (the economist). Marcuse and the Frankfurt School were concerned with the way in which economic inequalities seemed to be accepted by the victims of such inequality. Piketty's book does not provide the kind of critique that we get in One-Dimensional Man but it provides recent empirical data on which a book like One-Dimensional Man can be written or re-read.

Finally, regarding contemporary Marcuse scholars, we have no interest in reviving Marcuse because we view him as a seer. The IHMS is composed of a wide range of scholars who are concerned about contemporary struggle for social justice. We find it necessary to use all of the theoretical, intellectual, and political tools available. Marcuse is just one. We have no desire to be disciples of anyone. Marcuse himself did not seek discipleship from anyone but only critical engagement. The published work and conference presentations by members of the IHMS signify an interest in bringing Marcuse to the conversation with many other important contemporary theorists. Whitfield's article seems to confuse contemporary Marcuse scholars with people who are merely seeking a political savior. Some of us have actually written against this form of political and intellectual messianism. Today's Marcuse scholar seeks not to mimic Marcuse nor to blindly follow him, but rather, to critically engage and rethink the important theoretical and emancipatory tools that Marcuse and others have provided us with. Marcuse's decline in popularity over the last few decades is irrelevant. The content of his work may still hold valuable resources for critically engaging and transforming our society. Refusing Marcuse would have to be based on something other than his decline in popularity. It must be based on a very careful reading and analysis of his work. There is no evidence of this in Whitfield's article.

One Dimensional Man at 50

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More than fifty years have passed since the publication of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (ODM) in 1964. That work shaped the first generation of critical theorists in the United States and, while no longer as popular as it once was, it continues to inspire young left intellectuals. Many of an earlier time first encountered the "Frankfurt School" through Marcuse's citations of works by his friends and colleagues from the 1930s. Erich Fromm may have had enormous popular success but few knew of his early connection with the Institute for Social Research. As for the writings of now iconic figures like Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer, they only began appearing in English translation during the 1970s.

For all practical purposes, ODM introduced critical theory to the United States. An interdisciplinary work, which merged the social sciences with philosophy and aesthetics, ODM offered a revamped version of what Antonio Gramsci originally termed "the philosophy of praxis" and — perhaps most importantly — a new critical pedagogy for a movement out of touch with its intellectual roots. Employing the critical method, it questioned old assumptions and predictions. Marcuse adapted Marxism to a new historical context marked by the New Left and an omnipresent postwar belief in "the American Century." Thus, remaining true to the spirit of ODM calls for developing an immanent critique of its assumptions in order to meet the needs of a new epoch and a new society.

Marcuse's classic was structured around what he called the "closing of the political universe." Middle class suburban life appeared as the apogee of human progress in the 1950s and early 1960s. Social issues gave way to personal concerns and in Germany political engagement made way for a new self-absorbed attitude that held those with partisan commitments in cynical contempt, and that these activists should pursue their agendas "without me" (*ohne mich*). The Popular Front and the dramatic confrontations with fascism were a distant memory. They had been reshaped and reinterpreted by the mass media and many of the old participants themselves. Social Democracy had identified with the capitalist West, happily dispensing with its more radical heritage, while Communism was still grappling with "the ghost of Stalin" (Sartre). Structural conflict seemed a thing of the past. Both sides in the Cold War were obsessed with productivity, instrumental rationality, the domination of nature, and intellectual conformity. Stasis seemed to prevail outside of wars (mostly fought by proxy) and a certain ideological competition. Whatever the differences between blocs, however, it was clear that communism was striving for what capitalism claimed to have realized: an abundance of consumer goods and what J.K. Galbraith termed "the affluent society."

Especially in the United States, self-satisfaction girded the prevalent belief that structural conflict was a thing of the past. Not that this was the reality: McCarthyism had launched an

attack against civil liberties, the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement was battling the KKK, which still controlled much of the South, and 10,000,000 people remained poverty-stricken in what Michael Harrington termed “the other America.” But these entrenched trends were only background noise so far as the mainstream was concerned. In the United States, class contradictions had seemingly been resolved and turned into differences in “income distribution.” The welfare state had become part of the consensus and, where social conflict did take place, it was stripped of ideological purpose and transformed into a problem of “public administration.” Thus, Daniel Bell made it fashionable to speak about the “end of ideology” in the early 1960s.

ODM was decidedly unfashionable with its esoteric reliance on critique, utopia, and cultural radicalism. One academic publisher after another rejected Marcuse’s manuscript until Beacon Press, mostly known for printing Bibles, took a chance. The title struck a nerve, the book turned into an instant best seller, and the publisher became the home of critical theory. ODM introduced a broad public to the dialectical way of thinking developed by Hegel and the young Marx that was completely antithetical to the common wisdom as well as “scientific” socialism. Marcuse argued that class contradictions “objectively” continued to exist in “advanced industrial society” — even if they were not “subjectively” recognized as such. He also claimed that the liberal welfare state was not as benign as its uncritical advocates liked to believe and that it rested on what President Dwight D. Eisenhower admitted was a “military-industrial complex” with imperialist ambitions. ODM loosened the straightjacket of political and philosophical conformism by insisting that freedom was not reducible to increased purchasing power, the wares of the culture industry, or the escapades of an imperialist war machine.

Marcuse’s work also confronted the way in which the mainstream analyzed problems and reality. It challenged the operational preoccupations, the robotic language, and the supposedly neutral categories of instrumental rationality and analytic philosophy. Marcuse highlighted the exercise of critical reflection and the aesthetic imagination. He understood genuinely radical thinking as intertwined with the development of a “new sensibility,” a concern with happiness, and a critique of what was fast becoming a “totally administered society.” Borrowing a phrase from Andre Breton, who had served as the guiding force of surrealism, ODM embraced the “great refusal” with its rejection of mainstream philosophical assumptions and its desire to contest the “totality.”

Critical theory would treat all forms of philosophy as inherently value-laden and marked by the historical circumstances in which they emerged. The self-proclaimed concern with neutrality was nothing more than expression of ideology by another name. Positivism and behaviorism, for example, were bent upon excluding subjective interests from the supposedly analytic (objective and value-free) use of language and instrumental rationality. The point was to highlight the operational value of philosophy. These philosophical outlooks had long targets of the Frankfurt School and, in keeping with its tradition, Marcuse undermined their claims of “neutrality” by insisting that they affirmed the status quo through their expulsion of what actually were ethical concerns and existential desires from social inquiry. Their ahistorical character naturalized reality and thus demonstrated their unconscious reification of society.

“Critical” theory had originally been juxtaposed against “traditional” theory when the term was first coined in 1938. The new interdisciplinary approach was explicit in its transformative purpose, its historical character, and its unfinished understanding of freedom. ODM was intent upon opening the closed political universe, highlighting new agents of change, questioning the prevailing consensus, and sparking the imagination of an ideologically dulled yet exploited working class. In the first instance this involved confronting the “culture industry” which, in its quest for profits and the broadest audience possible, tends towards seeking the lowest common denominator for its products. The culture industry thus presents the simple, the clear, the unambiguous, and the tried and true. Unconcerned with critical reflection, let alone radical politics, these cultural commodities are inherently “affirmative” of the status quo. Even cynical and hard-bitten crime dramas, let alone saccharine sitcoms, fulfill this aim by rejecting utopian sentiments and insisting that human nature is deeply corrupt and that the brutal existing order is all that there is or can be. The culture industry almost naturally threatens what Hegel called the “unhappy consciousness,” the motor of freedom and negation, which longs for the new and projects an emancipated social order. Triumphant in advanced industrial society is the “happy consciousness” that excludes meaningful critique and any prospects for developing a “new sensibility.”

ODM reflected the aesthetic impulse of the New Left, if not its musical and cinematic tastes, by castigating affirmative culture and the logic of its production. The integrative power of the culture industry led Marcuse to privilege the role of what considered “marginal groups” that had been victims of exploitation and prejudice: women, people of color, young intellectuals, and the colonized. Their marginality to the functioning of the culture industry is precisely what enabled them to serve as revolutionary “catalysts” for the working class while inspired by a new sensibility disgusted with the exercise of cruelty, patriarchal values, environmental devastation, prejudice, exploitation, and war. ODM presented this as part of an always-unfinished struggle for a very different world. Therein lies its radicalism.

* * *

ODM crystallized a host of themes and influences from Marcuse’s earlier writings ranging from critical aesthetics and alienation to history and historicity to meta-psychology and the dialectical character of freedom. Often forgotten amid the controversy engendered by ODM is the intellectual quality of Marcuse’s scholarly work and his exceptional talents as an essayist. His reviews of *The Paris Manuscripts of 1844* (1932) and Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1939) provide seminal interpretations of these classics. Marcuse’s own early experimental attempts to link Marx and Heidegger by grounding history in “historicity” shaped the perspective on alienation taken in ODM where it appears not merely as a function of the production process but an existential experience that impoverishes the interior. Other early essays collected in *Negations* (1968) like “The Affirmative Character of Culture” (1937) and “On Hedonism” (1938) evinced a deep erudition even as the target under attack and the new concern with happiness that Marcuse would articulate in various works including ODM. His later fusion of Schiller and Freud with Marx and Heidegger resulted in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) — arguably the most important and utopian work of modernity — along with the

emergence of categories like the “pacification of existence” and the “new sensibility.”

The culture industry is perhaps the most famous category of critical theory. It originated in essays by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer from the 1930s as well as, most notably, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) by Horkheimer and Adorno. But the concept first gained notoriety through ODM. That art was being transformed into a commodity was nothing new, little more than an extension of the logic employed by Marx in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867). But the claim that art had lost its uniqueness, its transcendence, its utopian quality, and its ability to foster critical reflection gave the old arguments a new twist. Art now *really* was nothing more than just another commodity. The culture industry would sell anything and turn anything into a fad. Even returning to the classics was impeded by the use of Beethoven or Mozart in advertisements or the transformation of great paintings into posters decorating every other wall in a university dorm. Nor did politics matter. No work of art was immune from the integrative and sanitizing power of the culture industry.

Marcuse sought to infuse a seemingly moribund radicalism degraded by the culture industry with new social priorities and, through Schiller, a new sense of utopian purpose. The former appropriated the “play impulse,” “lightness,” and the primacy of form from the latter’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794). Just as Schiller’s highlighting of aesthetics served to preserve the emancipatory impulse from becoming identified with the bloody politics of the French Revolution, and the ultimate triumph of the Restoration, Marcuse privileged the cultural moment and the utopian alternative in order to prevent liberation from becoming identified with “advanced industrial society.” Marcuse employed this term in the subtitle of ODM. Its implication was clear: critical theory was meant to target not only capitalist society but “actually existing socialism” and any other production process built upon the “alienation” of labor.

ODM confronted this reality with an unfinished notion of freedom that always remains to be specified and redefined. That understanding of freedom kept the book from falling into the trap of an unrelieved “cultural pessimism.” Reason for Marcuse is not neutral (as positivists and behaviorists would have it) but inherently value-laden, historical, and critical of all attempts to conflate freedom with given institutions. The reliance on philosophical idealism in ODM is rooted in an earlier work: *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (1941). It remains one of the great and still salient interpretations of Hegel’s thought. Rejecting the still popular view of his philosophy as authoritarian, if not a precursor of fascism, Marcuse stressed Hegel’s emphasis upon “negation,” its confrontation with necessity; its imperative to uncover still unacknowledged forms of alienation, its attack on dogmatism, and its view of history as the province of “social theory” rather than “science.” *Reason and Revolution* confirms the rueful claim of Carl Schmitt, the staunch conservative and fascist thinker, that “on the day that Hitler took power Hegel died.”

Marcuse saw Hegel as paving the way for the new materialist understanding of alienation along with the utopian impulse of the young Marx. Insofar as alienation taints every aspect of advanced industrial society, if we really are living in what Hegel (and then Marx) termed an

"inverted world," then freedom should appear not merely as an insight into necessity but as the negation of the totality and as what I elsewhere termed an "anthropological break" from a totally administered society. Only in that way is it possible to enrich the existential realm of experience impoverished by alienation. This, in turn, is the justification for introducing the idea of a "new sensibility" and radicalizing E.P. Thompson's claim that the New Left was the first mass movement to place culture at the forefront of the radical enterprise.

Much has been made of the influence (or lack of it) exhibited by ODM. But this much is clear: "Marginal" groups were the catalytic agents for the European strike wave of 1968, and their discourse was decidedly more radical than the explicitly liberal Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Much of the New Left was also concerned with what are today termed "post-materialist" issues such as animal rights, personal relations, child rearing, sexuality, and the environment. Infused by what Paul Ricoeur termed a "hermeneutic suspicion" of power, these groups also evinced an almost visceral hatred of war, racism, and inequality. Exaggerated claims about the emergence of a "new man," or attempts to romanticize the '60s, only obscure what was important. The New Left expanded the boundaries of taste, challenged the "culture industry," helped bring empower previously disenfranchised groups, changed what was permissible, and gave education a critical thrust. Marcuse aided the efforts of what conservatives still condemn as "the adversary culture." ODM heightened the material level of culture, offered an immanent critique of an outworn discourse, and challenged radicals to provide what is so sorely missing today: a politics inspired by the ability to imagine a different world.

* * *

ODM remains a classic work that, as Hegel put the matter, "comprehends its epoch in thought." But this is now a different epoch. Marcuse saw a reactionary change coming and the conservative attack upon the "movement" in *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (1972). His last book, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1977) highlighted the need for critical theory to focus on the "non-identity" between subject and object, the individual and society, and the decidedly non-activist aesthetic views of Theodor Adorno. But this has tended to make critical theory self-indulgent, unnecessarily esoteric, metaphysical, and blind to the workings of institutional power. Critical theory, in short, has become academic precisely when it needs to confront a changed political world.

The closed political universe has re-opened. The old consensus is gone. There is hardly a single important liberal left in the Republican Party and its agenda has basically been set by the Tea Party. Supporters of free markets square off against advocates of state intervention. Ideological cleavages have emerged. The totally administered society has come apart amid the catastrophic policies associated with war in the Middle East and a gigantic economic collapse in 2007. The happy consciousness is no longer quite so omnipresent. Even during the 1960s it was evident that critical television (as in the case of, say, *All in the Family*) provoked real controversy and it is hard to deny that saccharine sitcoms have humanized gays and lesbians for a broader public. Douglas Kellner was correct when he talked of the culture industry as a

“contested terrain” and, today, old assumptions about culture and aesthetics require radical revision given the rise of “virtual reality” and a new cyber world.

Once marginal groups are also no longer marginal. Outbreaks of the old racist or sexist or homophobic style and rhetoric, admittedly, still occur. Police still shoot black youths, religious zealots still thunder against homosexuality, and provincial chauvinists still fear the immigrant and the Arab. But there is a sense in which all of this is anachronistic. As I suggested in *The Bigot: Why Prejudice Persists* (2014), traditional targets of discrimination now come under attack in a more “politically correct” manner. Criticisms of the welfare state are no longer peppered with references to single mothers and “welfare queens” but rather the rhetoric of the free market, individual “responsibility,” and warnings that the country is heading down what Friedrich Hayek termed the “road to serfdom.” Curtailing the voting rights and the political clout of poor people of color is now justified in terms of formalities and fear of fraud — even though there is barely a hint of electoral fraud. The assault on gay marriage and women in the workplace now takes place in the name of tradition while supposed fear of moral decline and loss of religious values anchor the opposition to evolution, multi-cultural education, and critical thinking.

Transformative politics today requires knowledge about how the production process works, how marginal groups have been integrated, and how to strengthen solidarity in a new age. Class contradictions that were dormant have become manifest. Dealing with them, of course, is another matter. But, then, the Left has made things too easy for itself. Romantic anti-capitalism has become entrenched, especially among those radicals who still feed off the cultural style and political assumptions of the 1960s after more than half a century. Old targets of formal prejudice now have their bureaucratic lobbying organizations. Each privileges its clientele against others and employs fragmenting ideologies to justify the morality of the separate deal. Political thinking divorced from the logic of power is always apolitical. The success of the Tea Party as against the collapse of Occupy Wall Street should prove instructive. Imagination has its place but that is also true of realism and the need for class ideals to shift economic priorities, protect civil liberties, and foster a new cosmopolitan sensibility. This means that imagining the possible must supplant abstract visions of an anthropological break and that the indeterminate negation of ODM requires greater specificity. To put it another way, articulating the clear alternative should be a substitute for the great refusal.

Whether Marcuse would have agreed with these suggestions is another story. But they are the kind of discussions that occur too rarely and that, I think, he would have enjoyed. They indicate the preconditions for fighting one-dimensional thinking and the temptations of one-dimensional man in a new age. Indeed, wherever the fight for freedom will arise in the future, it will surely draw inspiration from the transformative promise of Herbert Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man.*

Dedicated to Douglas Kellner

Film Review: Selma, MLK, and Voting Rights: The Film Version

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It seems like an eternity has passed since the chants of “we shall overcome” to “I can’t breathe” and “hands up, don’t shoot.” In fact, a millennium seems to have gone by since that night in Grant Park on November 4th, 2008 when some Americans thought we were on the point of entering a post-racial era, only to find in the last six months the streets of Ferguson, and New York turning into scenes of volatile protests against police brutality and racism.

It is fortuitous for Ava DuVernay’s film Selma that it has appeared at a time when race is again a roiling issue and when only those who like to indulge in wish fulfillment can believe harmony in race relations—despite measurable progress—has been achieved. DuVernay’s stately, deeply moving film centers on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (although there was a TV miniseries in 1978 starring Paul Winfield and Cicely Tyson, this is the first feature film to use him as a main character) and the stirring 1965 Selma-Montgomery marches that he led. DuVernay couldn’t have foreseen the protests this fall and winter, but she and the cast wore T-shirts in support with the “I can’t breathe” slogan, when promoting the film. There was also the fact that in 2013 the conservative Supreme Court struck down section four of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, at which the Selma march had aimed and succeeded in getting passed.

Yes, the two eras protests share some of the same justifiable anger against the virulence of white racism. But the world was different in 1965 when Martin Luther King led the Selma march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge. It was still a segregated South where rednecks could use violence to protect their racist institutions and laws, and where politicians like Governor George Wallace openly pandered to their constituent’s racism to further their political careers. The protestors then had to deal with racism backed by state power rather than the implicit subtler racism of today, where the police serve as genuine protectors as well as at times oppressors of minority communities. In addition, the unchecked power-wielding head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, was hard at work then to discredit King and the civil rights movement, wiretapping King’s phone conversations and creating intense anxiety for the King family. Today the FBI may be far from a bellwether of civil liberties, but there is nobody as ominous and vindictive as Hoover in control.

Interestingly, Selma shares some of the same characteristics as another film about an American icon and martyr, Steven Spielberg’s Lincoln (2012). Both present a single event, in Lincoln the passage of the 13th amendment and in Selma the Selma to Montgomery March, and both use more intimate scenes to evoke some of the personal and even less admirable qualities of their heroes. InLincoln Tony Kushner’s script and Daniel Day-Lewis’ performance create a nuanced, indelible portrait of our eloquent, haunted 16th president. Spielberg and

Kushner achieve this without turning Lincoln into the larger-than-life mythic figure that has often dominated our image of him. He's viewed as a man caught in a difficult marriage with the neurasthenic Mary Todd (Sally Field), whom he affectionately calls Molly, and painfully involved in a losing argument with his older son about joining the army and, most markedly, operating as a hard-nosed politico behind the scenes, who was not hesitant to use his power and chicanery to achieve his goals.

Selma spends a bit less time on the nature of King's character and much less on his personal life than Lincoln, but there are smaller incidents such as King and his wife, Coretta (Carmen Ejogo), whose persona is seen as dignified, genteel and clearly burdened, fussing with his ascot before his Nobel laureate speech in 1964. The scene conveys genuine affection between them. It's a rare moment in a strained, difficult marriage, especially (though its never discussed directly) because of King's adulteries and womanizing. King is portrayed neither as a saint nor as someone free of self-doubt. He wonders if it's enough to end the segregation of a lunch counter or of an interstate bus without alleviating poverty. He expresses anxiety about leading a march, where he is responsible for the safety of thousands of citizens who could be brutalized by troopers while practicing non-violence. And he has to live with the fact that people were bloodied and a few died when the Selma March took place. There is one scene that beautifully captures his unease. King makes a late night call, and at first one thinks it's to one of his mistresses. But it is to his friend and gospel singer Mahalia Jackson asking her to sing for him, so he can "share the Lord's voice" to provide him with consolation and reassurance. She sings his favorite gospel song, Thomas A. Dorsey's classic plea for divine intervention "Take My Hand Precious Lord".

Though the reflective, self-doubting King is given a fair amount of screen time, it's the public figure and events that resonate the most in the film. The film makes clear that King was not only a brilliant orator, an idealist and a visionary, but also an astute tactician. He chose Selma as the battleground because of its vicious law enforcers, such as Sheriff Jim Clark and the state's racist and demagogic governor, George Wallace. He knew that the march would generate violent clashes that the media would cover, conveying the nature of the struggle to the American people-and ultimately put pressure on LBJ's White House. It also shows how King could learn from his mistakes, when he mentions Sheriff Laurie Pritchett's handling of King's Albany movement, which was a complete failure because Pritchett treated the protestors with wise restraint and almost no violence.

The public virtue of King and his associates in the SCLC was beyond question. Their movement adhered to Gandhian non-violence and had its roots in Southern black churches (King in the film kneels in prayer and quotes scripture). The march was markedly different from the basically leaderless, spontaneous protests of today (there is no man or woman who has the political weight or charisma to be called a national black leader in 2015), which can't always control the violent and destructive individuals who join up—adding an element of nihilistic chaos to a genuine cry for justice and opposition to victimization. On the other hand Selma was carefully planned, had defined goals, and a strong leadership group that made the movement a model of disciplined and purposive behavior.

That leadership group included Hosea Williams (Wendell Pierce), Andrew Young (Andre Holland), and Ralph Abernathy (Colman Domingo). The film also includes the passionate and courageous SNCC chairman, later Georgia Congressman, John Lewis (Stephen James) who joined with the SCLC on the march. (Lewis ended his commitment to SNCC when Stokely Carmichael became chairman the next year, realizing that the integrated grass roots organization was heading in a militant black power direction that conflicted with his ‘‘personal commitment to nonviolence.’’) None of the leadership group are given much dimension or personality, but they are still more defined in the film than Diane Nash (Tessa Thompson) who is seen as a mere bystander in an almost all-male SCLC movement. But it was the fearless, tactically astute Nash who originated the idea of the Selma to Montgomery march Thus, DuVernay compounds the frequent error of seeing the Civil Rights movement as solely the province of males, leaving out the important contributions of women like Ella Baker and others.

This historical omission is surpassed by DuVernay’s treatment of President Lyndon B. Johnson (Tom Wilkerson). Selma portrays Johnson as hostile to the idea of a voting rights bill, even plotting with J. Edgar Hoover (Dylan Baker) to wiretap King—a blatant untruth— to undermine King. There have been many Johnson supporters who have risen to his defense, most notably former cabinet secretary Joseph Califano. Their contention is that Johnson was fully supportive of King’s campaign for voting rights and even consulted with him on strategy. Also, David J. Garrow, the author of Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, stated that “Selma may not have been Johnson’s idea, but he was happy that King was out there mounting a voting rights campaign.”

What is certain is that Johnson wanted to get his beloved War on Poverty going before he turned to voting rights, which might have made his support for the poverty war a bit lukewarm. Hardly anyone doubts that the War of Poverty was closest to Johnson’s heart. Indeed that policy was born on the evening after JFK’s assassination and possibly years earlier as a result of Johnson’s own impoverished and hard-scrabble adolescence and youth. Of course Johnson knew that he had to pass Civil Rights legislation in 1964 in order to go unchallenged for the democratic nomination, and he was also hesitant about actively pushing the Voting Rights Act so close to the passage of the Civil Rights Act. As a matter of fact to the end of his days Johnson lamented the fact that the Vietnam War had killed his war on poverty. But he did leave a lasting legacy when Congress passed both the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Medicare bill within seven days of one another.

Despite its historical flaws, Selma has a great many virtues. David Oyelowo’s Martin Luther King does more than play the role of King, for his diction and his body language captures both King’s surface and essence. His performance and the film bring back to us just how charismatic and eloquent MLK could be. For legal reasons, DuVernay had to reimagine King’s oratory (but the soaring words like, “A man stands up and says enough is enough,” still have King’s cadence and moral resonance. If they lose something in authenticity, the power of his words remains undiminished. Duvernay also captures the tension and violence of the marches, especially “Bloody Sunday” with fluid editing and by avoiding creating overly grandiose tableaus.

It’s realistic film, so neither the heroes of SCLC or their enemies are turned into outsized figures. They are all grounded in history, and we believe in their existence. It makes for a film that should be required viewing for anyone, especially the young, encompassing those interested and even those unconcerned about 20th century American history and specifically the Civil Rights movement. It is also a reminder of a time when the better angels of our society were able to claim a victory over the darker forces that also inhabit it, when a man like King could make a speech after ending the Selma March at Alabama’s state capital in Montgomery that envisioned “a society of justice where none would prey upon the weakness of others; a society of plenty where greed and poverty would be done away.”

Given that speech, it’s useful to remind those who perceive our contemporary problems as intractable and inexorably moving us towards cynicism and apathy that Dr. King believed in a moral arc of the universe that is long but also will bend toward ultimate justice.

We are struck by how much this country and Black America lost with the assassination of King in 1968. If King had lived into the 70s and 80s, he clearly would have tried to move us towards issues of inequality that would have made a true difference in an American society, confronted with an increasing economic gap between the rich and the middle class and, of course, the poor. King would then have left us with an even more enduring legacy than he has done.

Review Essay on Howard Zinn

By | 2015: vol. 14, no. 1

Books reviewed:

Martin Duberman, *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left* (New York: The New Press, 2012)

Anthony Arnove, *Howard Zinn Speaks: Collected Speeches 1963-2009* ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012)

The American Association of University Professors was founded 100 years ago in 1915 to defend academic freedom for professors who were initially under siege during the Progressive Era and World War I. A.A.U.P. is celebrating its centennial and its historic role in defending academic freedom, launching the tenure system and developing comprehensive common law for the academy. Its illustrious founders were Arthur Lovejoy of Johns Hopkins University and John Dewey of Columbia University. Faculty and administrators throughout the United States rely upon A.A.U.P. Policy Documents and Reports, frequently referred to as the Redbook, with its red cover, as the rules-of-the-road in post-secondary education. Unfortunately, the academy has persecuted many scholars, past and present, who deviated from the canon by exercising an independence in scholarship, pedagogy and extramural utterances. Through coercion, the evisceration of the tenure system with only twenty-five per cent of faculty on the tenure stream and the increasingly anti-academic nature of the corporate university, the very principles that inspired the founding of the Association are at risk.

Two of America's greatest historians of the postwar period were Richard Hofstadter and Howard Zinn. Like Dewey they had a strong Columbia connection. Hofstadter taught at Columbia from 1946 to 1970, and chaired Howard Zinn's dissertation defense committee. Both were revisionist historians who preferred synthesizing secondary sources over mining archival documents. The claim that only primary sources constitute the gold standard of historiography is undermined by the Hofstadter-Zinn mode of discovery of a new past, thereby creating a more enlightened present. Historiography relying upon printed sources or readily available primary sources can be quite effective in liberation from the predominant accepted discourse on essential matters of national identity and purpose. The towering histories of Hofstadter's, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It*, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, and *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* and Dr. Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, *Postwar America: 1945-1971* and *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* are examples of a searing revisionism that discovers a new American past freed from nationalistic hagiography.

While one does not require a university appointment to qualify as a historian, tenured or

tenure-track academicians are the freest to challenge the past. Tenure, as developed by the A.A.U.P., is intended to serve the common good, not the tenure holder, by permitting those educators who have demonstrated excellence in teaching, scholarship and service during a six-year probationary period to develop freely those skills that benefit society. Continuous tenure usually results in the issuance of annual contracts until retirement and undergirds academic freedom to explore new pathways of knowledge and teaching that contribute mightily to societal progress. Professor Zinn hoped the granting of tenure would inoculate one from retaliation for "rub[bing] your dean or president or department chair[person] the wrong way, that might get the alumni riled up."[1]

Throughout Dr. Zinn's academic career on two very different campuses — an African-American women's college in the South and a comprehensive Carnegie R-1 university in the North–there was a disturbing commonality. The need to wage academic freedom battles against the institutions' presidents that included a desperate defense of his livelihood. His mission of giving voice to history's forgotten also hung in the balance. In Howard Zinn Speaks, the essential Zinn appears through public speaking venues spanning some five decades. While Dr. Zinn's reputation is derived from his writings and actions during the Civil Rights Movement and the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War, his courageous but frequently overlooked career-long demand for academic freedom and securing basic rights for faculty, students and staff is also significant.

Howard Zinn resisted authoritarian presidents at Spelman College in Atlanta and Boston University who were eager to destroy his academic career, sully his reputation and remove him from campus. President Albert Manley and President John Silber construed Professor Zinn as an existential threat to their authoritarian control of faculty and students. An examination of Howard Zinn's contribution to an understanding of America's past must also include revelations of his personal struggles, even as a tenured faculty member at the rank of full professor, to retain his academic appointment. With so few academicians today on the tenure stream, much less at professor rank, Professor Zinn's tumultuous academic career should alert and energize those willing to defy the assessment police, the demand for common syllabi and the intimidation of faculty who challenge institutional culture and the putative "mission" of a post-secondary institution.

Martin Duberman's biography, *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left*, is a somewhat random, uneven effort to construct an intimate portrait of Professor Zinn and present a separate American history as well. While at times illuminating, Duberman's criticism of Dr. Zinn's "vacuuming" documents of a private, intimate nature from his personal papers, and daring "to pull the veil over the personal side of his life" is self-serving for a biographer's prying eyes. Duberman invades gratuitously but rather ineffectively Dr. Zinn's zone of privacy by culling from family and anonymous "close friends" tales of alleged extramarital affairs.[2] One would anticipate that Duberman, a former director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY Graduate School, would appreciate that one's private sexual encounters need not serve the impulses of public scrutiny. Howard Zinn did not want his private life exposed in a seedy published biography and Duberman, who refers to his subject by first-name intimacy, should have

respected his “friend’s” wish, and not whine about the dearth of juicy peccadilloes in the Zinn papers

Spelman College in Atlanta offered Howard Zinn his first tenure-track appointment. He became a tenured full professor and chair of the Department of History and Social Sciences at the African-American women’s college. Dr. Zinn was intent on liberating Spelman students from a confined, regimented existence behind an imposing college-constructed wall of isolation and self-segregation from the tumult of the Civil Rights Movement. President Manley, Spelman’s first African-American president, fired Dr. Zinn after seven years of service in 1963.

Facts are facts. Dr. Zinn was fired in violation of the American Association of University Professors guidelines on dismissal of a faculty member. Although Duberman throughout the text and index repeatedly misidentifies A.A.U.P. as the Association of American University Professors, he explores in depth its efforts to help the beleaguered historian.[3] The iconic A.A.U.P. 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and the 1958 Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings permit the firing of a tenured faculty member only for cause. The burden of proof shifts to the administration, after the probationary period, and an adversarial hearing before a faculty-hearing committee is required. President Manley in a craven manner sends a letter to Dr. Zinn in June 1963 after the semester had ended with students and faculty no longer on campus, that “you are relieved of all duties after June 30, 1963…The college’s check for your termination pay is enclosed.”[4] There was no explanation, no warning, no opportunity for grievance, and no face-to-face meeting. Such egregious presidential abuse of power led to the founding of the American Association of University Professors forty-nine years earlier.

Professor Zinn contacted the A.A.U.P. and they investigated the disruption of his continuous tenure. Duberman indicates that Spelman claimed that only upon promotion to full professor does the six-year time tenure-track time clock begin. That is risible. Dr. Zinn was at Spelman for seven years from 1956-1963 and rightfully claimed he was tenured: The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure affirms “the probationary period should not exceed seven years.” Despite the anarchy at Spelman in which a formal-tenure review process was not granted, A.A.U.P. agreed with Professor Zinn that he had earned de facto tenure and that Manley could not fire him. Professor Zinn, with a family to support and no other faculty appointment, asked for an explanation of his dismissal. Manley tersely replied, “it is not necessary for the college to give reasons when it is decided not to renew the contract of a faculty member.”[5]

Today such arbitrary abuse of the professoriate’s new majority of full-time non-tenure track, and part-time faculty is not uncommon. Even tenured faculty, as seen in the Steven Salaita case at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, are increasingly vulnerable in the post-Zinn era to arbitrary revocation of tenure or dismissal due to trumped up charges of misconduct, lack of civility and faked financial exigencies. President Manley and subsequent university presidents should have a copy of the Redbook on their lavish desks in their corner offices and consult the Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings. It

contains specific due process requirements to precede dismissal including a formal charge brought before a pre-sanction review faculty hearing committee:

> Commencement of Formal Proceedings. The formal proceedings should be commenced by a communication addressed to the faculty member by the president of the institution, informing the faculty member of the statement formulated, and also informing the faculty member that, at the faculty member's request, a hearing will be conducted by a faculty committee at a specified time and place to determine whether he or she should be removed from the faculty position on the grounds stated.… Hearing Committee. The committee of faculty members to conduct the hearing and reach a decision should be either an elected standing committee not previously concerned with the case or a committee established as soon as possible after the president's letter to the faculty member has been sent.

Spelman's Manley travels to Washington to meet with the Howard Zinn A.A.U.P. case officer, associate secretary Robert Van Waes. Confronted with a burgeoning A.A.U.P. investigation, Manley raises a moral turpitude violation four years after the alleged incident. Duberman finds it necessary to investigate this matter despite Dr. Zinn having previously disclosed with considerable detail in one of his best if underappreciated works, The Southern Mystique. Dr. Zinn was alone in a car with a student; white police officers arrested him for "disorderly conduct" and in the words of the police for sitting "in a car with a nigger gal."[6] From jail he called Don Hollowell, an African-American Civil Rights attorney in Atlanta. Hollowell paid their bond and Professor Zinn and the student were released. All charges were dropped a few days later. Duberman is needlessly preoccupied with an unproven, sensationalized sexual dimension of his dismissal. While Duberman considers it probative that the car was on a dead-end street, there was no complaint, no charge, no plea bargain, no trial, no plaintiff and no conviction. Duberman cites a draft account of this incident when Howard Zinn was preparing *The Southern Mystique*. Yet the draft appears identical to the book version. I think Duberman was incorrect to use December 1959 as the date of the encounter since Zinn writes it was January 1960 in the released publication of *The Southern Mystique*. It is very unlikely Duberman had access to additional primary documents. With ironic prescience, Dr. Zinn described the matter as a "Kafka-like episode, a relic perhaps for future historians."[7]

After Manley cynically raises this encounter to justify his summary dismissal of Professor Zinn, A.A.U.P. becomes diffident in pursuing further an investigation of Howard Zinn's complaint despite the absence of any evidence of professional misconduct. Both A.A.U.P.s general secretary (now the position is called executive director) and Professor Zinn mutually agree to end the inquiry as he prepares to undertake the ultimate challenge of his heroic, storied career: protecting his appointment at Boston University. (Disclosure: I graduated from Boston University, majored in Dr. Zinn's Department of Government, matriculated in three of his classes, including Political Theory that Duberman mentions and was one of his advisees during senior year. I saw him for the last time at a Historians Against the War conference in 2006. We spoke for about twenty-five minutes prior to his anti-Iraq War keynote address in ironically the cavernous L.B.J. Auditorium at the Lyndon B. Johnson presidential library on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin.)

Professor Zinn left Spelman during the Civil Rights Movement and arrives at Boston University "just in time for the beginning of the big American escalation of the war in Vietnam."[8] At Spelman he resisted American apartheid and at B.U. the genocide and mass murder during the Vietnam War consumed his activism. No other historian, and only a few academics such as Noam Chomsky, commanded such influence during the uprising against the war. Professor Zinn's demand for change and human rights placed him once again in the firing line of Boston University president John Silber: an arrogant, powerful, ruthless, determined reactionary who had recently stepped down as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin.

A seminal American Association of University Professors document defines in depth the concept of shared governance. The 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities requires that faculty play a significant role in institutional governance. It refers to an "inescapable interdependence" between faculty, governing boards and administration. In defining the role of the president, it emphasizes sharing faculty views, even when dissenting, with the governing board. In particular the professoriate retains primacy in many key areas. These include determining faculty status that encompasses "appointments, reappointments, decisions not to reappoint, promotions, the granting of tenure, and dismissal. The primary responsibility of the faculty for such matters is based upon the fact that its judgment is central to general educational policy." [Emphasis added]

At Spelman there was no faculty involvement in the egregious dismissal of Howard Zinn. At Boston University, Silber rejected any role for faculty whom he construed as underlings and vicariously defined as dead wood and mocked the very concept of shared governance–a core principle of A.A.U.P. and the sine qua non of academic democracy. Silber intoned about "a natural hierarchy among men…[and] no university can be run except on an elitist basis."[9] Such a position is a baneful attack on academic freedom. If college and university faculty are subaltern, at will employees without a voice, their students, to be sure, will not explore new pathways of knowledge. Without critical thinking students cannot challenge the white-privileged cannon. Academic freedom to teach, publish and engage freely in extramural utterances is censored.

Professor Zinn during the worst excesses of apartheid in South Africa explores the essence of academic freedom in a daring speech at the University of Cape Town. With a brilliant twist of rhetoric: "To me, academic freedom has always meant the right to insist that freedom be more than academic…we can challenge not only the ideas but the institutions."[10] At home, Dr. Zinn supported the unionization of B.U. faculty, staff and maintenance workers. He supported civil disobedience rallies against military recruiters and racism. He went to Hanoi with Father Daniel Berrigan to free American POW and shielded Berrigan when he was a fugitive from America's secret police, the F.B.I. He invited students voluntarily in his last class lecture to join a picket line on campus. Professor Zinn's spoke truth to power not only with provocative lectures in a B.U. classroom, but also leading resistance to university transgressions outside the classroom.

Professor Zinn excoriates Silber for exercising “dictatorial power” in the 1970s and 1980s in his suppression of faculty, administrators, students and staff who defied his commands.[11] Silber’s treatment of Professor Zinn was bullying and a clear violation of A.A.U.P. guidelines and policies. Duberman reveals the Department of Political Science in 1979 recommended Dr. Zinn receive a merit salary increase of $2,400. Silber personally blocked any raise even though B.U. salaries were already among the lowest nationally for comparable institutions. Silber, however, was the highest paid university president in the United States whose salary was twice as much as the president ofHarvard.[12] Administrations are obligated to honor a departmental salary-increase recommendation unless there are bona fide financial developments that mandate austerity. The Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities rejects this display of presidential unilateralism: “The faculty should actively participate in the determination of policies and procedures governing salary increases.” Boston University faculty, librarians and clerical workers formed unions as the insurrection mounted against the loss of academic freedom, the notoriously chattel-wage structure and the shredding of shared governance in the kingdom of John Silber.

Although post-secondary presidents are not usually afforded academic freedom protection–it applies to faculty and supposedly for students–they have rights. Most avoid taking positions on matters of public concern for fear of alienating financially powerful constituencies and board members who may sanction an outspoken president. I believe university presidents should engage issues of public concern in addition to university matters. Silber, to his credit, was outspoken on a full array of public-policy issues but when he attacked publicly Dr. Zinn’s scholarship, ideology and general character, it degenerated into an existential threat to academic freedom. Such egregious public rebuke of a faculty member serves intentionally as a general admonition to the professoriate: back off, remain meek and conduct your professional exploration of the truth within prescribed limits.

Dr. Zinn and other faculty met their classes outdoors during a spring strike of clerical workers along Commonwealth Avenue, a major street in Boston that abuts much of the campus. The administration wanted to fire the tenured “B.U. Five” for a breach of contract that prohibited “sympathy strikes.”[13] According to Duberman, Silber called Dr. Zinn a liar during this labor-solidarity campaign. Silber charged, “His apparent belief that it is proper to distort the truth for political purposes.” He castigated the people’s historian for failing to achieve, “standards of scholarship that were very high.”[14] Such invective is disruptive of academic freedom as developed in the epochal 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure: “Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results.” A university president’s public scolding of a professor is unacceptable. If there are issues related to scholarship, then a faculty committee should be empanelled to investigate.

Silber also accused Professor Zinn of arson! When told by a colleague that Silber accused him of setting fire to the president’s office, Professor Zinn exclaimed, “You’re not serious.” While Silber later apologized and claimed he was mistakenly referring to an incident prior to his tenure as president, it demonstrated, as he was losing control, his determination to silence and destroy the reputation of Professor Zinn. The A.A.U.P. Recommended Institutional Regulations

on Academic Freedom and Tenure contains procedural requirements if a charge of misconduct is filed against a faculty member. Silber, of course, had no intention of investigating Dr. Zinn but was merely mouthing off to muzzle progressive activists on the Boston University campus.

At the age of eighty-two, he was invited to give an antiwar lecture in Rome. On the duty of the historian, he proclaimed, "We need, all of us, to become teachers, to spread information…We need to teach history…"[15] Indeed, teach history without university presidents threatening dismissal or immiseration. Indeed, teach history without university presidents demanding that the teacher-student relationship remain purely academic and not subject to civil disobedience coalition building. Indeed, teach history with tenured historians and not proletarian marginalized contingent faculty who may empower students to think critically about issues on their own campus and society at large. A.A.U.P. was established to serve the common good in protecting freedom of inquiry for university and college professors. Our challenge is to insure that there is an academy to protect so the next Howard Zinn may arise who exemplifies the cri de coeur of the 1955 Bertrand Russell-Albert Einstein Manifesto: "Remember your humanity and forget the rest."

Notes

[1] Anthony Arnove, *Howard Zinn Speaks: Collected Speeches 1963-2009* ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 31.

[2] Martin Duberman, *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left* (New York: The New Press, 2012), xii, 188.

[3] Ibid., 78, 346.

[4] Howard Zinn, *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 42.

[5] Duberman, *Zinn*, 84.

[6] Howard Zinn, *The Southern Mystique* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 136-37.

[7] Duberman, *Zinn*, 87; Ibid.

[8] *Howard Zinn Speaks*, 111.

[9] Duberman, *Zinn*, 206.

[10] *Howard Zinn Speaks*, 46.

[11] Howard Zinn, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 202.

[12] Robert D. McFadden, “John Silber Dies at 86; Led Boston University,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2012.

[13] Zinn, *You Can’t be Neutral*, 191.

[14] Duberman, *Zinn*, 221.

[15] *Howard Zinn Speaks*, 203-04.

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The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan by Rick Pearlstein

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The Invisible Bridge, the book jacket informs us, "is the story of America on the verge of a nervous breakdown." Thus are we introduced to the third volume of Rick Perlstein's exploration of the birth and growth of contemporary American conservatism, centering on the rise of Ronald Reagan. (He has produced other books centering on Goldwater and Nixon.) Whether or not the United States was on the verge of a breakdown, either by design or because it is his natural style, Perlstein, who wears with pride his designation as "the hyper-caffeinated Herodotus of the American Century," conveys the sense that it was. And by constructing, as it were, a memory of 1973-76 for those who did not live through those years, and by reconstructing memory for those who were there, he persuades us to imagine we are experiencing something of that period. The recovery of memories is, however, a risky enterprise, so Perlstein's methods must be scrutinized. But first a bit more about his style.

Perlstein's description of Robert Altman's 1975 film *Nashville* says much about the form, the content and the purpose of *The Invisible Bridge.* That film, composed of "random, unmotivated cut[s] to . . . apparently unrelated scene[s]" was "a sort of scattered, discursive allegory for a national mood buried a bit too far beneath the surface of the national consciousness to make it a simple thing to explain" (p. 581). The overall effect, Perlstein writes, was that "you could pick through the various runes and try to make them signify something coherent, but the incoherence felt like *the point* – but an incoherence, be that as it may, that is *shared*. That somehow ends with this shambling, variegated community *redeemed*, as one" (p. 583; italics in original).

My first problem with Perlstein's book is that what made for an engaging if long (160 min) film does not necessarily make a very long book engaging too. Yet my difficulties stemmed not just from length and not just from its Altmanesque, hypercaffeinated style which, in my view, discourages reflection. Actually it doesn't come over as a single book. I find it hard to say precisely what it is. Two books interwoven together? Or one or more books constantly interrupted by interjections?

There is a story here about president-centered politics from 1973 when America's Vietnam War ended and the Nixon presidency began to implode as "Watergate" grew, until 1976, as the Ford presidency deflated out of sight, having had the remaining air sucked out of it, Perlstein says, by Ronald Reagan's not-quite-spontaneous, not-quite-in-support-of-Ford speech which brought the Republican convention to a close in August. That ten weeks later Ford would be defeated by Carter the Democrat is merely a looming, unmentioned anticlimax.

This ‘book’ comes across more as short stories—many quite engaging—than as a systematically linked series of chapters. But Perlstein intends them and his frequent interjections collectively to make a specific point, to show “how Ronald Reagan came within a hairsbreadth of becoming the 1976 Republican nominee for president.” And since Reagan is the star in this episode of Perlstein’s epic series on conservatism, we are treated to segments of Reagan’s life, from birth through his childhood, school and college years, his career in radio and Hollywood, and his performance as California’s governor. This “sort of biography” (p. xv), an oft-told tale, is scattered throughout the text. So Perlstein’s production includes, besides the ‘book’ and the interjections, a biography. But where then do we stop this count of its many parts? For it also includes a ‘sort of biography’, though a shorter one, of Jimmy Carter, whom Perlstein treats with much greater moral disdain than he does Reagan.

Regarding the interjections, Perlstein intends that they contribute to his larger purpose, to lay bare the traumatic wounds “America suffered. . . to its ideal of itself” (p. xiii). Here are vignettes, some no more than anecdotal asides, drawn from popular political culture, many about what might be described as minor moral panics of the time. His selectio is idiosyncratic. Are we supposed to read a lot into the extensive list on p. 63 of misdeeds committed by politicians, as if they were peculiar to that time? And what about the fourteen-year-old who “was stripped of first prize [in the Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio] after officials X-rayed his car and discovered an electromagnet in the nose to pull him out of the starting gate more quickly” (p. 167)? Cute, this last one. But these hardly add up to a demonstration that those times were seriously morally out of joint—unless, of course, we accept that bribery, corruption and cheating—and suspicion (what officials would think to X-ray a child’s soapbox?)—were peculiarly salient during those years, and unless we are swept along by Perlstein’s energetic style into believing that beforehand Americans were for the most part naively innocent. That 1973-1976 was when Perlstein began to become a conscious human being—he was born in 1969—should be historically irrelevant, but it may not be psychologically irrelevant to the way he assigns significance.

Since the ‘short stories’ and the cultural vignettes follow the same chronological order, their interweaving suggests an interactive relationship between these two aspects of the reality Perlstein addresses. Since, however, everything is merely juxtaposed rather than linked in an explicit way, since Perlstein keeps his reasoning under wraps, and since the cultural component is undeveloped – presented in the form of interjections whose significance is rarely explored. Is he urging us to reflect upon those times and develop an understanding of them? Or is he seeking to overwhelm us, not just by the volume of the information but also by the somewhat chaotic nature of his discourse, into accepting his understanding that the period was an almost incomprehensibly chaotic one? (That is not, by the way, quite how I remember it.) Besides, should that be Perlstein’s purpose, is he asserting that that time was a uniquely chaotic? And if so, how might a claim such as that be sustained?

So far, I have not remarked on Perlstein’s tendency to hyperbole, something one immediately encounters in his Preface:

"In the years between 1973 and 1976, America suffered more wounds to its ideal of itself than at just about any other time in its history (p. xiii)."

He then launches into a litany of major traumatic events–the American defeat in Vietnam, the unfolding of Watergate on television, the oil embargo– and "dozens of smaller traumas," including one of his favorites, "lost to everyday historical memory, . . . the near doubling of meat prices in the spring of 1973." But let's not dwell on the bathos. He continues:

"In the next few years the traumas continued, compounding. The end of a presidency . . . Inflation such as America had never known during peacetime. A recession that saw hundreds of thousands of blue-collar workers idled during Christmastime; crime at a volume and ghastliness greater, according to one observer, 'than at any time since the fifteenth century.' Senate and House hearings on the Central Intelligence Agency that accused American presidents since Dwight Eisenhower of commanding squads of lawless assassins.

With these traumas emerged a new sort of American politics–a stark discourse of reckoning (pp. xiii-xiv)."

"[C]rime at a volume and ghastliness greater . . . 'than at any time since the fifteenth century'." Really? (I cannot tell from his Source Notes who the "observer" is who first put forward this problematical claim.)

I do not mean to suggest that these things were insignificant or pain-free. But to refer to them all, the greater and the smaller, as traumas is surely to overstate the case. Were they all experienced as emotional shocks that did substantial, lasting damage to the American psyche?

"In the years between 1973 and 1976, America suffered more wounds to its ideal of itself than at just about any other time in its history."

Just how would one validate that claim? Is the insertion of "just about" intended to serve as an escape clause: he wants to make a claim of some enormity, but he doesn't want to be held responsible for it? One might even use Perlstein to indict Perlstein for his careless – hypercaffeinated? – rhetoric by turning to the Preface, where we are told that it is now that, "In certain ways we live in some of the darkest times in our history: global warming threatens to engulf us; political polarization threatens to paralyze us; the economy nearly collapsed because of the failure of the banking regulatory regime; competition from China threatens to overwhelm us; social mobility is at its lowest point in generations–to name only a few versions of the national apocalypse that may yet come" (p. xx).—Interestingly, he does not include the events of 9/11 and its consequences among the things now weighing heavily on American minds, yet he does include among his cultural vignettes something that would have traumatized me had I witnessed it: the1974 between-the-twin-towers skywalking feats of Philippe Petit (p. 269)—Americans are just fated, it seems, to keep on experiencing periods of trauma.

Neither is it only in the recent past and in the present that extraordinarily troubling things

have happened. Having asserted that 1973-1976 was perhaps the most traumatic period in American history, Perlstein briefly sums up the American Civil War. Only he minimizes its traumatic status by beginning as if it were a children's story: "Once upon a time we had a civil war" (p. 1)—perhaps invoking "a galaxy far, far away"? Then he passes over the "more than six hundred thousand Americans [who] were slaughtered or wounded" to dwell a trifle longer on the "sentimental rituals of reconciliation" and on the fact that those who sought a different sort of reconciliation were shouted down. To be sure, the Civil War and its consequences are not his subject. But I have to protest that it is surely bathetic to juxtapose all that the Civil War connotes for Americans to the claim that 1973-1976 was especially disturbing, Vietnam and its aftermath notwithstanding. What is lacking here is any sort of historical judgment supported by evidence and argument. We just have to accept his assertions on faith because they are pronounced so confidently and without any serious qualification.

The Civil War evidently is introduced as a lead-in to Perlstein's assertion, that "America the Innocent [is] always searching for totems of unity it can never quite achieve–even, or especially, when its crises of disunity are most pressing: it is one of the structuring stories of disunity" (p. 1). But surely, if this is a recurrent feature of American life, there is no need to overdramatize the mid-1970s? It would have been sufficient and more accurate to say that yet another trying time prompted yet another politically consequential round in America's endlessly recurring search for unity. That would, of course, somewhat diminish the historical status of Ronald Reagan; he would become just one among all the others who somehow, through a mixture of luck, disposition and skill, managed to climb to the top of the pole when it was more than usually tall and greasy. (It goes without saying that these conjoined diminutions of the period and the man would have diminished the glamour of Perlstein's production.)

So what, finally, is one to make of what Perlstein has wrought? At the outset I noted that he has constructed a memory of 1973-1976 so as to lead us to imagine we are experiencing, sometimes vividly, that political climate. But the memory he constructs is a partial one—how could it be otherwise? He tells us he has waded and crowd-sourced his way through enormous masses of detail (pp. 805-810), but nowhere does he tell us what principles he employed to recover these particular memories. Neither does he indicate that he views with any suspicion the news reports that constitute so much of that detail. Should we take on trust what the media disseminated? There are surely grounds to be suspicious.

Even more troubling, however, is the notion that we are therby re-experiencing those times. As those who experienced it the first time round will be only too well aware, to experience was not to understand. To live through those years was, as always, to be confronted by the need to try to understand what was happening and to act in relation to that, not just to find relief in some imagined unity. And that need to understand and act resulted in argument, sometime bitter political argument about how to do so. All that too was an essential aspect of the experience. And that was something that surely figured in the processes that contributed to the development of American conservativism as well as other political strains. Yet I detect very little evidence of this, other than allusions to some of the arguments then going forward among conservatives, in Perlstein's account.

Second, with respect to the 'short stories' and the vignettes, I think he short-changes the movements for racial and gender equality and the reactions to them, all of which has resonated through American politics and culture since the Seventies, all of which occasioned passion and bitterness on the right which is still with us. Perlstein alludes to them at several points, to be sure. But one would be hard pressed to discern in what he writes that both these challenging movements and the virulent reactions to them would be so definitive of America's future conservatism. Since by his own telling he has embedded himself in the Seventies, and since also by his own telling he has a "heroin-like habit of tacking between past and present" (pp. 806-807), in other words, since he has not been locked into that past, he was in a position to know what they portended, not just what they were, so he surely could have at least suggested that there was more to them than their epiphenomena, e.g., the tribulations of Hank Aaron, the rhetoric of Barbara Jordan, the titillations of the sexual revolution, or Betty Ford doing "the Bump" with singer Tony Orlando (p. 771, photo no. 76, facing p. 525)?

Perlstein also treats the scope of American conservatism much too narrowly. He does note that during the period presently of concern to him "another front opening up in the right's political war: the corporate front." He does note Lewis Powell's now infamous insistence that it be a primary responsibility of corporate management to advance pro-free-market politics. And he does emphasize how New York City was made a brutal example to encourage austerity elsewhere (pp. 475-483). He does show how Reagan's years as a General Electric "ambassador" in the 1950s attuned him to this sort of corporate conservatism (pp. 386-395). He does quote a corporate executive's complaint that "One man, one vote has undermined the power of business in all capitalist countries since World War II" (p. 479), but he does not really convey that those initiating and funding this endeavor intended it to be an international war. It is surely clear in retrospective that Perlstein's period of trauma included neoliberalism's birth pangs. But he leaves the impression that the development of American capitalism and American conservatism can be engaged with as if they have not been a part of, and informed by, a much more comprehensive global project.

This sort of short-changing mars the entire work. I do not take away from Perlstein any sense that there were struggles going on in the United States in the Seventies. Despite the oppositions he portrays between the traditional and the emergent within and between the political parties and in American culture at large, there is something static about it all. What people do is reactive. Corporate leaders aside, people are disconnected from deeper purposes. He constructs a big data set–a subset, it may be said, given what he tells us of his research methods, of Google's enormously big data set (pp. 809-810) – leaving it to his readers to try to construct knowledge out of all that information. There was this, and there was this, and there was this, . . . as if interactional relationships may be induced from discrete events. What Perlstein places before us would seem to be symptomatic of our big-data times. But Perlstein's set of events can be connected by innumerable explanations; that his data set is large does not alleviate this problem. But should not a would-be interpreter of some historical period at least suggest an explanation, draw some quite specific connections indicating the interactive processes at work? For that is what may then usefully be debated and evaluated. As it is, the dynamism is all in Perlstein's rhetoric, not in what he is writing about. The movement is on the

surface, not in its substance. Is it that Reagan's own shallowness has come to define the world of Reagan's children?

But, perhaps finally, it would be fairer to say that Perlstein is not just seeking to evoke experience or offer an explanation? Perhaps he is really seeking to carry out the more ambitious and more archetypal American project – a search for unity, a search occasioned by the events of 1973-1976 but perhaps also by trials and tribulations that face Americans now? Evn so, and leaving aside the argument whether unity is possible or desirable, it seems to me his book is symptomatic of our times. In its disjointedness, in its refusal to draw and defend connections, in its "incoherence . . . *shared*," Perlstein proposes another "shambling, variegated community *redeemed*, as one" of the sort he ascribed to Altman. Perlstein's is just another unity with a conservative thrust to it since it affords no critical purchase on the past or the present.

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Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life, Stephen Parker

By | 2015: vol. 14, no. 1

The Brecht Industry rolls on: doctoral dissertations, journals, blogs, websites, YouTube, and memoirs comprising millions of pages, much to the consternation of the boys at the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute, who must be musing on how it is that an ardent anti-capitalist has entranced the cognoscenti and, much like Che, taken the moral high-ground despite the ubiquitous mercantilist hard sell at Fox News. Is there a credible pro-capitalist playwright, or are we still drifting with the platitudes and prose of an Ayn Rand as counter example?

One of the answers to that riddle may be that Brecht in his short 58 years wrote forty extraordinary plays; created an exemplary body of German poetry and song, and wrote twenty volumes of theoretical work, in addition to the journals, media analysis, letters, film scripts, drafts, rewrites and dramaturgical notes. Much of this work was created while Brecht was on the run from the Gestapo, and with his name on a Nazi hit list. Still in his early twenties, he had been the toast of theatrical Berlin.

His life was played out between lethal Stalinists, flaccid Hollywood types, and Hitler's murderous regime. He loses a number of friends to both Hitler and Stalin.

Shadowing Parker's detailed biography is the taboo topic of the Russian holocaust Stalin's military mistakes were of course a catastrophe, but twenty six million Russians died defeating the Nazis. Russia today is the forlorn shell of what might have been, had the Stalinists not been in charge, and the German attack not been so devastating. America's Cold War on the Soviets carefully obliterated this historical possibility.

Enter Steven Parker's biography of Brecht, 689 pages of carefully researched and foot-noted conjecture about this paradoxical, irritating, overbearing, brilliant Marxist whose love life would shame a Casanova, and whose intellectual praxis suggests that after Shakespeare he is one of the greatest theatrical thinkers and playwrights. Charles Laughton repeated this appraisal to Brecht's Hollywood detractors; who like Brecht himself were wont to point out that the playwright just wasn't a "nice guy."

He wasn't. Brecht's early life seems a catalogue of obsessive, compulsive misogyny. He abandons the children of his first two serious relationships (Bie Banholzer, and Marianne Zoff). Despite a long and successful marriage to the actress Helen Weigel, but she too is victim to his infidelities. He ritually requires that his sexual partners sign "contracts" obligating them to obey Brecht's rulebook, which he then flagrantly violates. Like Welles, Brecht is born into the world as radio, film, and modern theater come into being, and he will write original work for all of these mediums. Parker is good at the infinite detail that all of this involved, but after a few

hundred pages Brecht's immense erudition begins to overwhelm all.

Brecht left his mark on so many areas that his significance will still be debated in a hundred years. This is especially true for America where his reception has been grudging and carping at best, and studiedly obtuse and reactionary at worst. In having fallen victim to the professoriate, who quote him endlessly, his survival has come at the cost of his comprehensibility, which remains problematic. He remains the middlebrow intellectual's nightmare: sexually avid and promiscuous; unceasingly disciplined and prolific; poetically so gifted that he changed the German language; and steadfast in his belief that capitalism must be destroyed and replaced by a revolutionary class dedicated to ending the Mercantilist putsch for all time. He was '"solitary, lonely, reckless and wise," and remained to the end a self-described "Bolshevik without a Party."

As Parker notes, Brecht was beset all of his life with failing health, heart problems, and a malfunctioning liver and spleen, which, as he predicted, shortened his life. Like D. H. Lawrence, the specter of his own mortality was ever-present. He was made instantly famous with the success of the Three Penny Opera, in 1928. His obsessions were eclectic and legendary: Kipling, poetry and song, Chicago, women, Marxism, market capitalism, even as he declares that his real subject is the migration of masses of people to the great cities.

In the 1920's, while researching a play on the Chicago Futures Exchange, he declares: "these are people who do not want to be understood." Out of this realization and association with Marxist thinkers like Karl Korsch, his political mentor, he is drawn to the German Communist Party (KPD,), which pays some faint homage to his work but never embraces him. Like Korsch, he remains too radical for the Communist Left. Although never officially a Party member, Brecht, in a few years, is considered the Poet Laureate of the international communist movement. A label that will see him forced to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and provide him with an FBI file that rivals the OED in size and scope. His publisher and friend Peter Suhrkamp remarked that had Brecht not encountered Marxism he would have become another in a long line of German decadents, wavering between a feeble Liberalism and the nihilism that the Nazis define.

But Brecht's Marxism came at a price: he is relentlessly attacked, vilified, and distorted from the Left, both in East Germany, where he finally settles, and during his Exile when he attempts to write for a Communist exile journal obsessed with the Realist vs. Formalist debate so dear to Zhdanov, Lukacs, and the Party hacks. Brecht sees the SA Brown shirts marching in Berlin and remarks to a friend: "When Mahogany comes: I go."

On the night of the Reichstag fire he enters a small bar, and hears two customers debating the event: "It was the Nazis." "No, it was the Communists." He does not return home but flees Germany within hours. Those who could not read events were soon either dead or in concentration camps. Parker's primary contribution to the mountains of Brecht scholarship is his analysis of Brecht's medical history: which is complicated, and sporadic. Diagnosed at an early age with heart problems, he is so fearful both of dying and being buried alive that his Will

required that a ceratoid artery be cut before he is interred.

Brecht's genius for survival keeps him in exile for well over a decade, and he spends the Forties in Hollywood, where he is unemployable, though there he manages a long relationship with Laughton, which produces Galileo, and one film script (*Hangman Also Die*), which Fritz Lang directs. Laughton will later denounce him on the advice of his manager, producing a short, bitter memorable poem from Brecht.

The critic John Fuegi will later claim that Brecht exploited his many women, who he insists wrote his work. Fuegi's book prompts an essay from the *International Brecht Journal* detailing its myriad howlers. Brecht's ever tenuous relationship with the Soviets, does get him an exit visa through Russia, and ever alert to Stalin's whimsical penchant for murder and the Gulag, he settles in Hollywood for the duration of the Second World War; a fact which did not endear him to the German Communists who survived Stalin in the USSR and returned to found the East German state.

Western critics of Brecht's Marxism ignore his continual problems with Marxist critics and with the East German elite who Brecht urged, following a worker rising, to simply "elect another People." He founds, with his wife the actress Helene Weigel, the Berliner Ensemble. They create a world-class company despite government interference, three successive campaigns against him in West Germany, and continual attacks from the Cold War intelligentsia. There are repeated attempts to carve him away from his politics, and sanitize his overt support for the USSR and the many Communist parties. Martin Esslin's biography is but one classic instance of this. Hannah Arendt insists, in print, that he had written an ode to Stalin. The Brecht scholar John Willett contests this and Arendt, wisely, refuses to engage. The charge is never proved, but remains evidence that the playwright's enemies were legion.

Brecht was well aware that the Hitler-Stalin pact signaled the end of any Soviet pretenses to Marxism:" The USSR saved itself…at the cost of leaving the workers of the world without guidance, hope, or help." And when Stalin adopts the nationalist, fascist terminology ("blood brotherhood, Pan Slavism") he is quietly critical. Like so many, he discovers that the anti-Nazi's had almost nowhere to go: the United States as late as 1940-41 is refusing to accept German anti-Nazis with Communist sympathies, in favor of relatively apolitical art figures like Max Ernst and Andre Breton.

Brecht was adept in mastering, and then putting into practice a Communist anti-aesthetic, and his Labor Theory of Value, remains one of the singular attempts to build a dramaturgy and praxis around Marxist ideas. Marxist insights abound in his dramatic and poetic work. Brecht names Heartsfield, Eisler, Grosz, Piscator and Anna Seghers as the five artists who had stood up for the German worker. His growing disillusion with Stalin culminates in the 1950s with a poem dedicated to "the honored murderer of the People."

Brecht's critical and theatrical reception in the U.S. remains befuddled and antagonistic. So fogged is the critical aura around him, both academics and theatrical folk find him complicated,

confusing and inapplicable without that forbidden essential, a Marxist schooling. The day that one is solved, Brecht may have a chance, but not before.

His impact in the U.S. extends to the San Francisco Mime Troupe, R.G. Davis Epic West Theater, university productions, Chicago's Second City, Theatro de Campesino, Luis Valdez, Story Theater, Paul Sills, and an equally impressive list in Europe. His early American disciples like Mordecai Gorelik and Marc Blitzstein went on to have distinguished careers.

The antipathy for Brecht is evidence of just how far behind the American theater has fallen, spurred on by the success of a corporate/defense contractor TV industry which has carried all before it- not least in its reductive, Know-Nothing attack on progressive content (consider Fox News viewer stats versus Link TV.) David Mamet has devolved to an increasingly strident right winger, and Sam Shepherd's cowboy mystic poses are now overshadowed by materialistic Hollywood success.

Professor Parker's book is laudable in its comprehensive attempt at fixing the history of a great thinker, poet, playwright, and perpetual goad in the battered sides of a triumphalist capitalism whose legacy is now tied to the destruction of the planet.

The plays are as potent today as when they were written but there are some mistakes; among them *The Round Heads and Peaked Heads*, which woefully underrated the Nazi's anti-Semitism. But the mistake was not Brecht's alone: the world reads the Holocaust well after its terrible success, abetted by an official indifference. Parker's excellent book will remain a reference for years to come, but Brecht, for now, remains a carefully obscured theatrical Meister- whose message and life revile all that a media obsessed capitalism now calls Truth.

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The Corpse Washer, Sinan Antoon

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Of late, the tendency of media pundits and so-called Middle East experts has been to explain developments in Iraq as being due to factors intrinsic to that country and the region as a whole. They are viewed as being rooted in history, either of recent vintage—that is, as a consequence of the artificial borders set down by the European powers at the end of the First World War—or of more ancient stock, as resulting from the split of the Muslim community into Sunnis and Shi'is during the early days of Islam. Sometimes the two explanations are combined, the argument being that Iraq is essentially an artificial country, one founded on a flimsily constructed secular nationalism unable to overcome centuries of Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism. Presented this way, Iraq never stood and chance, and its present unraveling was unavoidable.

Yet often lost is the fact that prior to the onset of the eight year Iran-Iraq War in 1980, and arguably even up until the American invasion of the country in 1991 (the First Gulf War), Iraq was actually a state that worked. Indeed, in many respects, it was a model to the region of a modern, functioning, secular state. Perhaps more importantly given current divisions, it saw the development of a secular Iraqi identity genuinely felt not only by Sunnis and Shiites, but Christians as well. Overlooked (or perhaps intentionally ignored, as such recognition would mean acknowledging the United States' role in all of this) is the impact of subsequent developments—the decade long embargo on Iraq, the Second Gulf War, the seemingly never-ending American occupation of the country—all of which greatly destabilized the country. There was nothing inevitable about Iraq's present situation; if the country is breaking apart, it is the consequence of a series of catastrophes that any country would be hard pressed to weather, or even survive.

The individual hoping to make sense of current developments in Iraq would do well to read the English translation (by the author no less) of the novella *The Corpse Washer*, by Iraqi writer Sinan Antoon, the story of a Baghdadi Shi'ite everyman named Jawad and his struggle to persevere or at the very least endure the endless calamities that have plagued his country, and *brought about* the sectarianism that has since come to define daily life in Iraq. Integral to the telling of this particular tale is the fact that Jawad is born to a family of corpse-washers, the profession of which is an apt one, both as reflective of a traditional way of life—one that Jawad desires to escape and later must come to terms with—and as the basis for a metaphorical depiction of the human toll the events over the last several decades have taken on Iraq.

This review does not speak to the original Arabic language version, though it is certainly worth noting that the author is presently considered one of the most distinguished and original new voices to emerge in recent years in the Arabic literary world, not only because of his mastery of that language, but also on account of his willingness to tackle in a sophisticated manner the

vast number of issues currently confronting the Middle East. Not least among these is the growing sectarian violence that has come to define inter-communal relations in much of the region, with regards to which, Mr. Antoon provides his Arab readers a much-needed reminder regarding their shared humanity. This review is concerned with the English translation, which provides a compelling argument that Arabic is not the only language the author has mastered, and which I suspect he undertook in recognition that the above-noted reminder is equally needed in the English speaking world. Little if anything is lost in translation, neither with regard to the book's message nor in a literary sense, and it is no surprise to learn that Mr. Antoon was awarded the 2014 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation for his English rendition of *The Corpse Washer*, a strong indication of the faithful manner in which he as rendered his novella from Arabic to English. The voice of the author remains entirely intact; that of the translator, invisible.

Mr. Antoon employs the English language with an almost Hemmingway-ish economy of words and an ease with English colloquialisms that effectively capture the essence of the original Arabic text—both linguistically and circumstantially—in a manner moreover that make the characters relatable to the average American reader. Helpful also in this respect is that Mr. Antoon avoids adopting a polemical tone, largely it would seem in deference to the common humanity that defines the main character and those around him. This is not to say that the characters never reflect on who is responsible for their situation; only that clearly their main concern is that the violence and turmoil should cease so that they can get on with their lives. Whatever his intention, this quality ends up making the book more accessible to the American reader, creating a safe space within which she or he might thoughtfully engage recent developments in Iraq with an eye to achieving a better understanding, not only as to why much of this has come to pass, but likewise of the full magnitude of the devastation that has been visited upon the Iraqi people.

The novella is structured as a series of vignettes framed by appositely situated dream sequences. Within this framework, Mr. Antoon achieves a remarkable synthesis of rootedness and universality. The events, characters and details related in the novella clearly belong to a particular time and place, yet at the same time, are entirely familiar and relatable. On the one hand, the story is unmistakably an Iraqi one: that of a country devastated by unending conflict, overcome with uncertainty and weighed down by a shattered confidence. The characters likewise are unmistakably Iraqi, the fact of which is made clear, however, not by stressing what makes them different from the reader—that is, by means of Orientalist clichés designed to evoke lurid images of the exotic East so as to create a feeling of otherness and incomprehensibility, so typical of Western depictions of the Middle East (not least in films these days)—but rather via the specific details that flesh them out as individuals living in a particular place at a particular time. It is these same details, however, that also make the characters recognizable and comprehensible to the reader for the reasons discussed above—that underscore the humanity they share with us, allowing the reader to identify with the universality of their dreams and aspirations, likewise to commiserate with them as they try their best to cope with the increasingly hopelessness of their situation and the consequent sense of despair and entrapment that threatens to overwhelm them.

Central to an understanding of the book is the motif of the corpse washer. That the figure of the corpse washer is metaphorical is hardly surprising, yet it is more than a mere personification of death *a la* the Grim Reaper in *The Book Thief*. Given the staggering number of Iraqis who lost their lives during the last three and a half decades, this would certainly have been sufficient, yet ultimately it is a metaphor that speaks to the manner in which death has since come to permeate the lives of those left behind, robbing them not only of what could have been, but arguably what *should have been*. It is a symbol of lives full of promise and potential robbed of purpose and meaning. It is in this respect that Jawad most appropriates the role of Iraqi everyman. Reading the book, one cannot escape the feeling that things should have turned out quite differently for him. It is not simply that Jawad aspires to be an artist—one with a cosmopolitan modernist sensibility, and with respect to which his sectarian identity is largely irrelevant—Jawad *is* an artist, one wretchedly deprived of both a means to express his vision and an audience capable of appreciating it. Jawad's story ultimately is that of an individual trying to realize him or herself in a situation where such realization may no longer be possible.

Related to this, the book becomes suffused with a sense of weariness as Jawad begins to grasp that there may not be a light at the end of this very long and dark tunnel, one so palpable at times that it would threaten to make *The Corpse Washer* an unbearably disheartening read if not for the equally pervasive quality of humanity that counters it, most evident in Jawad's ability in spite of his growing despondency to see those around him as fellow human beings, ultimately in defiance of the sectarian divisions that begin to emerge about halfway through the book. Indeed, the incredibly nuanced balance the novella achieves between these two tendencies—such as allows the reader to experience the full weight of the characters' overwhelming sense of hopelessness, even while empathizing with them because of the genuine compassion evident in their interactions with one another—is perhaps its most remarkable achievements. It is the tension between the weariness that threatens to engulf Jawad and his fellow Iraqis and the humanity that allows them to cope that ultimately drives the story and which maintains the reader's interest in the outcome. This tension is especially evident in Jawad's attempt to come to terms with his own Shi'ite identity, which importantly is never demonized, neither by Jawad nor the author. Even while Jawad rejects sectarianism and has no desire to live a traditional Shi'ite life, neither to inherit his father's profession of corpse washer, he never becomes bitter about his heritage, even demonstrating at times an ability to appreciate the beauty and transcendence of the traditions that defined his youth, something that extends even to the corpse washing rituals, which are portrayed in the novella with great sensitivity and almost loving detail.

I would conclude by reiterating the point made at the start of this review: that in addition to helping readers appreciate the full extent of the disaster visited upon Iraq—the tragedy of lives robbed, not only as reflected in the numbers killed, but in the tens of thousands of lives that will likely go unrealized—Mr. Antoon's novella exposes the fact that sectarianism is ultimately not the cause of the violence and increasing fragmentation that Iraq has experienced over the last several decades, but rather a consequence of it. One can only hope that this thoroughly engaging and deeply thoughtful book helps Americans to arrive at a point of self reflection concerning the role of the United States in fostering what, in the end, was not an inevitable

consequence of historical and religious factors, but rather a very much avoidable *human*-itarian disaster. *Inshallah*.

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An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen

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At a time when ‘shining’ India seemingly stands poised to become a global economic powerhouse steered by new Prime Minister Narendra Modi, selected by an increasingly impatient and disgruntled electorate, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen’s book, An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions, serves as a timely critical eye-opener for anyone interested in understanding the challenges facing this nation, the third largest economy in the world and the second largest in Asia.

India’s extraordinary heterogeneities have long attracted, dismayed and befuddled visitors and researchers alike but what is often obscured in discussions of the usual divides of religion, caste, gender, region and language is the burgeoning of income inequality. While India’s poor have been hard to ignore since the colonial era, the persistent deprivation of these masses of humanity seem all the starker in modern India when juxtaposed with the ever growing opulence of the rich.

Class and other inequalities combine to impose multiple vicious circles upon those scraping by at the most disadvantaged end of the social spectrum. Dreze and Sen identify this “resilient division” between the privileged and the rest in Indian society as India’s biggest challenge, yet one seldom highlighted in all the recent hype about Indian prosperity. Making a strong case for equality and social justice amid economic progress, An Uncertain Glory becomes an almost indispensable economic, social and political reader to understand India’s checkered development story.

The distinction between a narrow concept of economic growth, defined in terms of rising aggregate income levels, and a broad notion of economic development, defined as improvement in the average person’s standard of living. is often obscured in political and economic logics based on faith in the eventual trickle-down of growth from the top to propel a broader based development. Admittedly, many of India’s challenges such as poverty, economic and gender inequality or illiteracy are lasting vestiges of a colonial past which either aggravated them or left them unaddressed. Immediate post-independence policies also did little to address them adequately.

The role of poorly implemented ‘socialist’ economic plans in allowing illiteracy to persist and in neglecting agricultural and rural development is undeniable. However, the vaunted neoliberal economic policies implemented since 1991 to help transition the economy out of the shackles of

undue restrictions (such as industrial licensing for private business) embodied in a large public sector and near autarkic postcolonial situation to a present-day one with a buoyant private sector enabling a greater role for foreign trade and investment, exemplify a classic example of misguided faith in trickle-down economics.

Rapid rates of growth enabled enticing employment options for those with the right skills and an unprecedented wealth accumulation for the corporate few. The Indian economy surged onto the global economic radar and improved the living conditions of the "'middle classes' (which means the top 20 per cent or so). But a lack of political will to utilize growing resources for improving 'education, healthcare, nutrition, social facilities, and other essentials of fuller and freer human life for all" suggests economic development is lop-sided at best and "excruciatingly slow" or nonexistent at worst for the vast majority of poor and/or unskilled Indians ("the rickshaw puller, domestic worker or brick-kiln laborer") who continue to "lack the basic requirements of dignified living." Ignoring the lives of this disempowered majority through a narrow development discourse not only casts doubts on the sustainability of growth, they argue, but also violates "the demands of social justice, which is integrally linked with the expansion of human freedoms".

An Uncertain Glory provides a cautionary narrative for those contented with India's economic trajectory. Dispelling the fallacy of "the increasingly used rhetoric which suggests that India is well on its way to becoming an economic 'superpower" Dreze and Sen present a grimmer reality of India's comparative developmental achievements which both in absolute and relative terms would jolt the uninformed India enthusiast. By unfurling a gamut of overlooked empirical data the authors demonstrate that "India is not doing well at all in many respects even in comparison with some of the poorest countries in the world" outside of sub- Saharan Africa and even in South Asia though ahead of neighbors in terms of per capita income, India's developmental indicators stand ahead of only Pakistan, a country with a perpetually disturbed political situation.

Key questions regarding 'human capital formation' through public health and education achievements should enter any discussion of the growing income gaps, which are critically contingent on labor market skills. In light of an increasingly polarized development discourse leaning heavily towards unfettered capitalism, An Uncertain Glory is a scathing critique relevant not only for India but for all nations under the spell of a laissez faire creed for the efficient provision of services. The ongoing privatization of public services such as education, health and infrastructure, and the attendant curtailing of public investment, as a panacea for resource misallocation or inadequate provision of services by the public sector implies, for the authors, a "misreading of the conclusions of mainstream economics."

Dreze and Sen draw on elementary economic principles to posit that markets are far from efficient resource allocators in the realms of education, healthcare and infrastructure services where inherent externality effects which makes these inevitable areas for public intervention. The text notes for example "in Sri Lanka, with its huge lead over India in social indicators and particularly schooling and literacy. . . private schools are virtually absent – and have in fact

been prohibited since the 1960s." However, as critical as the authors are of "market mania" they also caution against unbridled "market phobia" resulting in loopholes such as free healthcare for the rich in Canada, while reiterating the crucial role of the state in providing services to ensure a "solid foundation of human development."

An account of India's experience with public services is seriously incomplete without a discussion of corruption, lack of accountability, and a 'malaise' deep enough to disillusion the staunchest supporters of public services. While much has been written about these lacunae, An Uncertain Glory makes an important contribution by connecting these persistent problems with growing economic inequality which not only deprives the poor of essential services like electricity but further saps them by the diversionary demands of the "'middle class' or 'aam aadmi' (the common man)." who are able to wangle enough services for themselves, and even at subsidized rates. Dreze and Sen rightly identify education, especially at higher levels, to be the dividing line between the middle classes and the unheard millions. While the Right to Education, recently upheld by the Indian Constitution as a Fundamental Right, is a step in the correct direction, reforming the delivery of public education remain critical in order to change "established rules of behavior," such as bribery, and provide voice to the masses.

Dreze and Sen propose solutions by drawing on global as well as local lessons, thus making their book relevant for the process of development in any economy. The recurring themes are the commonsense yet oft-forgotten relevance of human welfare at all class and status levels for strengthening an economy and the importance of political will of the state in helping realize that goal. Economies that transitioned to high levels of human development in Europe, Latin America or East Asia – plus others even among India's South Asian neighbors such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – have all done so with prudent government intervention.

Some local Indian state governments such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu or Himachal Pradesh offer universal public provision of services such as education, efficient administration and have taken concrete steps to address historical inequalities such as caste. They have done a substantially better job of ensuring higher standards of living and human development compared to Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odhisa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh where most of the "…the poorer half of India (who) are not much better, if at all, than in the poorer half of Africa" live.

An Uncertain Glory covers a gamut of other forms of inequality that determine "the progress of human freedom and capability to lead the kind of lives that people have reason to value". Environmental degradation, caste-based oppression and unequal treatment of women are apt culprits on this list. For women the intersection of patriarchy with poverty reinforces a cycle of low education, poor skill, and high unemployment. Low nutritional levels and the lack of basic sanitation facilities for women relative to men are also discussed here. Dreze and Sen devote attention to patriarchal violence surreptitiously expressed in selective abortion of female fetuses, or brutally in gang rapes, which recently brought more attention to misogynist realities in India. They call for "enlightened agency" of women to be made possible not only through academic achievements (steadily rising since independence) but through a social environment

which dispels the patriarchal framework. By enabling women to become more productive members of the growth process via employment, fertility reduction and child health gender equality seems a worthwhile and attainable goal to pursue.

The ability of the government to hasten poverty alleviation, secure gender justice and produce a corruption-free society can only be ensured by informed political selection. While much has been made, and rightfully so, of India's democracy, evident in the size of the country, the variety of political parties, a largely free press as well as in the ability to sustain the democratic process amidst vast poverty, Dreze and Sen stress India's need "to make much greater use of the democratic system." It is in this optimism, which recognizes that India indeed possesses the means of achieving broad development for all, that An Uncertain Glory maintains a tone of hope amid grounds for despair.

The text is a call for participatory democracy in India possible through a vigilant middle class aware and mindful of the true challenges to all-embracing development and are served by an uncensored press geared to inform public reasoning. With its strong analytical arguments, range of pertinent issues and empirical corroboration of facts, Dreze and Sen's latest book serves as a powerful and thought-provoking starting point for all interested in fathoming India's present, which appears ridden with contradictions as well as possibilities.

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