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Does Organized Labor Have A Future?

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The state of the labor movement in the United States in the year 2013 makes for grim reading. Scarcely eleven percent of the labor force belongs to a union and fewer than seven percent of private sector workers do. Only public employees enjoy a significant union presence, and like unionized private sector workers, their greatest strength is limited to a handful of states. In only eight states do union members have a substantial presence. Most states in the South, the plains, and the Rocky Mountains lack significant union presence. Moreover, in several states where unions have traditionally enjoyed success, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, public employee unions have come under sustained attack, and have lost members. Labor seems equally embattled politically, capable of getting out the vote but unable to achieve support for its policy goals. Can the labor movement reverse its decline?

At least once every decade since the 1970s, I have recalled the prophesy that the labor economist George Barnett made in his 1932 presidential address to the American Economic Association. Barnett concluded that the labor movement as then constituted was incapable of resurrection. Yet within ten years labor became a force to be reckoned with economically, socially, and politically. I cited Barnett's prophesy to suggest that subsequent doomsayers of the labor movement might be equally mistaken, and that organized labor might rise once again. Today, the state of the labor movement reinforces my belief that historians who usually disagree about the past can scarcely foresee the future.

I now find it hard to be optimistic about labor's future. Today is different. When Barnett spoke in 1932, the pattern of labor movement history resembled that of the economy, marked by alternating periods of expansion and contraction. That was true not just of the labor movement in the United States between 1870 and 1970 but of labor movements globally as we discovered in a collective research project on world labor conducted within the Fernand Braudel Center and subsequently published in a special issue of the Center's journal, Review.[1] Since the 1970s, however, while the economy has continued to fluctuate between periods of expansion and contraction, the labor movement in the Western world has contracted steadily, nowhere as rapidly as in Great Britain and the United States. Organized labor in the United States reached its peak density in the early 1950s when nearly one-third of the non-agricultural civilian labor force belonged to unions and such key sectors of the economy as automobiles, steel, electrical goods, food processing, mining, and transportation were substantially unionized. In those and related economic sectors, even non-union enterprises provided employees wages and benefits that matched and sometimes exceeded the gains union contracts obtained for members.

Thereafter, however, unions, especially in the private sector, suffered persistent declines in membership. [pullquote]*Absolute union membership advanced in the 1960s when public*

employees won the right to unionize and to bargain collectively. Yet the labor force grew more rapidly than did the number of union members leading to a decline in union density.[/pullquote] The decline was most notable in the private sector where technological innovation, beginning in the 1950s under the rubric automation, increased productivity and displaced labor; fewer automobile and steel workers produced far more output than their predecessors. Simultaneously the industrial powers ravaged by war, notably Germany and Japan, rebuilt their economies and invested in the most modern technology while their U.S. competitors had yet to amortize fully their existing capital investments. Not only did U.S. manufacturers lose market share overseas but foreign competitors competed successfully with them for market share domestically.

Private sector employers in the U.S have always resisted unions and fought any impingement of their "right to manage." Unable in the 1950s to oust unions from the towering heights of the economy, corporations sought to contain union power. They practiced containment more successfully than the U.S. did in its cold war with the Soviet Union. First, with the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, labor's adversaries tolerated union power where it already existed but restrained its further growth. Corporations then engaged in a well-funded public relations campaign that associated unions with corruption, labor racketeering, and communism, and that appealed to powerful strains of individualism in American culture.[2] Corporations continuously introduced new technologies that raised productivity and diminished the demand for labor. As population redistributed away from centers of union power in what became the "rust belt," toward states in the "sun belt" where unions were most notable by their absence and the dominant culture and political structures were anti-union, labor power suffered. Unions enjoyed less stability in "right to work" states, where negotiated contracts could not legally mandate union membership as a condition of employment or require that non-union employees share the costs associated with the legal requirement that unions must represent and bargain for all employees in an enterprise governed by a collective bargaining agreement. Moreover, between the mid-1950s and the end of the century, the federal judiciary steadily stripped union members of the right to strike and reinterpreted the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act to deny unions rights previously held while allocating new rights to employers. Indeed the corporate containment of labor proved exceedingly successful. Union power collapsed far earlier than the Soviet bloc fell apart.

By the time the Republicans came to power in the 1980s with Ronald Reagan and a congressional majority the American labor movement had already been debilitated. Between 1977 and 1980 with a Democratic president and a party majority in both houses of congress, labor suffered more defeats than victories. Then secretary of labor, Ray Marshall, may have been a friend to unions but the men (not a woman among them) who shaped economic policy in the Carter administration believed that labor's "monopoly power" should be curtailed. The deregulation of the trucking and airline industries weakened what had theretofore been a dominant union influence in both sectors. Policies that encouraged liberal global trade practices decimated labor intensive domestic industries as American garment manufacturers, textile producers, and shoe companies either moved their enterprises abroad to benefit from low-wage labor or shuttered their domestic operations.[3] Even capital intensive domestic

industries that remained unionized found themselves in competition with foreign enterprises that opened plants in the U.S. most often in right-to-work states and on a non-union basis.

The Reagan presidency merely accelerated trends years in the making. At first his administration sought an accommodation with the AFL-CIO, while following the customary Republican practice of appointing friends of business to the NLRB and the federal courts. The decision by the Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Association to call its members out on strike in 1981 enabled Reagan to act as a decisive leader in tune with public opinion as well as many union members when he ordered the controllers back to work and threatened them with permanent job loss if they refused his order. Even then Reagan offered labor his hand in a speech to the convention of the Carpenter's union, part of which a White House staff member vetted with me. In the aftermath of the strike and the crushing of the union, private sector employers pursued a strategy of inducing strikes by their employees and responded by hiring replacement workers to break the unions. As the 1980s ended, unions had effectively surrendered the right to strike and massive industry-wide walkouts that had marked industrial relations from 1934 to the early 1970s practically disappeared. To maintain their vanishing power in the private sector, unions negotiated concessionary contracts that tolerated a separate lower wage scale for new hires, often reduced wages for longterm workers in competition with labor overseas or employees in non-union foreign transplants in the U.S. Nothing that unions tried in the globally competitive private economic sectors countervailed their decline.

[pullquote]*Only among public sector employees whose unionized ranks continued to grow and in personal service sectors, especially health care, janitorial services, and hospitality trades in which foreign competitors lacked purchase, did organized labor seem to have a future.* [/pullquote]Even there the "Walmart model" threatened union growth and security. Walmart, by the year 2000 the world's largest private employer, practiced a successful union avoidance strategy. It employed many part-time workers who earned a wage barely above the legal minimum and who often lacked such essential benefits as health care. Walmart's exploitative labor practices undermined the United Food and Commercial Workers' union's strength in the retail trade sector. Elsewhere in the personal services sector, labor turnover was so common and rapid that unions found it nearly impossible to maintain membership levels or too costly to invest in organizing new hires.

As a new century opened only workers in the public sector and the health professions appeared relatively secure in their union membership. Yet hostility to public sector unionism had been building since the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. The state and local tax rebellions that arose in the 1970s and that succeeded in California and Massachusetts were in large part a reaction to the salaries, benefits, and job security enjoyed by public employees. As private sector unionism declined and as union members saw their wages, benefits, and job security diminished, non-union and union workers alike increasingly resented the property and sales taxes that financed the salaries and benefits enjoyed by public employees. So, today, in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan, where private sector unionism has declined and union members have suffered from concessionary bargaining, much of the voting public resents unionized public employees.

Hence it should be no surprise that in all three states the rights of public employees have been curtailed by legislative and executive actions. It is also well to remember that in much of the nation public employees lack the right to unionize or to bargain collectively.

More than three-quarters of a century has passed since the American labor movement experienced an insurgency that transformed its structure, unionized millions of new members, and organized the towering heights of the economy. Even then, as the labor historian David Brody has noted repeatedly, the CIO pursued a style of "job conscious" unionism long associated with the AFL and its practice of "pure and simple unionism."[4] When AFL and CIO merged in 1955, their marriage represented the maturation of an American labor movement. Ever since organized labor has suffered from senescence, a decline in its health and vitality that has caused a breach between elderly union leaders and younger members. For too long aging "white guys" showed disdain for the growing ranks of women and nonwhite workers, and practiced a politics that failed to recognize how or why the Democratic party no longer felt bound to serve the interests of AFL-CIO.

When in the 1990s the labor movement finally reawakened and insurgents captured control of the AFL-CIO, they chose as their new president another aging white man. Moreover, the rebels could not have chosen a less propitious moment to achieve power. However much they promised to revitalize the labor movement, to organize more aggressively, to embrace openly Latinos and Latinas (citizens and legal residents as well as the undocumented), to support liberal immigration policies, to welcome women and African Americans into leadership positions, and to embrace gay and trans-gender members, the forces arrayed against labor proved too powerful. So ineffective did the new leadership of AFL-CIO prove itself to be in unionizing the unorganized that within less than a decade a new insurgency arose, one that split the labor movement as CIO had done in 1935. This time, however, the insurgents who created Change to Win failed to repeat the success of CIO. Not only did Change to Win fail to revitalize the labor movement; both it and AFL-CIO continued to suffer membership losses in the private sector, until in the year 2013 fewer than 6.6 percent of employees belonged to unions.

Given the current alignment of forces domestically and globally, I find it hard to conceive of any tactics or broader strategy through which the labor movement might reestablish its former size, place, and power. Indeed, I cannot imagine a policy that might reverse the decline in private sector union membership nor one that would defend public sector union members successfully against their political enemies. A regrowth of the labor movement will not emerge from leaders or forces within the movement as currently constituted. Only a shock of the magnitude of the Great Depression of the 1930s or World Wars I and II is likely to stimulate a rebirth of the labor movement. Such a shock, however, might this time be as likely to produce greater repression of labor as to bring a New Deal for workers. Today it is far easier to maintain "pessimism of the intelligence" than "optimism of the will."

Notes

[1] Melvyn Dubofsky, G. Arrighi,& B. Silver, eds., “Labor Unrest in the World Economy, 1870-1990,” *Review* (Special Issue), XVIII (Winter 1995).

[2] David Witwer, *Shadow of the Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor (Working Class in American History,*University of Illinois Press, 2009.

[3] Melvyn Dubofsky, “Jimmy Carter and the End of the Politics of Productivity,” in Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham, eds., *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*¸ University Press of Kansas, 1998, 95-116.

[4] David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth-Century Struggle,* Oxford University Press, 1993.

Now What? Labor Unions and the Inevitability of Class Struggle

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There is a story that I often use to make a point regarding one of the central problems in organized labor in the USA. It goes like this:

A man jumped off of the Empire State Building in New York. As he was dropping past the 30th floor he was overheard saying "…so far, so good…"

For more than five decades organized labor in the USA has been in decline. At first the decline was not particularly noticeable since, through the early 1970s, organized labor still represented more than 25% of the non-agricultural workforce (down from 35% in 1955). Nevertheless the decline rapidly increased in the aftermath of the recessions of the 1970s and the advent of President Ronald Reagan and Reaganism (the homegrown variety of neo-liberal economics).

Having purged its left-wing in the late 1940s and abandoned any coherent sense of being a social movement on behalf of a class of people, organized labor drifted, slowly at first and then with increasing speed as gravity took hold. Despite evidence of decline, most of the leadership continued to insist that the situation was not 'that bad' and that either (1) their particular labor union would survive intact, and perhaps grow, or (2)the pendulum of U.S. politics would inevitably shift and unions would rise again.

Yet the rate of decline increased. In 1947 a Republican Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act which amended the National Labor Relations Act. There were many regressive components to this statute but one in particular has performed like a slow-acting poison in the political system: so-called 'right to work'. [pullquote]*An incredible example of a misnomer, 'right to work' has nothing to do with offering a worker a right to a job, but instead is a weapon used to ensure that unions, which have a statutory obligation to represent all workers in a unionized facility* regardless of union membership*, have no right to insist upon dues from workers benefitting from such representation*. [/pullquote] Thus, 'right to work' is really the 'right to be greedy.' It would be the equivalent of saying that citizens did not need to pay taxes to their city but would, regardless, receive access to the police, fire department, sanitation, for free! Reasonable?

Organized labor objected to 'right to work' [Section 14(b) in the Taft-Hartley Act] but never mounted a serious challenge to it. Initially 'right to work' was contained in the South and

Southwest. A direct challenge to 'right to work' would have involved both a national legislative strategy and an active organizing campaign(s) in the South and the Southwest. Organized labor refused. After the failure of the Congress of Industrial Organization's "Operation Dixie" in the late 1940s, the bulk of organized labor abandoned any real thought to organizing the South and Southwest.

By not challenging 'right to work', organized labor was providing the conditions under which this poison could—and did—spread. In that sense, the recent 'right to work' victories, first in Indiana and most recently Michigan, should have come as no surprise. Tragic, yes; surprise, no.

Challenging 'right to work', however, would have involved more than lobbying and, indeed, more than a traditional organizing campaign. 'Right to work' was nothing short of a component of the declaration of war against workers represented by Taft-Hartley. As much as organized labor objected to Taft-Hartley, the dominant forces in the movement refused to accept the full implications of this assault.

To have moved against 'right to work' would have necessitated abandoning the anti-communism that fueled the purges of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. It would have also necessitated an approach to organizing in the South and Southwest that would have by necessity taken on the form of a mass social movement, akin to but more advanced than what took place in the 1930s and early 1940s. The reason for this is that to have conducted successful union organizing in the South and the Southwest would have involved taking on "race", and specifically organizing African Americans in the South and Chicanos/Mexican Americans in the Southwest; organizing these groups, not as an afterthought, but as core constituencies.

Evidence of the turn away from being a movement for social and economic justice for the working class was precisely found in this monumental failure. Yes, for years union orators would decry 'right to work', but at the end of the day they believed that it could be contained.

The spread of 'right to work' becomes an example of the extent of the crisis facing the unions, but it is not the sum total of the crisis. Yet, to address the continuing poison of 'right to work' there must be a transformation of the US labor movement on a scale that mirrors a reformation precisely because taking on 'right to work' is part of a larger challenge for labor. That challenge is summed up by the initial story: the ground is fast approaching.

Renewal?

Some years ago in a discussion with a very wealthy businessman, I was instructed on key steps in turning around a company that has collapsed or is near collapse. In thinking through his analysis, I realized that there are valuable lessons that are directly applicable to organized labor (and of course, there are some that are not at all applicable). Consider the following:

New leadership: It is very difficult to turn around any formation with the old leadership still in

command. This does not necessarily imply a complete change, but it does mean that those who are in commanding heights must move on. One is reminded of the opening scenes from the film Patton with George C. Scott, where he takes command of US troops in North Africa after the disastrous battle at Kasserine Pass in Tunisia. The complete failure of the operation necessitated new leadership rather than tinkering around the edges.

[pullquote]Organized labor in the USA needs new leadership. Many of the new leaders are already within the ranks of unions andother social movements. [/pullquote] They are prepared to introduce new strategies and build new alliances. Most especially they recognize that the status quo is not only unacceptable but is, at best, temporary. They realize, in other words, that the ground is fast approaching.

Mission clarification and internal education: Organizations and movements can become lost. Their missions, developed in a different era, may have nothing relevant to say about the current moment and the near future.

Organized labor in the USA lost its mission in the late 1940s. Actually, it abandoned its mission and replaced it with a different one: the building of a labor lobby within the context of the mainstream USA. More than anything else organized labor refused to accept the inevitability of class struggle and instead insisted that the elimination of the left-wing in labor helped to ensure that a productive relationship could be built with capital. The elimination of the left-wing was not only the elimination of people and organizations, but it was also represented by unconditional support for US foreign policy and the repudiation of any sense that organized labor had a direct responsibility to un-organized labor, i.e., to the rest of the working class.

Turning this situation around necessitates a reassertion of a mission focused on social and economic justice founded upon a cold appraisal of the realities of class struggle in 21st century USA, and for that matter the 21st century planet Earth. It is a mission that involves a level of global labor solidarity the likes of which most of us have not seen in our life-times. But it also involves the building of strategic alliances in the USA that aim towards winning power for working people.

The mission, however, is only as good as are those who are prepared to implement it. This means that within the unions and allied worker organizations, there must be a process of large-scale member education that helps to create the framework for understanding the dynamics of contemporary capitalism and the sorts of strategies that are necessary in order to address it. Too many organizations alter their missions only to stagnate due to the failure of the members to ‘own’ the result.

Organizational assessment and retooling/restructuring: In the aftermath of any major failure there must be an assessment. While part of that involves assessing strategies, organizational forms must be reconsidered. In the case of organized labor, the movement must assess how it is structured, including but not limited to its relationship with worker organizations that are

not formal unions. To put it another way, organized labor must ascertain what is necessary in order to build a genuine 21stcentury labor movement. One example of this is that of the unemployed who, for all intents and purposes, most of organized labor has abandoned. Building a movement of workers necessitates organizing and mobilizing the unemployed, therefore, one must determine what that means at the levels of program and organization.

Assessment will necessitate examining everything from the role of staff in unions, to structures like central labor councils and state federations, to the relationship of US-based unions to what are known as "global union federations." And it will also necessitate evaluating whether those in leadership and on staff have the proper tools in order to perform their jobs. For too many union activists this is an unsettling proposition since they may have performed their duties in a certain way for years and are unwilling or unable to change to meet the demands of the present, let alone, the future. Such individuals may need to beencouraged to move on or retire.

Moving forward: The other element of turning around from a collapse is that one must keep moving. This is to say that change does not take place while standing still. When Patton took over after Kasserine Pass the U.S. could not call a truce with the Germans while they got their act together. The transformation had to take place as they were preparing for battle.

This is just as much the case for organized labor. While there will be moments necessarily taken for 'retreats' and trainings, this happens while at the same time the 'ground is fast approaching.' It takes place while we fight battles such as in Michigan against 'right to work'. Moving forward is essential also in order to ensure that demoralization and confusion does not spread. There must be a sense of progressive motion otherwise there will be a sense of stagnation.

Seeds of renewal, and then what?

The seeds of renewal can be seen, both within organized labor but also outside of the formal structures of the labor union movement. The Chicago Teacher's Strike is a major example of a different approach to unionism that transformed a battle between teachers and the City into a struggle by led a union on behalf of parents and students. The strikes by thousands of workers at WalMart facilities shook not only that corporation but much of the employer class. Striking dockworkers on the West Coast and separately organized dockworkers on the East Coast that had been preparing for a major strike, pointed to the continued vulnerability of contemporary capitalism to mass action by workers.

There are additional developments. The rise of the New York Taxi Worker Alliance and the spread of taxi worker unionism to other parts of the USA demonstrated that workers who have been so restricted by the law can find a means for collective action. The emergence of the National Domestic Workers Alliance evidenced a movement of an 'invisible' workforce that has periodically risen over the last century. The National Day Laborers Organizing Network fused the fight for immigrant rights with the fight for economic justice. The Right to the City Alliance is seeking to build an urban-based workers movement against gentrification and the

class-cleansing of our cities. Independent worker centers have developed over the last twenty years addressing the needs of the working poor. Although most of these advances have not taken place within the context of organized labor, they nevertheless point in the direction of a reconstruction and redefinition of a labor movement for the 21st century.

Yet none of this can happen in the absence of a Left, a point Dr. Fernando Gapasin and I sought to make in our bookSolidarity Divided. In fact, the Left has a critical role today in breaking organizing labor away from the notion of narrow trade union struggle and instead replacing that with a concept of 21stcentury class struggle. The implications of this are critical. The issue here is not mainly one of struggle or militancy, but rather scale and objectives. The existence of neo-liberal capitalism has meant, both in theory and in practice, the movement toward the elimination of labor unions and other forms of worker organization. It has also meant the systematic constriction of political democracy and restrictions of all sorts on forms of dissent.

For organized labor, then, the task presented is the building of a social justice unionism that is prepared to battle not only the "1%" who dominated society, but battle the system that reinforces the privileges and domination of the "1%" (who are actually more like the 10%). Unions must be the vehicle for the "47%" that Mitt Romney so cavalierly derided prior to his electoral defeat. Actually it is more than that 47% but Romney created for the broader public a clearer sense of contemporary class struggle than has any other mainstream leader in some time. He was prepared to suggest that close to half of the population of the USA should be written off. A renewed labor movement must offer a different approach.

There are those . . .

. . .who suggest that the current union movement cannot sustain itself and that out of its ashes will arise something new and better. Such views are at best wishful thinking and at worst irresponsible. The complete marginalization of the union movement, or its demise, will certainly not mean that struggle will cease. But it will mean that a critical vehicle to organize workers will be lost, at least for the short term.

The marginalization and demise of organized labor also would come at a moment when very reactionary forces are moving swiftly to secure total political and economic control. Efforts, as we saw in the lead up to the November 2012 election, toward voter suppression along with various forms of Republican gerrymandering plus demagogic appeals to right-wing populism among whites all point in some very dangerous directions.

Unions, as they are currently constituted, organized and theorized, are not up to the challenges of the 21st century. The existing union movement, however, can play a role in the building of that new labor movement for the not-so-new 21st century. Embracing other forms of worker organizations; building organization and activism among the unemployed; creating strategic alliances with other progressive social movements in order to fight for political and economic power; engaging in global labor solidarity in order to challenge global capitalism as manifested

by transnational corporations and the governments that back them, these are the challenges that can and must be undertaken at this very moment. This cannot await a new and better union movement. We must be part of building that future movement…and building it now!

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So Why don’t we have better unions?

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Union busting is nothing new; the atavistic trait was never bred out or beaten out of capital. While the business class fights among itself like stray cats— witness Dirty Digger Rupert Murdoch’s feral relations with communications rivals real and imaginary— that class also maintains a good deal of commonality on shaping the state and treating unions even in boom times as irritants. And when it comes to making workers pay for an economic crisis or on denuding funds for public needs, it reads from the same hymnal. Even the 1950 Treaty of Detroit, where the Big Three automakers and the United Auto Workers traded social welfare for labor peace, was more a one-front Christmas truce than an industry-wide peace accord, let alone the preferred model for industrial-labor relations in many other industries.

By the late 1970s, even the treaty was shredded, with the UAW’s Douglas Fraser denouncing a “one-sided class war.” It’s been one-sided since.

Only now, with its numbers among the working population so downsized that the obscenity of “right to work” can pass for sober public policy in northern states, too, are our unions getting on the same verso page, or at least the same chapter, and beginning to act with the kind of minimal unity that typified corporate behavior throughout the postwar period.

[pullquote]*Still, the adoption of a virulent right-wing agenda by arriviste Republican governors is just the fecund flavor of a political moment in the unfolding of a nearly 40-year retreat. That’s not to say nothing’s changed; tactics matter, for them and us.*[/pullquote]Among we Leftist brethren, there’s a tendency to deal with unions and union leaders by delineating what we as the very model of very modern radicals consider wrong—and there’s plenty wrong. We know about the seductive careerist pitfalls that can turn a shop-militant lion into a quotidian staff mouse if not a supervisor/administrator and the risks of conflating the union leadership with its members or the sorry history of missed opportunities that came from replacing organizing from the bottom-up and listening to members with glad-handing of political friends. Then there’s the danger of focusing on the small number of unionized workers while giving little attention to the some 88 percent who are unorganized, often underemployed and frequently undocumented. Social justice unionism isn’t just a noble sentiment, it’s a survival tactic.

We know all about the tawdry poverty of labor solidarity; how Gompers’ “more” for me translated as “less” for you; how U.S, unions back to the 1830s fought pitched jurisdictional battles; how even today self-interested union leaders (and not just because of bad labor laws or binding contract provisions) promote scabbing and sweetheart deals; witness Longview, Wash. last winter, where the operating engineers supplied scabs to break a longshore workers’

job action or the unending SEIU efforts to destroy a healthcare rival. Or where the Laborers broke bread with the Koch brothers in pursuing an environmentally calamitous cross-continent shale-oil pipeline, something even the nominally eco-friendly AFL-CIO now promotes. The federation's Rich Trumka called it "connecting the dots." It's more like oil splatter.

Even labor's messaging is befuddled. Unions, which are increasingly media savvy, as least technically, don't directly attack the neoliberal agenda or offer a point-by-point counter agenda. It talks too often about "fairness" and about a "middle class" that needs a fair shake. Oligarch J.D. Rockefeller, Jr. used the same language almost a century ago. It doesn't get validated, let alone subversive, when it comes from union tops. It's the whole corpus of neoliberalism that needs thrashing.

Neoliberalism in practice is more than an austerity gambit by grasping politicians, or an exercise in unfairness. It's a confiscatory regime in which the working class pays and the business elite get a pass. British National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workersleader Bob Crow talks about missed union opportunities and about how the fight is not essentially about austerity or derivatives or greed but about capital. That's a common enough and easily digestible message. It's not too late to correct the damage and say it. Why not Rich Trumka?

Okay! We know all this, or we should. It's Intro to Commie Studies 1. It's not the whole of the discipline, and talking bad about unions—if that's all we proper Leftists say — is as mindless as going on about what's so very right with them. "Tell no lies, claim no easy victories" was never a union commandment in my lifetime, but telling half the story is no virtue, either.

Yes, unions can only be expected to function purely as fighting class institutions only in the last instance; for most of its history, the bulk of US American unions fought sector-by-sector when not employer-by employer, and damn the consequences for others. But in the present cold climate it sure feels like we're nearing the heated age of last instances.

When Occupy Wall Street damned the richest 1 percent and defended the rest of us, most union leaders I knew rushed to adopt Occupy slogans as their own. The Right, at least since Reagan, has peddled the trope that labor represents a special interest, while business as job creators has a broader mandate. What Occupy did so successfully was resurrect and popularize the notion of "them and us," with a keen sense that "us" is the overwhelming majority of Americans and that the corporate class is a coddled if not parasitic minority. For months, "inequality" if not yet "exploitation" replaced "deficit spending" as the media's great satanic motif. My own teachers union in New York City housed the Occupy central command, while the State, County and Municipal Workers and other city unions lent meeting space gratis. Construction workers joined in the occupying, and unions cosponsored mammoth support demonstrations here and in hundreds of cities.

Today, attacks on living standards and union rights in states such as Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan and Florida are forcing the kinds of labor-community alliances only dreamed of in our philosophies just a few years ago. Public sector workers in transit, health care and education

are already breaking down the fourth wall, appealing to community groups not only about their own members' needs, but advocating for theirs, too.

Sure, this isn't a settled process. Yesterday's porkchopper isn't today's Spartacus. It's just that the effect of the late 2007 economic collapse and the unrelenting attacks on working people and unions is creating a context in which even the most routinized time server can't realistically pine for the shining days of the golden handshake. Social unionism is a necessity.

Internationally, unions are taking a page from the employer's book, with the ILO, the International Trade Union Federation and the United Electrical Workers fostering co-operation across borders and even in some cases merging. Global unions as the counterpoint to global capitalism may still be a stretch, but labor is focusing on coordinated international campaigns against conglomerate employers. The properly reviled News Corp has a five-continent strategy. That part at least is a model worth copying.

Unions, even the progressive ones, need to do some housekeeping first. We need to stop saying there's a zero-sum relationship between internal and external organizing, or stop thinking that servicing existing members comes at the expense of organizing the unborn. .The servicing model is not dead; it just never was enough in and of itself. On the day of the proletarian seizure of state power, there will still be union members who won't attend meetings or even have the courage to file a grievance, let alone build a countervailing workers council or staff barricades. Jettisoning the paternalistic slogan "experts in collective bargaining" doesn't require the bear-hug-like embrace of "building union density," or what the "Brits call "skull counting." They're both demobilizing, if that's all you do.

[pullquote]*On research, the AFL-CIO puts out an excellent Executive Paywatch. Why not a Capital Planwatch?* [/pullquote]It's not just ALEC and the Koch brothers or the deep-pocket contributors to both national parties' campaigns that need watching; it's the legislation written and pursued by lobbyists greasing palms and the market-bought think tanks plotting longer-range strategy that need naming and exposing, too. The invaluable Economic Policy Institute does some of this, as do Left publications and freelance or blogging muckrakers. Individual unions cover their own corporate and public masters' misadventures—usually in the run-up to contract time— but it's not done systematically. Or system wide.

Labor political action could use an overhaul, too. I won't second guess organized labor's doglike endorsement of Obama; would there were an electoral alternative in toss-up states that was anything more than a lifestyle choice or a moral gesture. But if labor decided it was too dangerous to let even this failed president (and what else are his two administrations for working people?) twist in the wind of what once looked to be a Republican superstorm, nothing required the unions to support him with preposterous language about what a grand president he'd been or how the only enemy for the nonce was spelled GOP.

So if labor's walking away from the lesser evil of two neoliberal parties is sadly a nonstarter, there's nothing stopping it from putting up its own candidates in primaries or in third party

election-day efforts in discrete districts. A pilot where labor and community allies run their own candidates on a program that unmistakably calls for high taxes on the rich and the Wall Street gamblers, affordable housing and jobs programs, real healthcare for all, defense of community schools and a democratic foreign policy is at least viable. Even if purely local, those campaigns could be a lodestone for every union leader in the country. And those campaigns can start early enough so that candidates are more than a name on a ballot.

Unions are not passé, at least not until working people decide they are. Building newer and better class organizations is historically contingent on other factors, not the least of which are crises and—invoking the old catechism—an inability of rulers to govern with any degree of equity joined by a refusal of people to be ruled in the old way.

Yes, it also requires union leaders with a taste for winning the final conflict and the humility to learn from others. It isn't just that modern capitalism produces generations of union leaders who don't believe, for example, in the utility of Rosa Luxemburg's mass political strikes. It isn't just that entrenched union leaders may be threatened by rank and file insurgencies or locked into particularistic demands or fantasize that legislative reforms alone can defang the beast. It's worse than that! We don't have a class either sociologically or politically in any position yet to do much better.

Rosa Luxemburg didn't pull the idea of the mass strike as the political weapon of the class out of her musings; she paid attention to what workers were actually doing elsewhere. It was the movement of Belgian workers at the end of the 19th century that offered her a peek at workers' power at its apex, just as was the Paris Commune for Marx or the factory councils for Russian radicals or the Italian revolts for Shelley.

Memo to *Logos* readers: Marx was frustratingly vague in The German Ideology when referring to "the real movement of the class," but he wasn't vague about his preferring it to even an artfully constructed party program that didn't take the class-in-formation as its starting point. As Gramsci understood, a workers' newspaper, for example, had to be "a mirror to the class," a compendium of bravery and best practices by themselves and others, deliciously written and cogently delivered.

Isn't that labor's real starting point, too?

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Is It Time For Just Cause?

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

"It's time for unions to stop being clever about excuses for why membership is declining and it's time to figure out how to devise appeals to the workers out there. Workers should be looking to unions because of job insecurity and stagnant wages, but they are not."

–Clark University Professor Gary N. Chaison as quoted in *The New York Times* on Jan. 24, 2013 about union density reaching a 97-year low.

The annual release of bad news about union membership levels always provides labor-oriented academics with an opportunity to pontificate. Professor Gary Chaison is one well-known chider of unions, for their various shortcomings and mistakes. Regularly quoted in *The Times*, he often dispenses tidbits of advice more critical than instructive. However, in the case of his comment above, attention must be paid.

As the new open shop movement spreads across the Midwest, it has undermined public and private sector bargaining units in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana. The impact on overall union membership is now apparent in the latest national statistics. As *Times* reporter Steven Greenhouse reported on Jan. 24, "the percentage of workers in unions fell to 11.3 percent last year" and "that brought unionization to its lowest level since 1916, when it was 11.2 percent." In the private sector, the loss of 400,000 members of all kinds reduced union density to 6.6 percent in 2012.[1] Another expert quoted in this story cited a public sector membership drop of 50,000 in Wisconsin alone.

Elsewhere we have suggested some strategies that unions, in new open shop environments, may need to adopt to maintain membership even where they have been stripped of collective bargaining rights and/or automatic dues check off.[2]

But the larger challenge issued by Chaison still needs to be met, and not just in states where organized labor is already on the defensive. Organized labor needs to go on the offensive, with a systematic campaign for new workplace protection that would address the widespread job insecurity cited by Chaison, and the erosion of job rights caused by de-unionization. As outlined below, this advocacy effort would increase the public appeal of unions and help lay the groundwork for a revival of collective bargaining as a tool for reversing long-term wage stagnation.

[pullquote]*What legislative goal might inspire all workers—union and non-union alike?*[/pullquote] Due process rights at work could be the answer. The United States is alone

among industrialized countries in allowing at-will employees (i.e. most of the 88.7 % without a union contract) to be terminated for arbitrary reasons. As a result of past labor movement lobbying, Germany, France, Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and South Africa all require employers to demonstrate they have "just cause" to dismiss non-probationary employees. [3] Workers who believe they have been fired unfairly have the opportunity to contest their dismissals, and pursue money damages, before various types of industrial tribunals. In the U.S., such recourse is only available to public employees with civil service protection and/or union-represented workers with access to a negotiated grievance/arbitration procedure. [4]

The concept of just cause appeals to basic fairness, just as due process does in our criminal justice system. At-will employees have no job security: they can be fired for a minor mistake, a disagreement with a supervisor, a biased performance evaluation, an individual complaint about pay or working conditions, or unapproved off-duty behavior–like supporting political causes or candidates disliked by the employer (an increasing election year concern at firms owned by proselytizing Republicans). Hundreds of thousands of workers are sent packing every year under such circumstances.

One state has passed such a law, curbing wrongful dismissals (and statutes in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands also prohibit termination without "good cause"). Enacted in 1987, the Montana Wrongful Discharge from Employment Act applies to non-union non-probationary employees and prohibits discharges without good cause. It permits aggrieved workers to sue for up to four years worth of back pay, and provides a method for recovery of the necessary legal fees. Business opponents tried to kill the legislation by claiming it would scare business away. Twenty-six years later, Montana's economic growth doesn't seem to have suffered.[5]

State level campaigns for similar just cause legislation would serve two purposes, one narrower (because it's related to union organizing) and the other broader, because all workers, pro- or anti-union would benefit. If just cause campaigns succeed, workers will gain another layer of legal protection in organizing drives. Montana's unionization rate reflects its mix of industries and history of militant struggles, but it's hard not to notice that the state, at 14.6 percent, has a much healthier percentage of union members than the national average. Neighboring Idaho has less than half the rate of unionized workers.

[pullquote]*"Just cause" protection is helpful because one of the main reasons private sector workers shy away from organizing is their fear of being fired*. [/pullquote]As any labor organizer knows, National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) remedies for retaliatory dismissals are wholly insufficient. Discharge cases can drag on for years, before reinstatement is ordered, if the fired worker is fortunate enough to win. Interim earnings (including unemployment benefits) are deducted from back pay awards. This leaves anti-union employers with little financial incentive not to commit this most serious of unfair labor practices. In addition, few employers come right out and say they're firing someone for being pro-union, during an organizing campaign. There's always an official cover story–and too often the Labor Board accepts this employer pretext, rather than finding discriminatory intent and a connection to union activity.

Just cause statutes could give fired union supporters a second bite at the apple, in a different venue, just as many workers now win unemployment benefit cases based on the same set of facts that the NLRB manages to mishandle. Among the broader population of non-union workers who might challenge a dismissal unconnected to organizing, there would also be an important new union role: providing representation, advice, and information to help workers win their "just cause" cases. In workplaces where unions are trying to build employee organizations, like OUR Walmart–that function like unions but without formal recognition or bargaining rights–the ability to represent individual workers in termination proceedings would become an important selling point for signing up new members.

As longtime UE organizer and national executive board member Peter Knowlton points out:

"In most countries, except the US, if the boss wants to fire you, they can — but they have to pay you severance. The payment is normally based on a combination of pay and service time. When you make the employer pay severance for firing a worker (for reasons not having to do with discrimination based on age, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, union activity or religion), then they will likely not do it so readily. For workers, knowing you'll get severance eases the fear, somewhat, of speaking up to confront injustice. So there's an economic "safeguard" for workers and a dis-incentive for employers. Plus, at least by law, it puts workers versus employers on a more equal footing."

Championing Everyone

Winning "just cause" legislation will certainly not be easy. But building a movement on a scale similar to the push for the organizing-oriented Employee Free Choice Act, circa 2007 – 2009, would offer union activists an opportunity to champion a cause directly affecting far more workers. Throughout the last century, organized labor led or assisted lots of uphill legislative fights for new protective legislation applying to the workplace. Some campaigns took many years but*, state-by-state*, labor won job injury insurance, minimum wage and overtime requirements, health and safety regulations, child labor laws, and prohibitions against employment discrimination. Every worker benefited from these regulatory initiatives, whether they had a union card or not. And whenever the labor movement was on the offensive fighting for all workers, union membership grew.

A "just cause" campaign could potentially engage working people at multiple levels. While agitating for state legislative action, local unions, central labor councils, and worker centers could promote the concept through community-based workers' rights boards and public pressure. Community leaders and labor activists could declare certain areas "Just Cause Zones" and fight to enforce just cause as a new community standard—like living wage laws, but potentially much wider. Unions and their allies could use the proposed legislation as a political "litmus test" for candidates. Workers fired unfairly could be enlisted to lobby and testify, along with their families, before state legislatures considering due process protection.

Even if campaigns for just cause do not succeed, millions of non-union workers will learn about

the concept, especially if enactment is also pursued through popular referenda, where those are permitted under state law. By popularizing the just cause concept and raising expectations, more workers may respond by thinking, “If we can’t get this protection through legislation, let’s get it by forming a union!”

Notes

[1] Steven Greenhouse, “Share of the Work Force in a Union Falls to a 97-Year Low, 11.3%,” New York Times, January 24, 2013 https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/business/union-membership-drops-despite-job-growth.html

[2] See Rand Wilson and Steve Early, “Back to the Future: Union Survival Strategies in Open Shop America,” in *Wisconsin Uprising: Labor Fights Back*, Michael D. Yates, editor, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010).

[3] See Clyde W. Summers, “Individual Protection Against Unjust Dismissal: Time for a Statute,” Virginia Law Review, Vol. 62, 1976. Summers provides a thorough (but obviously outdated) overview of just cause laws in other countries. He was a long-time champion for the adoption of a just cause statute in the U.S.

[4] For more on the application of the “just cause” standard in arbitration and other administrative law settings, see Robert Schwartz, *Just Cause: A Union Guide To Winning Discipline Cases*. The book lays out seven tests that are the guiding principles for discipline and discharge in most union workplaces. By popularizing and refining the “just cause” concept, Schwartz’s book could provide the basis for more workers (and communities) to begin thinking how it could be applied much more broadly if those same standards could apply to everyone. More info go to: Work Rights Press.

[5] The most thorough analysis of employment impacts is, “The Costs of Wrongful-Discharge Laws,” by David H. Autor, John J. Donohue III, and Stewart J. Schwab, in the Review of Economics and Statistics, MIT, August 2, 2005 and online at https://economics.mit.edu/files/594.

The Sandy Hook Slaughter and Copy Cat Killers in a Media Celebrity Society: Analyses and Plans for Action

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

With the brutal massacre of children and administrators at the Sandy Hook Elementary school in Connecticut on December 12, 2012, following assassination of innocents in an Oregon mall earlier in the week, 2012 may be remembered in part as the year when mass shootings spiraled out of control and shocked the conscience of the nation. As President Obama declared in his speech the night of the tragedy with tears in his eyes: “As a country, we have been through this too many times. Whether it’s an elementary school in Newtown, or a shopping mall in Oregon, or a temple in Wisconsin, or a movie theater in Aurora, or a street corner in Chicago – these neighborhoods are our neighborhoods, and these children are our children.” And then with a resolute look, Obama declared: “And we’re going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics.”

School shootings attract maximum media attention and shooters, craving publicity and the public eye, gravitate toward schools, which may be why the Sandy Hook shooter chose an elementary school, whose pupils are the most innocent and vulnerable, and whose slaughter would gain maximum media attention. In April 2007, Korean-American student Seung-hui Cho carried out “The Virginia Tech Massacre,” killing 32 and wounding 17 in what was the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, in which Cho was star, director, and producer. His writings and videotaped pronouncements revealed he imitated images from films and enacted a vengeance drama like that of the Columbine School shooters, whom he cited as “martyrs,” in a clear example of “copy cat killers.”

The February 14, 2008 shootings at Northern Illinois University featured former student Steven Kazmierczak, who leaped from behind a curtain onto a stage in a large lecture hall. Armed with a barrage of weapons and dressed in black, he randomly shot students in a geology class, killing five before he shot himself. While his motivation is still unclear, he created a highly theatrical spectacle of violence remindful of the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings.

The epidemic of school shootings intensified throughout 2012. On February 10, 2012, a 14-year-old student shot himself in front of 70 fellow students in Walpole, New Hampshire, while on February 27 a former classmate gunned down three students and injured six at ChardonHigh School in Ohio. On March 6, 2012 in Jacksonville, Florida, a 28-year-old male high school teacher, after being fired, shot and killed the headmistress; and on April 2, 2012 in Oakland, California, a 43-year-old former student shot seven people and wounded several

others at OikosUniversity. Furthermore, in 2012, mass shootings took place in movie theaters, malls, Sikh Temples, and elementary and high schools, as well as Universities.

The Aurora Colorado shooting during a midnight showing of *The Dark Knight Rises* killed 12 and wounded 78. Evidently, no public space is now safe in the United States, as the epidemic of male violence and mass shootings proliferate.[1] The shooters are also increasingly modeling themselves as military killing machines. In December 2012, both the Connecticut and Oregon killers loaded themselves up with lethal weapons, body armor, and planned assaults in public places where they were likely to get maximum media attentions and days of celebrity infamy. The Oregon mall murderer was reported to have run through the mall screaming "I am the shooter" before firing his AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle, similar to the one used in Sandy Hook, which mercifully jammed after two people were killed and one wounded, leading the shooter to aim the gun at himself and take his own life.[2]

Perhaps for the first time in decades, serious discussions are emerging after the Sandy Hook slaughter concerning the need for gun control in an out-of-control gun culture *and* for better mental health care in a society in which mentally disturbed young teenagers and men have been producing an epidemic of mass murder. In the media frenzy in the face of mass shootings, we need to better understand that we face a crisis of masculinity in the country, and that young alienated males are increasingly turning to guns and murder to construct their identities and resolve their personal crises.[3]

By crises of masculinities," By "crises in masculinity," I refer to a dominant societal connection between masculinity and being a tough guy, assuming what Jackson Katz (2006) describes as a "tough guise," a mask or façade of aggressive assertiveness, covering over vulnerabilities. The crisis erupted in outbreaks of violence and societal murder, as men acted out rage, which took extremely violent forms such as political assassinations, serial and mass murders, and school and workplace shootings.

In this article, I argue that the cycle of mass shootings throughout 2012 and the past decades suggests that young men are constructing media spectacles to achieve celebrity though attempting to overcome their alienation and failures by turning to weapons and gun culture, and carrying out mass murders. [pullquote]*I suggest that our media/celebrity culture has helped produce an epidemic of predominantly male copy cat killers who resolve their crises of masculinity through immersion in gun culture and carry out deadly mass shootings in public places.* [/pullquote]Unless we begin to have national discussions on the dangers of gun culture, alienated men, mental health problems, and societal crises as the context to discuss mass shootings and take serious action to address the problems, we are condemned to repeat endlessly the cycle of the mass murder of innocents.

Admittedly, the problem of mass shootings and social violence is complex and involves multiple aspects that require multiple social and political action to address the problem. In the following study, I will first interrogate the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings in the context in the United States of an outburst of mass shootings by alienated males during the past years, and then

present analyses of some of the key aspects of the crises of masculinity and factors which help produce gun violence that are generally overlooked in mainstream media discussions. Then, recognizing that the sources of mass shootings are complex and that multiple measures are necessary to address to issue, I will offer some reflections on why we urgently need discussion and action on gun safety reform, concluding with some suggestions concerning long-term steps toward dealing with the problems of crises of masculinity and gun violence.

The Sandy Hook Slaughter and Media Spectacle

On Friday, December 14, 2012 reports circulated that scores of children and adults working at the Sandy HookElementary School had been killed by a gunman. For the following days, the story completely dominated the cable news channels and network news reports, newspapers, the Internet, and social networking. Initial information turned out to be wildly false. Within hours of the initial reports of the shootings, wire services and television networks identified the shooter as 24-year old Ryan Lanza; by the next day, it was reported that the shooter was actually his brother Adam Lanza. Initial reports had the shooter killing his mother, Nancy, said to be a school teacher at Sandy Hook Elementary, and then slaughtering students in her classroom, with suggestions that the shooter had committed matricide and in all-consuming hatred of his mother killed those she loved the most, her students. It was initially stated that Lanza had been allowed to enter through the school security system, while the next day authorities claimed that he shot his way into the school and that his entrance was thus forcible. Further, it was soon revealed that the shooter's mother was not a teacher, that the schoolchildren murdered were not her students, and that the mother was killed at home, apparently before the mass shooting at the school, creating a puzzle concerning why the shooter chose the elementary school to act out his male rage and carry out his spectacle of carnage.

The initial reports painted the mother as an extremely nice person who loved gardening and her children, and was a model homemaker whose house was always neat and attractive, even after a divorce from her husband who was the shooter's father. By the weekend, media reports highlighted that the mother was a gun collector who took her children to rifle ranges to practice shooting, that she apparently never let any neighbors or trades people into her house, and that the arsenal of hand-guns and assault rifles found in the school where the shooting occurred had been legally purchased and registered by the mother.[4]

Media reports at first claimed that the shooter had used Glock and Sig Sauer semi-automatic handguns in his killing spree, but the state coroner reported the next day that an AR-15 Bushmaster semi-automatic assault rifle had been used in the killings, that extremely lethal bullets and a high-speed gun magazine firing 30 rounds had been deployed, that hundreds of bullets had been shot, and that the young children were so bullet-riddled that none had survived the carnage, although a couple of adults shot in the school had survived and were taken to emergency rooms of hospitals.

Contradictory reports also circulated concerning the shooter. Adam Lanza was evidently a

loner who apparently had few, if any, friends, and was barely remembered by classmates. While he was described by some who remembered him as “smart,” and as “one of these real brainiac computer kind of kids,” he left no traces on the Internet, just as there were no pictures of him in his school yearbooks and few images of him otherwise available. While the police reported that they had taken his computers from his home after the shooting, and had “very good evidence” that would explain the “why” and the “how” of the killings, police reported over the weekend that the shooter’s home computer had been “smashed,” thus intensifying the mystery concerning why the shooter carried out his spectacle of terror at Sandy Hook Elementary.

Over the weekend of December 15-16, the media spectacle of the Sandy Hook slaughter focused on the victims of the shootings and their families, the interfaith memorial service that President Obama attended, and how the people of Newton were coping with the tragedy. These themes continued to play out the next week as funerals for the victims began, allowing a chance to memorialize the lives of the individual victims and their families. Heroes appeared such as the principle and teachers who reportedly gave their lives to protect the children. Little new information appeared about the shooter, his family, and his mother, whose murder began the killing spree.

The issue of gun control became a major media story of the day with cable channel news focusing on public outrage and demand to have strict gun control, starting with banning the sale of assault rifles and requiring background checks on all gun sales. Congressmen, families of children shot at Columbine, Virginia Tech and Newtown, and members of the public came on screen, demanding urgent change in the gun laws with politicians, including those who had previous opposed gun law reform, promising swift action. Hence, a watershed seemed to have been passed and serious debate and a demand for action was emerging as an immediate aftermath of the tragedy.

[pullquote]*Yet the mainstream corporate media so far refuse to see the gun crisis as a crisis of masculinity, of young men who attempt to resolve their personal crises through guns and acts of violence*.[/pullquote] In every case of mass shootings, young men turn to guns, get involved in gun culture, and then act out their fantasies through acts of aggression involving shooting and killing usually innocent victims, unrelated to the shooter. The Sandy Hook Slaughter involved a case where the shooter killed both his mother, for as yet unspecified reasons, and then went on a rampage, indiscriminately shooting children at a grade school in his district. Obviously, this was a young man in crisis, but the media reduced his problems to unspecified “mental health” issues, as if mental health were the key variable to the problem of school shootings.

Obviously an out-of-control gun culture and mental health crises are both important factors in the epidemic of school shootings, but so is a crisis of masculinity as more and more men spiral out of control. I am writing this paragraph after just watching a MSNBC report around 9:45 am on December 19, 2012 that indicated that in the past day Oklahoma public schools were shut down because of a “credible threat” to school safety; in Utah, a student was detained because

he was found with a gun at school, which he claimed his parents had told to take to school to protect himself; in Ohio, a male student was arrested when his car was found to be full of knives, a revolver and ammunition; in Maryland, a male student was arrested after drawings and diagrams outlining possible gun murder scenarios was found. This two-minute report on out of control young men found to threaten others with gun violence could be happening everyday, but it is apparently so common that it rarely gains media attention. Reflection on the threats and actions carried out by men-out-of-control signifies a serious crisis of masculinity in the USA today and the need to take immediate action.

Minutes after the MSNBC report on December 19, President Obama came on television and made a dramatic announcement that he had appointed Vice President Joe Biden to head a task force consisting of cabinet secretaries and outside organizations to come up with proposals by January that would inspire "very specific" initiatives on gun violence early in his next term, insisting that "this time, the words need to lead to action."[5]

Further, Obama argued that a consensus was beginning to build around very specific measures on gun safety, stating: "A majority of Americans support banning the sale of military-style assault weapons.[6] A majority of Americans support banning the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips. A majority of Americans support laws requiring background checks before all gun purchases so that criminals can't take advantage of legal loopholes to buy a gun from somebody who won't take the responsibility of doing a background check at all."

Dramatizing the explosion of gun violence throughout the United States and emphasizing that gun violence is a facet of everyday life, and not just occasional media spectacles of mass shootings, President Obama stated in a White House Briefing Room statement on December 19:

Since Friday morning, a police officer was gunned down in Memphis, leaving four children without their mother. Two officers were killed outside a grocery store in Topeka. A woman was shot and killed inside a Las Vegas casino. Three people were shot inside an Alabama hospital. A four-year-old was caught in a drive-by in Missouri and taken off life support just yesterday.

Each one of these Americans was a victim of the everyday gun violence that takes the lives of more than 10,000 Americans every year — violence that we cannot accept as routine.

So I will use all the powers of this office to help advance efforts aimed the at preventing more tragedies like this. We won't prevent them all, but that can't be an excuse not to try. It won't be easy, but that can't be an excuse not to try.

And I'm not going to be able to do it by myself. Ultimately, if this effort is to succeed, it's going to require the help of the American people. It's gonna require all of you. If we're going to change things, it's going to take a wave of Americans — mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, pastors, law enforcement, mental health professionals, and, yes, gun owners — standing up and saying, enough on behalf of our kids.

It will take commitment and compromise, and most of all it will take courage.

Obama thus made his strongest pledge so far that he and Biden would lead the way to achieve meaningful gun safety in his second term. Interestingly, after his forceful comments on going forward with concrete actions on an out-of-control gun culture, the White House press corps spent the rest of Obama's news conference with question after question on battles with the Republicans over debt crisis and the so-called fiscal cliff, not once mentioning the problem of gun safety. The performance of the press showed the relative indifference on behalf of the mainstream corporate media to significant problems like gun violence and their obsession with political infighting in Washington.

Yet the Newtown tragedy deeply influenced the public, and there discussions about gun violence and the need for significant measures of gun control throughout society intensified during early 2013 in the public, Congress, and media. There were increasing number of reports that the NRA was losing its grip on Congress and the public after having contributed millions to defeat Obama and more to congressional candidates, only about 50% of whom won in the 2012 elections.[7] There appeared to be a backlash against the NRA and an increasing number of individuals speaking up against it, including many of its own members calling for reasonable limits on gun access. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a gun safety activist who had contributed millions to defeat rightwing politicians supported by the gun lobby in the 2012 election, promised that he would spend millions to counter NRA propaganda and support of pro-gun politicians, and to help create a counterbalance to its sphere of influence.[8]

On December 21 as the people of Newton rang 26 bells in commemoration of the death of 26 beloved people exactly one week after the shooting and President Obama held a moment of silence in the Oval Office, NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre called in the press for a 30 minute lecture on Guns in America, and argued that "armed police officers" in every school was the solution to school shootings. Combative and defiant, LaPierre claimed it was "monsters" who were doing the killing, erasing categories of people and guns, and attacked Hollywood film, video games, and the country's mental health services for causing violence in society. LaPierre was interrupted twice in his rant by protestors, first, by a banner held by Tighe Barry of Code Pink standing in front of the NRA stooge and TV cameras with a large sign stating "NRA killing our kids," before he was hauled away. Then, after LaPierre resumed his speech, Medea Benjamin of Code Pink stood up holding a banner reading, "NRA: Blood on your hands", and was also pulled out of the auditorium by security forces.

After his tirade, LaPierre was immediately criticized by many, with New Jersey Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg insisting that: "The NRA leadership is wildly out of touch with its own members, responsible gun owners, and the American public who want to close dangerous loopholes and enact common-sense gun safety reform." New York mayor Michael Bloomberg called LaPierre's comments "a shameful evasion of the crisis facing our country. Instead of offering solutions to a problem they have helped create, they offered a paranoid, dystopian vision of a more dangerous and violent America where everyone is armed and no place is safe."

Critics noted that the NRA argument that people are safer owning guns is bogus and that research indicated that having a gun in your gun made it 22 times more likely that one would be a victim of a gun crime; further, research revealed that "people who carried guns were 4.5 times as likely to be shot and 4.2 times as likely to get killed compared with unarmed citizens."[9] Thus NRA gun discourse went against academic research as well as common sense and is becoming increasingly discredited.

Following his lunatic rant, LaPierre was assailed throughout the country.[10] While LaPierre's speech might appear tone-deaf and angered both NRA critics and some members, it made apparent that the main function of the NRA is to boost the gun industries which pay it to serve as their PR and lobbying agency.[11] The National Rifle Selling Association (aka NRA) thus was involved in a fierce struggle to make sure that no arms were removed from the streets so that the gun industry could maximize its profits. The NRA was also spreading its usual fear that the government was coming to take away their precious weapons, and accordingly weapon sales of all sorts were booming, especially semi-automatic assault rifles that were under legitimate scrutiny and might well be restricted.

The NRA is also correctly perceived as an arm of the rightwing of the Republican party whose candidates it had supported for years, although not so successfully in the 2012 election. The night before LaPierre's tirade, the Republican Party's inability to pass an alternative plan to President Obama's proposals to address the fiscal crisis brought the "fiscal cliff" perilously threatening, with pundits proclaiming that it would be "Cliffmas" this year with the overwhelming majority of citizens facing higher taxes in January if Congress and the President did not come up with fiscal plan to resolve the debt crisis. [pullquote]*There appears to be a parallel between the Republican Party refusal to compromise on taxes and the NRA refusal to compromise in the least on gun safety, suggesting that both taken the Republicans and the NRA have been taken over by extremist factions who are incapable of political compromise and thus democratic decision-making.* [/pullquote]Clearly, both groups are currently putting their rightwing ideologies and visceral hatred of taxes and gun reform before the public interest and public opinion of the majority of citizens.

With the NRA making it clear that there could be no rational compromise on the issue of gun control, and Congress unable to forge a consensus concerning the debt crisis, the country confronted an impasse as it faced a not-so-Merry Christmas and frightening New Year. The end of the world prophesized for December 21 by the Mayan capital was finally correctly interpreted as the end of one calendar cycle and the beginning of a new one, but there wasn't much hope that the new political cycle beginning in January would be a promising one, as the country was further polarized by the intransigence on taxes and gun control by the Republicans and NRA.

Time For Gun Safety and Mental Health Reform NOW!

Will the brutal massacre of children and administrators at the Sandy HookElementary school in Connecticut finally initiate a serious discussion of the burning need for a conversation about

gun safety reform in the United States that aims at practical steps for curbing gun violence? The many shocking mass shootings in 2012 all elicited declarations of intent to tackle the out of control epidemic of gun violence, but no meaningful action followed. After the shooting of Arizona Congresswoman Gabriel Giffords in 2011, President Obama promised "sound and effective steps that will actually keep those irresponsible, law-breaking few from getting their hands on a gun in the first place." However, no resolution emerged, although a more intensive background check on individuals purchasing firearms was promised by the Justice Department. Likewise, while Obama cited the need for stricter gun laws in summer 2012 after the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting, no action had been taken on the federal level to promote gun safety reform until the Sandy Hook massacre seized the attention of the media and the conscience of the nation. Previously, under the Obama administration, gun laws around the country have become more lax, allowing people to carry concealed weapons, and there are more places where people are allowed to openly carry guns, while weapon sales have boomed.[12]

Could it be different this time? The mass slaughter of children in school is unprecedented and should concern every thinking and feeling person. The 2012 election is over and Obama and his administration have four years to carry out meaningful gun safety reform legislation. During the past election, Republicans were widely defeated, and, in particular, extreme conservatives lost in race after race, losing six out of seven contested seats in the Senate to liberal Democrats. Clearly, the public is fed up with conservative Republicans' politics, like their insistent opposition to ANY gun control measures, and may be ready for "change that matters" in gun laws.

Perhaps President Obama's emotional speech at a Sandy Hook Memorial service on Sunday December 16 could mark a turning point in the national attitude toward gun control. In a heart-felt speech full of Biblical references and resonances, Obama insisted that we *must* do something and take up the challenges of mass shootings:

Can we say that we're truly doing enough to give all the children of this country the chance they deserve to live out their lives in happiness and with purpose?

I've been reflecting on this the last few days, and if we're honest with ourselves, the answer's no. We're not doing enough. And we will have to change.

Since I've been president, this is the fourth time we have come together to comfort a grieving community torn apart by mass shootings, fourth time we've hugged survivors, the fourth time we've consoled the families of victims.

And in between, there have been an endless series of deadly shootings across the country, almost daily reports of victims, many of them children, in small towns and in big cities all across America, victims whose – much of the time their only fault was being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

We can't tolerate this anymore. These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change.

We will be told that the causes of such violence are complex, and that is true. No single law, no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society, but that can't be an excuse for inaction. Surely we can do better than this.

If there's even one step we can take to save another child or another parent or another town from the grief that's visited Tucson and Aurora and Oak Creek and Newtown and communities from Columbine to Blacksburg before that, then surely we have an obligation to try.

In the coming weeks, I'll use whatever power this office holds to engage my fellow citizens, from law enforcement, to mental health professionals, to parents and educators, in an effort aimed at preventing more tragedies like this, because what choice do we have? We can't accept events like this as routine.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook slaughter, throughout the media and public sphere, there have been calls to return to the ban on assault rifles carried out by the Clinton administration in 1994 and which expired during the Bush/Cheney administration allowed to expire in 2004. The shooters at both the Oregon Mall and SandyHillElementary School in December 2012 carried AR-16 assault rifles and high-speed gun magazines allowing hundreds of high velocity bullets to be fired rapidly.

Fire arms similar to the Bushmaster rifle which was identified as the murder weapon in Sandy Hook massacre had been deployed as well in other recent mass shootings, leading to debates whether such rapid-fire semi-automatic rifles should be banned. The Bushmaster assault weapon was targeted toward men, and the Bushmaster website even made a connection between owning the gun and being a "man":

"Visitors of bushmaster.com will have to prove they're a man by answering a series of manhood questions. Upon successful completion, they will be issued a temporary Man Card to proudly display to friends and family. The Man Card is valid for one year.

Visitors can also call into question or even revoke the Man Card of friends they feel have betrayed their manhood. The man in question will then have to defend himself, and their Man Card, by answering a series of questions geared towards proving indeed, they are worthy of retaining their card."[13]

This blatant connection between hard masculinity and Bushmaster rifles makes clear part of the reasons why so many young men in crisis turn to guns as a means of becoming a "real man." [pullquote]*It raises the question why men need a "Man Card" to validate their masculinity, and why they think buying an assault rifle makes them men.* [/pullquote]The Bushmaster Firearms International Logo seems to offer an answer in what appears as a bright-red Chinese dragon coiled up as a snake with what appears to be an erect penis protruding from its base.[14] Obviously, the Bushmaster Man is manly and fully erect and ready for action and must have his gun handy and ready as all times, reminding me of the old Beatles song "Happiness is a Warm Gun," with its refrain, "bang, bang, shoot shoot."

Soon after the Sandy Hook Slaughter on Christmas eve, 2012, in a suburb near Rochester, New York on a beachfront strip off Lake Ontario, ex-felon on parole, William Spengler Jr. killed his sister with whom he lived, set the house on fire, and then used his Bushmaster assault weapon to kill two firefighters and seriously wound two others before using a weapon to take his own life. The Bushmaster Assassin left behind a typewritten note that indicated his mindset and plan: “I still have to get ready to see how much of the neighborhood I can burn down and do what I like doing best — killing people.”

Guns, however, were becoming lethal in the economy and market place, as well as the public sphere. On Monday after the Sandy Hook shootings, a private equity firm Cerebus announced that it was selling off its shares in the fire-arms company that made the Bushmaster, after pressure from the California State Teachers’ Retirement System (CalSTRS), the second largest pension fund in the country, threatened to sell its share of Cerebus, unless the firm sold the company that produced the Bushmaster and other assault weapons. Walmarkt pulled Bushmaster rifles from its online store as furor grew over the sales of ammunition and guns online with no background check, but continued to sell rifles in its stores and sales were reportedly booming of semi-automatic assault weapons throughout the country, a trend that continued through the Christmas holidays.[15]

Such deadly assault weapons as the Bushmaster, used by the military, are properly seen as **weapons of mass destruction** and the shooters involved in mass shootings should be viewed as **terrorists**. After 9/11, the country came together and agreed on harsh measures concerning domestic security in airports and airlines, and hopefully after Sandy Hook, there will be concern for school safety and the need to protect the public against gun violence. Interestingly, previously to Sandy Hook, the NRA and the gun lobby talked incessantly of “gun rights” and the Second Amendment to attack any efforts at gun law reform, and the media went along with this discourse, whereas now the term “gun safety” and protecting the public against gun violence has become a national discourse.In the light of such awesome and destructive fire-power creating such carnage, surely a consensus could be constructed that there is no rational reason to let private citizens run amok with deadly semi-automatic assault weapons, such as the rapid-fire assault weapons that were used in both Oregon and Connecticut to kill innocents in a mall and public school. Likewise, there were multiplying calls for more intensive background checks and even gun registration after the Sandy Hook Slaughter which would surely limit gun ownership among criminals and people with mental health problems. It is scandalous that over 40% of guns in the United States are sold privately at gun shows or other venues and that there are no background checks in these cases; the payoff here is that over 80% of the crimes with guns are committed by those who had no background checks in obtaining their weapons.[16] Further, the existing data base for mental health and criminal prohibitions against selling guns to specific individuals is not even functional in many states creating a Wild West situation in the U.S. that seemingly anyone can buy a gun.[17] Such unrestricted gun sales are a clear and present danger to safety in the U.S. and must be addressed by those seeking a secure and rational society.

While there *are* serious mental health issues involved in the epidemic of mass shootings in the

U.S.,[18] it is definitely a mistake to reduce the problem to mental health since *all* of the mass murders this year have involved males deeply immersed in gun culture who used guns to perpetrate mass murders. Until we understand the depth of the problem of the crises of masculinities and an out-of-control gun culture in the U.S., and take rational steps to control them, we are condemned to repeat endlessly the cycle of the murder of innocents.

Media pundits and anti-gun control conservatives often just reduce the mass shootings to mental health saying "he's crazy" and that's that without looking at the intersection of mental health, guns and guns culture, and the crises of masculinities. For instance, in his infamous NRA speech referenced above Wayne Pierre denounced the mass shooters as "monsters," as if using such a concept would end discussion about gun safety reform. Such people not only reduce mass shooting to mental health categories, but when specific gun control measures are proposed, they divert discussion by claiming it's primarily an issue of mental health. For instance, freshman Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), who had received an "A" rating from the National Rifle Association, stated on TV that: "To me, one of the issues that I think comes — screams out of this — is the issue of mental health and the care for the mentally ill in our country, especially the dangerously mentally ill. And so we need to have a broad discussion before we start talking about gun control."[19]

Indeed, the nexus of mental health issues and unrestricted gun possession is a key variable in all of the mass shootings. Thus, as Newark Mayor Cory Booker recommends to seriously address gun violence we need the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to be deployed for all gun sales, ending the gun show/private dealer loopholes and make all guns subject to background checks, including mental health checks. This would require mandating criminal background and mental health data bases so that adequate information could be used to keep weapons out of the wrong hands. Further, as Booker advocates, we must **tighten anti-trafficking laws,** passing laws "that makes gun trafficking a clear, substantial, and practically enforceable federal crime," which stronger penalties for illegal gun sales and possession, since, "as recently noted by the bipartisan coalition Mayors Against Illegal Guns, carries the same punishment as for the trafficking of chicken or livestock."[20]

Crucially, all of the mass shootings of recent years involved semi-automatic assault weapons and high-capacity bullet magazines, hence it is obvious that these weapons of mass destruction need to be banned. Killers can buy unlimited amounts of ammunition and even guns unchecked over the Internet; James Holmes had reportedly bought over 6,000 rounds of ammo from the Internet, as well as an arsenal of guns from local gun shows. No assault munitions, guns, or perhaps even gear used by the police or military should be sold over the Internet, and there should be heavy penalties for illegal sales of this material.

However, it would be a mistake to wait and expect politicians on the national or local level to solve this problem of mass shootings and the need for gun safety reform. This is an issue that concerns every individual who cares about their fellow citizens and wants to see a reduction in gun violence. We need a national discussion to pressure politicians on the national, state, and local level to move toward seeing the extent of the problem of gun violence, and the need for

serious steps to address the cycle of mass shootings. Otherwise the epidemic of mass killings will become worse and there will no nowhere safe from gun violence.

Crises of Masculinities, Mass Shootings, and Media Spectacle

In this article, I have argued that in order to carry forth meaningful discussions of the scope of gun violence and mass murder in the U.S., we need to better understand how a wide range of school shootings and acts of domestic terrorism have multiple dimensions and need to be addressed by a diverse range of responses. Indeed, school shootings and domestic terrorism have proliferated on a global level. In 2012, there have been school shootings in Finland, Germany, Greece, and other countries as well as the United States.[21] Although each case of gun violence has specific causal features and context, in all cases men act out their rage through the use of guns and violence to create media spectacles and become celebrities-of-the-moment. In the following sections, I will argue that dealing with problems of school and societal violence will require reconstruction of male identities and critique of masculinist socialization and identities, as well as changing gun laws, effecting stricter gun control, and offering better mental health service.

The mainstream corporate media have rarely, if ever, seriously discussed the crisis of masculinity and its connection with gun violence and mass shootings. Invariably, when shootings or acts of social violence are mentioned in the corporate media, the word “male” is rarely, if ever, used. In the concluding discussions of this article, I want to suggest some of the connections between crises of masculinity, gun culture, and mass shootings and how a reconstruction of masculinity and different models of male socialization are necessary to seriously address the problem of mass shootings and social violence in the contemporary U.S.

In the following discussion, I argue that media culture, gun culture, gang culture, sports, and military culture produce ultramacho men as an ideal, generating societal problems from violence against women to gang murder (see Katz 2006 and Kellner 2008). As Jackson Katz urges, young men have to renounce these ideals and behavior and construct alternative notions of masculinity. Katz concludes that reconstructing masculinity and overcoming aggressive and violent macho behavior and values provides “a vision of manhood that does not depend on putting down others in order to lift itself up. When a man stands up for social justice, non-violence, and basic human rights -– for women as much as for men -— he is acting in the best traditions of our civilization. That makes him not only a better man, but a better human being” (Katz 2006, p. 270).

Major sources of violence in U.S. society include cultures of violence produced by poverty as well as many other factors, including masculinist military, sports, and gun culture; ultramasculine behavior in the corporate and political world; high school bullying and fighting; general societal violence reproduced by media and in the family and everyday life; and escalating violence in prisons. In any of these cases, an ultraviolent masculinity can explode and produce societal violence, and until we have new conceptions of what it means to be a man that include intelligence, independence, sensitivity, and the renunciation of bullying and

violence, societal violence will no doubt increase.

Lee Hirsch's film *Bully* (2011) has called attention to the phenomenon of bullying in schools, by showing intense bullying taking place on school buses, playgrounds, classrooms, and neighborhoods. Focusing on five victims of bullying from various regions in the United States, two of whom committed suicide, Hirsch's film puts on display shocking physical mistreatment of high school students by their peers. In an allegorical mode, the wildly popular film *The Hunger Game* (2012) also presents a stark view of a dystopic world in which only the strongest survive and violence is valorized as the key to survival, although this time the hero is a young woman.

Sports culture is another major part of the construction of American masculinity that can take violent forms. In many of the high school shootings of the 1990s, jocks tormented young teenage boys who took revenge in asserting a hyperviolent masculinity and went on shooting rampages. Ralph Larkin (2007: 205ff) provides a detailed analysis of "Football and Toxic High School Environments," focusing on Columbine. He describes how sports played a primary role in the school environment, how jocks were celebrities, and how they systematically abused outsiders and marginal youth like Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

The "pattern of sports domination of high schools," Larkin suggests, "is apparently the norm in America" (2007: 206). Larkin notes how football has become incorporated into a hyper-masculinized subculture that emphasizes physical aggression, domination, sexism, and the celebration of victory. He notes that more "than in any other sport, defeat in football is associated with being physically dominated and humiliated" (2007: 208). Further, football is associated with militarism as George Carlin notes in his comedy routine:

In football the object is for the quarterback, also known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use the shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing this aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy's defensive line.

In baseball the object is to go home! And to be safe! (Carlin, cited in Larkin 2007: 208).

Larkin argues that football culture has "corrupted many high schools," including Columbine where "the culture of hyper-masculinity reigned supreme" (2007: 209). Hence, Larkin concludes that: "If we wish to reduce violence in high schools, we have to de-emphasize the power of sports and change the culture of hypermasculinity. Football players cannot be lords of the hallways, bullying their peers with impunity, sometimes encouraged by coaches with adolescent mentalities" (2007: 210).

Hypermasculinity in sports is also often a cauldron of homophobia and many of the school shooters were taunted about their sexuality and responded ultimately with a berserk affirmation of compensatory violence.[22] Indeed, hypermasculinity is a problem for young men beyond high school and college. Professional sports like football, boxing, and wrestling

promote hypermasculine images of men and tough guy behaviour, as does body-building culture, some forms of gym culture, and informal sites of male-bonding like fight clubs.[23] Pro football players are our modern gladiators, highly trained and armoured to go out every week and "kill" the other side.[24] TV sports programs promote violent TV sports and reward hypermasculine winners.

Yet hypermasculinity is found throughout sports, military, gun, gang, and other male subcultures, as well as the corporate and political world, often starting in the family with male socialization by the father, and is reproduced and validated constantly in films, television programs, and other forms of media and gun culture. Further, media culture is full of violence and the case studies in Chapter 3 in *Guys and Guns Amok* of violent masculinity show that Timothy McVeigh, the two Columbine shooters, and many other school shooters in the 2000s were deeply influenced by violent media culture. In particular, Cho at Virginia Tech was a failed film writer who left a dossier full of cinematic images and arguably orchestrated the "Virginia Tech Massacre" as a cinematic media spectacle (see Kellner 2008). There are reports that Norwegian shooter Andreas Breivik, Adam Lanza, and other mass shooters were fans of the military first-person assault video game *Call to Duty*, a program used by the military to train recruits.[25]

I do not, however, want to claim that either film or video games "causes" mass shootings, as influences of media culture are but one factor in a complex nexus of societal influences that include gun culture and other societal influences, as well as media culture. Yet, while media images of violence and specific books, films, TV shows, video and computer games, and other artifacts of media culture may provide scripts for violent masculinity that young men act out, it is the broader culture of militarism, gun culture, violent sports, ultraviolent video and computer games, subcultures of bullying and violence, and the rewarding of ultramasculinity in the corporate and political worlds that are major factors in constructing hegemonic violent masculinities. Media culture itself obviously contributes to this macho ideal of masculinity, but gender is a contested terrain between different conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and between liberal, conservative, and more radical representations and discourses (Kellner 1995).

Crises in masculinity are grounded in the deterioration of socio-economic possibilities for young men and are inflamed by economic troubles. In a time of neo-liberal capitalist economic crisis young men without a positive economic future and prospects for good jobs turn to guns for empowerment. Their rage is intensified by gun culture and declining economic prospects. Gun carnage is also encouraged in part by media that repeatedly illustrate violence as a way of responding to problems. Explosions of male rage and rampage are also embedded in the escalation of war and militarism in the United States from the long nightmare of Vietnam through the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this context of escalating societal violence, adoption of a more rational policy addressing access to guns is one solution to this problem. It was initially heartening that people appalled by the Virginia Tech shootings campaigned to close loop holes for gun shows that enable the purchase of firearms without adequate background checks, as in the case of the girlfriend of

one of the underage Columbine shooters. Yet failure to act to close these loopholes, or to reverse ending the ban on semi-automatic assault weapons in succeeding years, has been disheartening.

We also must examine the role of the Internet as a source of ammunition and firearms, where anyone can assume a virtual identity and purchase lethal weapons; it is perhaps not coincidental that the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University shooters both bought their ammunition from the same on-line business,[26] and it is incredible what one can now find on the Internet promoting guns and male violence.[27]

However, escalating gun violence and random shootings is a larger problem than gun control alone. Underlying causes of rampant gun violence include increasing societal alienation, frustration, anger, and rage in schools, universities, workplaces, public spaces, and communities. To address these problems, we need better mental health facilities and monitoring of troubled individuals, and also of institutions.

Schools and universities, for example, have scrambled to ensure counseling and monitoring programs to help troubled students, and offer safety plans on how to address crises that result in violence and have increased video surveillance. Schools themselves should be assessed on how well they provide a secure learning environment and counseling for troubled students. Schools can also teach non-violent conflict resolution and media literacy courses that critique media representations that associate power and gun violence with masculinity and should cultivate alternative images to the ultraviolent images of masculinity circulating in media.

To be sure, in an era such as ours of ongoing war and poverty and societal violence, male rage shootings will no doubt be a problem for years to come. It is essential, therefore, that we address the issue of crises of masculinity and social alienation, and not reflexively resort to using simplistic jargon – "he's just crazy" – to explain away the issue. Mental illness is a complex phenomenon that has a variety of dimensions and expressions.

It is also important not to scapegoat the Internet, media, computer games, prescription drugs, or any one factor that may very well contribute to the problem, but is not the single underlying cause. Rather, we need to admit to both the complexity and the urgency of the problem of school shootings, and enact an array of intelligent and informed responses that will produce a more peaceful and humane society. In the concluding section, I will conclude with further suggestions of the sort of social reconstruction and cultivation of new sensibilities necessary to address challenges of mass shootings and domestic terrorism.

Scapegoating, Social Reconstruction, and a New Sensibility

After dramatic school shootings and incidents of youth violence, there are usually attempts to scapegoat media culture. After the Virginia Tech shootings, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) issued a report in late April, 2007 on "violent television programming and its impact on children" that call for expanding governmental oversight on broadcast television, but also extending content regulation to cable and satellite channels for the first time and

banning some shows from time-slots where children might be watching. FCC Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein, who is in favor of the measures, did not hesitate to evoke the Virginia Tech shootings: "particularly in sight of the spasm of unconscionable violence at Virginia Tech, but just as importantly in light of the excessive violent crime that daily affects our nation, there is a basis for appropriate federal action to curb violence in the media."[28]

In a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed piece, Nick Gillespie, editor of *Reason*, noted that the report itself indicated that there was no causal relation between watching TV violence and committing violent acts. Further, Gillespie argued that given the steady drop in incidents of juvenile violence over the last twelve years, reaching a low not seen since at least the 1970s, it was inappropriate to demonize media culture for acts of societal violence.[29] Yet, in my view, the proliferation of media culture and spectacle requires renewed calls for critical media literacy so that people can intelligently analyze and interpret the media and see how they are vehicles for representations of race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and violence.

In the wake of the Columbine shootings, fierce criticism and scapegoating of media and youth culture erupted. Oddly, there was less finger pointing at these targets after the Virginia Tech Massacre, perhaps because the Korean and Asian films upon which Cho modeled his photos and videos were largely unknown in the United States, and perhaps because conservatives prefer to target jihadists or liberals as nefarious influences on Cho (Kellner 2008, Chapter 1). I want to avoid, however, both extremes, neither demonizing media and youth culture, nor asserting that it is mere entertainment without serious social influence. There is no question but that the media nurture fantasies and influence behavior, sometimes sick and vile ones, and to achieve mental health in our culture requires that we are able to critically analyze and dissect media culture and not let it gain power over us. Critical media literacy empowers individuals over media so that they can establish critical and analytical distance from media messages and images. This provides protection from media manipulation and avoids letting the most destructive images of media gain power over one. It also enables more critical, healthy, and active relations with our culture. Media culture will not disappear and it is simply a question of how we will deal with it and if we can develop an adequate pedagogy of critical media literacy to empower our youth (see Kellner 2004).

Unfortunately, there are few media literacy courses offered in schools in the United States from kindergarten through high school. Many other countries such as Canada, Australia, and England have such programs (see Kellner and Share 2007). In previous studies, I have argued that to design schools for the new millennium that meet the challenges posed by student alienation and violence and that provide skills which students need for a high-tech economy requires a democratic reconstruction of education (Kellner 2004, 2006, and 2008).

I would also argue that to address problems of societal violence raised in this article requires a reconstruction of education and society, and what Herbert Marcuse referred to as "a revolution in values" and a "new sensibility."[30] The revolution in values involves breaking with values of competition, aggression, greed, and self-interest and cultivating values of equality, peace, harmony, and community. Such a revolution of values "would also make for a new morality, for

new relations between the sexes and generations, for a new relation between man and nature" (Marcuse 2001: 198). Harbingers of the revolution in values, Marcuse argued, are found in "a widespread rebellion against the domineering values, of virility, heroism and force, invoking the images of society which may bring about the end of violence" (ibid).

The "new sensibility" in turn would cultivate needs for beauty, love, connections with nature and other people, and more democratic and egalitarian social relations. Marcuse believed that without a change in the sensibility, there can be no real social change, and that education, art, and the humanities can help cultivate the conditions for a new sensibility. Underlying the theory of the new sensibility is a concept of the active role of the senses in the constitution of experience that rejects the Kantian and other philosophical devaluations of the senses as passive, merely receptive. For Marcuse, our senses are shaped and molded by society, yet constitute in turn our primary experience of the world and provide both imagination and reason with its material. He believes that the senses are currently socially constrained and mutilated and argues that only an emancipation of the senses and a new sensibility can produce liberating social change.

This is not to say that masculinity per se, or the traits associated with it, are all bad. There are times when being strong, independent, self-reliant, and even aggressive can serve positive goals and resist oppression and injustice. A post-gendered human being would share traits now associated with women and men, so that women could exhibit the traits listed above and men could be more loving, caring, emotional, vulnerable and other traits associated with women. Gender itself should be deconstructed and while we should fight gender oppression and inequality there are reasons to question gender itself in a more emancipated and democratic world in which individuals create their own personalities and lives out of the potential found traditionally in men and women.

Since guns are identified with hypermasculinity and societal violence, a reconstruction of masculinity could help individuals and society deal with the ongoing American obsession with guns and resultant outbreaks of gun massacres. Developing new masculinities and sensibilities and overcoming alienation of students and youth is of course a utopian dream, but in the light of growing societal violence, domestic terrorism, and indiscriminate mass shootings, such a reconstruction of education and society is necessary to help produce a life worthy of human beings.

Notes

[1] For an ever expanding "Time Line of Worldwide School and Mass Shootings" since 1996, see https://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0777958.html (accessed on December 20, 2012). For a global "list of rampage killers," see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rampage_killers (accessed on December 26, 2012). For information on specific mass shootings, including guns used and a map of the shootings, see "Mother Jones Guide to Mass Shootings" at

https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/mass-shootings-map (accessed on January 26, 2012).

[2] Mariano Castillo and Holly Yan, "Details, but no answers, in Oregon mall shooting," *CNN*, December 13, 2012 at https://www.cnn.com/2012/12/12/justice/oregon-mall-shooting (accessed on February 9, 2013).

[3] See my analysis of connections between crises of masculinity, an out-of-control gun culture, and media spectacle in Kellner 2008.

[4] Questions were later raised concerning why Nancy Lanza purchased such an arsenal of assault weapons, took her mentally disturbed child to target practice with her, and did not keep her gun collection secured, allowing her son Adam to use her arsenal for mass murder. It was reported that many people in her community of Newtown were angry with Ms. Lanza and did not include her in their memorials of the murdered victims; see Kevin Sullivan, "In Newtown, Nancy Lanza a subject of sympathy for some, anger for others," *Washington Post*, December 19, 2012, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-newtown-nancy-lanza-a-subject-of-sympathy-for-some-anger-for-others/2012/12/19/5a425f1c-4a1e-11e2-ad54-580638ede391_story.html (retrieved December 20, 2012). A later *Washington Post* story gave a more detailed account of Adam Lanza's solitary life, indicating that Adam was alone in life except for his relation to Nancy Lanza, who homeschooled him, and that when his father remarried, Adam broke off relations with both his father and brother. See Marc Fisher, Robert O'Harrow and Peter Finn, "A frustrating search for motive in Newtown shootings," *Washington Post,* December 22, 2012 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/a-frustrating-search-for-motive-in-the-madness/2012/12/22/1cbe1cbc-4956-11e2-820e-17eefac2f939_story.html (accessed on December 22, 2012).

[5] See Ewen MacAskill, "Obama puts gun control centre stage as Biden appointed to lead task force. President pledges to force action on gun control as politicians implored to summon 'courage' in wake of Newtown massacre," *The* Guardian, December 2012 at https://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/19/obama-gun-control-biden-task-force (accessed at February 1, 2013).

[6] As it turns out, December 2012 polls indicated a majority of Americans do not support banning assault rifles, whereas there was a strong majority supporting background checks and a significant majority supporte banning high-capacity ammunition clips, so it appears that U.S. gun safety reform will begin with reforms supporting by the majority; see "After Newtown, Modest Change in Opinion about Gun Control. Most Say Assault Weapons Make Nation More Dangerous," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, December 20, 2012, at https://www.people-press.org/2012/12/20/after-newtown-modest-change-in-opinion-about-gun-control/ (accessed January 30, 2012).

[7] See Matea Gold, Joseph Tanfani, and Richard Simon, "Gun lobby's grip loosens on Congress," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2012: A1, and Peter Wallsten and Tom

Hamburger, “Even before Newtown tragedy, NRA was losing Democratic support,” *Washington Post,* December 19, 2012 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/even-before-newtown-tragedy-nra-was-losing-democratic-support/2012/12/19/9b32738a-4952-11e2-ad54-580638ede391_story.html (accessed December 21, 2012).

[8] Michael M. Grynbaum, “Bloomberg, Incensed by Shooting, Vows Stiffer Fight to Rework Gun Laws,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2012, at https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/nyregion/bloomberg-vows-stiffer-fight-to-overhaul-us-gun-laws.html?pagewanted=all (accessed January 27, 2012).

[9] Ewen Callaway, “Carrying a gun increases risk of getting shot and killed, October 9, 2009 at https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17922-carrying-a-gun-increases-risk-of-getting-shot-and-killed.html (accessed December 27, 2012); see also *American Journal of Public Health*, DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2008.143099 (accessed December 27, 2012).

[10] Newspapers were even more scathing with Rupert Murdoch’s *NY Post* featuring a giant headline GUN NUT, while its’ competitor the *New York Daily News* ran a headline CRAZIEST MAN ON EARTH. A *New York Times* editorial was less incendiary describing LaPierre’s “mendacious, delusional, almost deranged rant.” In general, the media was angry because a press conference was announced and LaPierre did not take any questions, using his 25-minute free network airtime to present a sales pitch for guns as the only solution for gun violence, while attacking the media, video games, the mental health system, and other targets for allegedly being responsible for gun violence. For discussion of media response to LaPierre’s speech, see Matt Williams, “Wayne LaPierre’s Newtown statement pilloried by US newspapers. New York Times and Hartford Courant among publications to denounce NRA leader’s response as ‘almost deranged’” *The Guardian*, December 22, 2012 at

https://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/22/nra-lapierre-statement-pilloried-newspapers (accessed on December 23, 2012).

[11] For a striking report on how the gun industry funds the NRA that functions as the industry lobby, see “National Rifle Association Receives Millions of Dollars From Gun Industry,” at https://www.vpc.org/press/1104blood.htm (accessed on December 26, 2012).

[12] On the failure of Obama and other leaders of the Democratic Party to address gun control during the 2008 presidential election, see Derrick Z. Jackson, “Missing on Gun Control,” *Boston Globe,* February 19, 2008 at https://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2008/02/19/missing_on_gun_control/ (accessed on April 4, 2012). Adam Winkler recently claimed that: “Few presidents have shown as little interest in gun control as Barack Obama… It’s as if ‘avoid gun control at all costs’ has become a plank in the Democratic Party platform.” Cited in Mitchell Landsberg, “NRA is restless despite clout. The group is so worried about Obama that it is willing to ignore

Romney's past." *Los Angeles Times,* April 13, 2012: AA7.

[13] See the Bushmaster web-site at https://www.bushmaster.com/press-release-050710.asp (accessed December 18, 2012).

[14] The logo was accessible on the Wikipedia Bushmaster site on the top right hand side when I accessed it on December 22, 2012 at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bushmaster_Firearms_International.

[15] Walmart had previously been the subject of campaigns against the easy available of assault weapons and ammunition; see George Zornick, "How Walmart Helped Make Newtown Shooter's AR-15 the Most Popular Assault Weapon in America," *The Nation,"* December 17, 2012 at https://www.thenation.com/article/171808/how-walmart-helped-make-newtown-shooters-ar-15-most-popular-assault-weapon-america (accessed on December 21, 2012).

[16] Cory Booker, "It's Time to Emphasize Pragmatic and Achievable Gun Law Reform," *Huffington Post*, December 21, 2012 at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/cory-booker/gun-law-reform_b_2346911.html (accessed on December 27, 2012).

[17] Michael S. Schmidt and Charlie Savage, "Gaps in F.B.I. Data Undercut Background Checks for Guns," *New York Times*, December 20, 2012, at https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/us/gaps-in-fbi-data-undercut-background-checks-for-guns.html?pagewanted=all (accessed on December 27, 2012).

[18] Mental health professionals argue that only 5% of shootings in the contemporary U.S. are attributed to those with diagnosed mental health issues, and that such people are more likely to be a object of violence rather than subject. See Michael Menaster, David Bienenfeld, et al "Psychiatric Disorders Associated With Criminal Behavior, *Medscape*, April 12, 2012 at https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/294626-overview (accessed at January 20, 2013).

[19] Sean Sullivan, "Lines drawn in gun-control debate," *Washington Post,* January 6, 2013 at https://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-01-06/politics/36208427_1_checks-on-gun-buyers-gun-control-gun-laws(accessed at January 20, 2013).

[20] Booker, op. cit.

[21] In China, the same day as the Sandy Hook slaughter, a man attacked 23 school children with a knife, but none were killed, highlighting the more lethal violence used by angry men on a rampage in the United States; see Carlos Tejada, "China Grapples with Latest attack on School," *Wall St. Journal*, December 17, 2012 at https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324407504578182904026663998.html (accessed at December 20, 2012).

[22] Yet as the Penn State football scandal revealed in 2011-2012, a deified football culture can also lead sports and university leaders to cover over sexual abuse of young men and women, as has the Catholic Church. See Henry A. Giroux, "From Penn State to JPMorgan Chase and Barclays: Destroying Higher Education, Savaging Children and Extinguishing Democracy," *Truth Out*, July 24, 2012 at https://truth-out.org/opinion/item/10301-from-penn-state-to-jpmorgan-chase-and-barclay-destroying-higher-education-savaging-children-and-extinguishing-democracy (accessed on July 30, 2012), and "Henry Giroux on Penn State, College Athletics, and Capitalism: Solidarity Is "Impossible When Sports Are Driven by Market Values," *Truth Out*, July 24, 2012 at https://truth-out.org/news/item/10496-henry-giroux-on-penn-state-college-athletics-and-capitalism-solidarity-is-impossible-when-sports-are-driven-by-market-values (accessed on July 30, 2012).

[23] On men and fight clubs, see Henry A. Giroux, "Private Satisfactions and Public Disorders: *Fight Club*, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence, at https://www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/fight_club.htm (accessed on January 3, 2013).

[24] There have been steadily growing serious injuries in pro football in recent years and calls to better protect players; see Kevin Cook, "Dying to Play," *New York Times*, September 11, 2012 at https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/opinion/head-injuries-in-football.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print (accessed on January 3, 2013).

[25] See "Report: Newtown Gunman Adam Lanza Spent Days In Basement Playing Call Of Duty," *CBS News New York*, December 19, 2012 at https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2012/12/19/report-newtown-gunman-adam-lanza-spent-days-in-basement-playing-call-of-duty/ (accessed on December 26, 2012), and Barney Henderson, "Connecticut school massacre: Adam Lanza 'spent hours playing Call Of Duty.' The Connecticut school massacre gunman Adam Lanza spent hours playing violent video games such as Call Of Duty in a windowless bunker, according to an interview with a plumber who worked at the family home." *The Telegraph*, December 18, 2012 at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/9752141/Connecticut-school-massacre-Adam-Lanza-spent-hours-playing-Call-Of-Duty.html (accessed on December 26, 2012). The Norwegian killer Anders Breivik was also reportedly a devotee of *Call of Duty* which he reportedly played hours on end. See Douglas Kellner, "The Dark Side of the Spectacle: Terror in Norway and the UK Riots," *Cultural Politics*, 8:01 (March 2012): 1-43.

[26] See "Gun dealer sold to both Va. Tech, NIU shooters," *USA Today,* February 16, 2008 at https://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-02-16-gundealer-niu-vatech-shooters_N.htm (accessed on April 16, 2012). Interestingly, Eric Thompson's company, TGSCOM Inc., which sold Cho and Kazmierczak weapons through his Web site www.thegunsource.com offered customers weapons at cost for two weeks to help citizens get the weapons they needed for their own self defense, see "Owner of Web-based Firearms Company that Sold to Virginia Tech and NIU Shooters to Forgo Profits to Help Prevent Future Loss of Life," April 25, 2008,

TGSCOM Inc. at https://www.thegunsource.com/Article.aspx?aKey=Guns_at_Cost (accessed on April 16, 2012).

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[28] Cited in Nick Gillespie, "The FCC's not mommy and daddy," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 2007: A23.

[29] In his book (2008) *Guyland. The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, Michael Kimble carries out a thorough and insightful mapping of the terrain of male culture in the contemporary United States, but does not address the problems of guns and culture, downplays the impact of video games and media culture (152ff), and does not adequately address the problems of hypermasculinity and violence.

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Israel's 2013 Elections

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

Part I: Prelude

In Early October 2012 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would hold national elections for a new Knesset early in 2013. The vote would come some 10 months before it was required by law. Netanyahu explained the move by claiming that, as it stood, his coalition government could not agree on the 2013 austerity budget he felt the country needed. Observers also noted that Netanyahu and his Likud-Beitenu Party (which was the result of a merger of Likud and Avigdor Lieberman's Israel Beitenu) were riding high in the polls, while his "centrist" opponents, Kadima (Forward) and the Labor Party were in sad shape.

No doubt Netanyahu planned for a definitive win in the new elections which would confirm his leadership and clear the way for continued belligerency toward Iran (a key issue in his election campaign) and indefinite postponement of any renewal of Palestinian negotiations. The sadistic economic strangulation of 1.6 million Gazans would also continue. Netanyahu understood that there were no major objections among the majority of Israel's Jewish public when it came to Palestinians, and that a certain amount of fear could always be adjusted up or down by focusing on Iran. There were domestic concerns that would prove more difficult, but the political moment appeared propitious to Netanyahu, and so he called the early election.

Benjamin Netanyahu is a wily politician, but he is not a man of broad vision. As with most of his country's politicians, he thinks within a rigid Zionist box. That means, having called for new elections, he followed certain formulae in his effort to achieve political success. One of the strategies usually pursued by the government in power in the run up to national elections, is beating up on the Palestinians. Thus, the same month that the Prime Minister announced new elections, the general calm that existed on the Israeli-Gaza border was broken by the Israeli army. According to the formula, this should have led to a strengthening of Netanyahu's image as a defender of the Israeli nation.

When it comes to breaking cease fires, there is also a general Israeli modus operandi. They start by using snipers to kill Palestinians walking near the border "buffer zones." By the end of October 2012 this was happening on the Gaza frontier. The Palestinians replied with rocket fire into southern Israel. Here a word should be said about the Palestinian rockets. The vast majority of them are small missiles, they have no warheads and they have no guidance systems. They are the motorized version of sling-shots and rock throwing. Can they damage property and, on rare occasion, people too? Yes. But, no serious comparison can be made between these rockets and the Israeli fire power used against the Palestinians.

After a flair up at the end of October things went quiet again, but only briefly. On the 8th of November Israeli ground forces came into Gaza and started indiscriminately shooting up an

area northeast of Khan Yunis. Children seemed to be the particular targets for this operation. On the next day, the 9th, Palestinian forces attacked an Israeli jeep, injuring 4 soldiers. Following this, Israeli fighter aircraft began attacking Gaza neighborhoods in earnest and, in retaliation, the rocket fire into Israel increased. This tete a tete would go on for the next month.

In the second week of November, Gershom Baskin, founder of the Israeli/PalestinianCenter for Research and Information, and a man with contacts both in the Israeli government and Hamas (he had helped negotiate the release of Gilad Shalit in 2011) put forth a plan for a long-term cease fire (see *Huffington Post, November, 17, 2012*). This document was given to both Israeli personnel, Egyptian intermediaries, and the Hamas military commander, Ahmed Jabari. According to Baskin, there is reason to believe that Jabari, acting for the Hamas side, reacted favorably to this approach. Yet, before anything could be settled, the Israeli government, seemingly acting on the advice of Yisrael Katz, the Transportation Minister, to "cut off the head of the snake" took the decision to assassinate Jabari. This was done on the 14th of November.

Hamas's response was predictable. There was an explosion of rocket attacks, now involving missiles of greater range, reaching the area of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Netanyahu responded by calling up 75,000 reservists and the possibility of yet another land invasion of Gaza now loomed (the last invasion was Israel's 2008-2009 operation "Cast Lead"). It was at this point that Egyptian intermediaries, representing the new Islamic oriented government of Mohammad Morsi, stepped up their efforts to head off such an invasion. Soon, Hamas let it be known that it was open to a cease fire (as they had been before the assassination of Jabari). But, apparently, the price for a cessation of the rocket attacks had gone up. They wanted an end to the Israeli blockade and no more Israeli raids into Gaza.

The Israeli reply was to move its troops into position for an invasion. Clearly, the Israelis were not going to respond to Egyptian overtures alone. When this became clear a period of intense negotiations commenced involving United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon, who flew into Cairo for consultations on the 19th of November, and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who showed up in Israel the next day.

It is perhaps the case that these more intense negotiations alone would have held the Israelis off. However, something else now happened that may be seen as the "clincher." On the 21st of November a bomb went off on a Tel Aviv bus. The Israelis had long assumed that they had created a secure defense against such attacks. They were obviously wrong. The message of the bombing was: Netanyahu could go ahead and invade the Gaza Strip, but the consequences would be politically fatal for him. There would not only be missiles raining down throughout the country, but a renewal of bombs going off on busses, outside of nightclubs, at malls, and who knew where else. This was hardly the environment that would encourage the Prime Minister's triumphal reelection.

Netanyahu had badly overplayed his hand. What had begun as a pre-election demonstration that he was a tough leader who could protect Israelis, now had devolved into a crisis which

called his judgment into serious question. He had created a line in the sand, so to speak, from which someone would have to retreat. Who that someone was became clear with the cease fire conditions released soon after the Tel Aviv bombing.

While Hamas agreed to stop firing the rockets, it was only on the condition that Israel cease its targeted assassinations of Hamas leaders and all incursions into the Gaza Strip. The Israelis were also obligated to "open the crossings and facilitate the movements of people and transfer of goods and refrain from restricting residents free movements and targeting residents in border areas…." (*Details of the agreement given at Huffington Post November 21, 2012*.)

Whether the Israelis would fully follow through on their obligations under the agreement was uncertain. Their historical record in this regard is poor. However, the reaction of theGazans, who poured into the streets in celebration, clearly indicated that the appearance of victory was on the side of the Palestinians. And, on the Israeli side there was a feeling that they had indeed come up short. Soon after the cease fire went into effect sixteen Israeli soldiers "arranged their uniformed bodies on the sand, to spell out the Hebrew words, 'Bibi [Netanyahu] loser.'" The picture of this circulated widely on the Web. This sentiment was to have an impact on the approaching election. (*Times of Israel,November 22, 2012*)

Part II: The Election

Before the Gaza fiasco Netanyahu's party, Likud-Beitenu, seemed poised for victory. In the run-up to the election, the party was polling between 37 and 42 seats in the 120 seat Knesset. If this projection held true that would allow Netanyahu to replicate the rightist coalition he led when new elections were called. Perspective coalition partners were, as usual, the conservative religious parties: Shas ("Sepharic Guardians of the Torah), Ha'ichud Ha'leumi (National Union) and Yahadut HaTorah Hameulhedet (United Torah Judaism). Collectively they would end up with 30 seats in the new Knesset.

However, this party configuration did not persist. Three new parties quickly appeared to shake things up: HaBayit HaYehudit (Jewish Home) led by Neftali Bennett, who once was Natanyahu's Chief of Staff and is, if possible, more right-wing than his former boss. This is the party that proved most attractive to the supporters of an expansionist "greater Israel." A new centrist party, Yesh Atid (There is a Future) led by ex-TV personality Yair Lapid who, it is said, "is the first [Israeli] politician to fully grasp the power of social media…." (*Haaretz, January 22, 2013*), proved to be the party of those voters demanding "more good government and less religious messianic politics." And, finally, HaTnuah (The Movement) led by Tzipi Livni who once was a member of Kadima and was Foreign Minister in the former government of Ehud Olmert. HaTnuah was the only party to make resumption of talks with the Palestinians a central campaign issue. However, it managed to win only 6 seats in the new Knesset.

When the elections finally came on the 22nd of January the results were bad, but not fatal, for Netanyahu. His gamble in Gaza had pushed some of his potential supporters (including, perhaps, many of the army reservists called up for the aborted Gaza invasion) away from Likud-Beitenu (which ended up with only 31 seats) and into the arms of the hard-liner Bennett, whose

Bayit Yehudit ended up with 12 seats in the new Knesset. The center parties Meretz (Energy) and Labor would gain 21 seats between them. However, the real new force in politics proved to be Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid which garnered 19 seats. In the elections Lipid had taken positions against the economic austerity that was hurting the Israeli middle class, and against the traditional exemption of Orthodox youth from military service. These positions resonated with a lot of secular Israeli Jews. The Arab parties and Balad (an anti-Zionist party of both Arabs and Jews) held the remaining 11 seats.

When it comes to Yair Lapid, there are those who question the sincerity of his campaign stands. One political observer has called him "the Tofu man" because he "takes on the flavor of whatever is around him" (*see Yair Lapid: The rise of the tofu man" by Dimi Reider, +972 blog, January 22, 2013*). He has repeatedly stated that he is willing to enter into a coalition with Netanyahu, a position that would require big compromises on his part.

It should be noted that neither of Lapid's chief causes, economic relief and draft equity, are priorities for Netanyahu. Israel faces a deficit of some 40 billion NIS (new Israeli shekels) and what a fiscal conservative like Netanyahu has his heart set on is an austerity budget. It was important enough to him to trigger the early elections in the first place. Lapid might well be offered the Finance portfolio by Netanyahu. This would be a prestigious position for the ambitious and vain celebrity, but it would require Lapid to renounce most of his economic campaign promises. Therefore, the Finance ministry is a "poisoned chalice." If Lapid accepted such an offer, it would probably end his political career.

Solving the issue of military exemptions for ultra-orthodox Jews is just as hard a nut to crack. Most secular Israeli Jews are deeply resentful over the fact that ultra-orthodox youth escape army service. The religious political parties that support these exemptions are not only strong enough to sustain them, but also to drain the treasury of large sums of money to subsidize the schools and other institutions of their constituencies.

If Lapid holds firm in his opposition to religious military exemptions, Netanyahu is in a bind. Given their present positions there cannot be a coalition government with both the ultra-orthodox parties and Yesh Atid. The ultra-orthodox parties, which are sure God is on their side, are not going to make any important compromises and so the ball is in Lapid's court. Rumor has it that, if he compromises, he can become Foreign Minister.

Part III: Missing Palestine

During the campaign, the issue of Palestine was missing for most Israeli Jewish voters. It was as if the one problem which really could be an "existentialist threat" to the Zionist nation was assumed settled. Settled in the sense that there would be no viable Palestinian state. If the public wanted a foreign policy issue to get upset about, Netanyahu suggested Iran's alleged passion for nuclear weapons.

This disregard for the future of the Palestinians is a product of Israeli power. For instance, during the election campaign no one doubted that the Israeli military could, as Deputy Prime

Minister Eli Yishai seriously suggested, "blow Gaza back to the Middle Ages destroying all the infrastructure including roads and water" (*Human Rights Investigations.org, November 18, 2012*). And, the Netanyahu government might have been tempted to do just that if the UN, the Egyptians, and Hillary Clinton had not gotten in the way. Like the hare in a race with the turtle, the power differential is so great that, with the exception of those pesky rockets (the only Palestine related issue to impact the election), the majority of voters have grown quite complacent on the subject of occupation.

This is fine with the rightist parties who find that this complacency opens the door for their neo-fascist activities and ambitions in the Occupied Territories. This includes Likud–Beitenu which has orchestrated the present purposely stalemated status of "peace" negotiations. It also suits Naftali Bennett's Bayit Yehudit which actively supports the settlers. As for the religious parties, for them the entire issue had been settled at the time of the biblical Abraham.

Israel's political center also has marginalized the Palestinian issue. To demonstrate this we need only go to what Yair Lapid says about a subject. Keep in mind that Lapid is, at the moment, the politician most representative of the Israeli Jewish middle class. And, we can assume, that his position on the fate of the Palestinians is also representative of that constituency. Here are some of Lapid's views taken both from recent post-election pronouncements and also his party platform:

On the issue of governing in coalition with Arab-Israeli Parties, which now hold 11 seats in the Knesset: Lapid has said that he would never form such a government, (*Haaretz February 11, 2013*). This attitude puts him right in the Israeli Jewish mainstream. An October 2012 poll by the *Israeli Democracy Institute* found that 64% of the Jewish public favored such an exclusion.

On the possibility of conducting negotiations with the Palestinians: Lapid is willing to talk to the West Bank Palestinians but it should be understood up front that "I don't believe a word they [the Palestinians] say….I think that Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] is a fraud, and I think this is the way we should negotiate with him…out of total mistrust" (*+972 blog, Lapid's Platform, January 26, 2013*).

On an equitable solution that brings an end to the occupation: To quote Lapid, "While it might be the humane thing to do…to stop the occupation immediately, to enable the Palestinians freedom of movement in the territories, to tear down the bloody inhumane wall, to promise them the basic rights ensured to every individual. It is just that I will end up paying for this with my life. Petty of me perhaps to dwell on this point….But still…call me thickheaded – I don't want to die." (*Permission to Narrate, January 24, 2013*). Lapid's inordinate fear may well be shared by most Israeli Jews. They have been indoctrinated to believe that the Palestinians want to "kick them into the sea" and now they are afraid to make peace with them lest they try to act out this Israeli fantasy. This is a totally unreal scenario and, in fact, is a projection onto the Palestinians of the desires and actions of the Israelis themselves.

The following points are from Lapid's party platform:

If there are any peace talks, “settlement blocs are to remain in Israel’s hands. *“If necessary*, there will be negotiations over land swaps.”

“Jerusalem will remain united under Israeli sovereignty.”

No negotiations with Hamas until it recognizes the Israel state.

“The war on terror will continue at all time, without any regards to the negotiations.”

None of Lapid’s positions are substantially different than those taken by Netanyahu.

It is against this background that we can judge the news of the February 19, that Tzipi Livni’s HaTnuah Party (6 seats) will be joining any future coalition government cobbled together by Netanyahu. Livni has been promised the Justice Ministry portfolio and also will lead any new negotiations with the Palestinians. Though an advocate of talks with Mahmud Abbas, she too is not willing to give him anything substantive. Actually, her position falls into line with that of Lapid.

Part IV: Conclusion

The parameters of thought of most Israeli Jews literally proscribes a just peace with the Palestinians. This is because Zionist Jews have brought up their children to view the Palestinians (and more generally the Arabs) as mortal enemies. They have done this never admitting that it is they, the Zionists, who have created the historical conditions for Palestinian animosity. For generation after generation, the Zionists have armed themselves to attack this enemy and have done so repeatedly with genocidal intensity even after they, the Palestinians, have ceased to be any mortal threat. As part of this process, the Zionists have trained themselves to confuse their own acts of terror with self-defense and Palestinian efforts at resistance with terrorism. This prolonged practice has locked the Zionists into a “thought collective” from which escape is extremely difficult. So it should come as no surprise that, with but few exceptions, those Israeli Jews who are most concerned with the Palestinian issue are those who want, one way or another, to destroy them as a people.

Interestingly, one of the ways to abet this destruction is to marginalize the Palestinians as a serious political subject even as you maintain them as an unrelenting enemy. Thus, while the rest of the world might take notice of settler pogroms on the West Bank and military action against Gaza warranting war crimes prosecution, most Israeli Jews see such behavior as acts of self-defense and, therefore, do not consider them as subjects for political debate. And, no one but a minuscule number of Israeli humanitarians, notice how deplorable this is.

In the end, the elections of 2013 will change nothing in the one area of Israeli political life where change is most needed. Whatever new coalition government is put together will busy itself with debates over economic and social reforms; it will spend a lot of time agonizing over equity when it comes to the military draft; but it will remain on a straight path toward the destruction of the Palestinian people.

The simple truth is that, as Israeli politics now stand, *there is no coalition that any Israeli politician can put together* that would survive the negotiated formation of a viable Palestinian state. President Obama, who has scheduled a visit to Israel in the Spring of 2013, cannot magically change this situation. He hasn't the leverage with either Israeli politicians or his own Congress.

This scenario, staying on a straight path to the destruction of the Palestinian people, will continue until outside circumstances grow powerful enough to shake the Israeli Jews out of their thought collective. These circumstances will not come from the Arab or Muslim world. The "Arab Spring" has done nothing but fortify Israel's military mentality. If such powerful circumstances evolve, they will have to come from the Western world of which Israelis see themselves a part. When, some day sooner rather than later, Israelis wake up and find that their behavior toward the Palestinians has made them and their economic, intellectual, artistic, and other activities unwelcome in the West; when they wake up one day and find the corruptive machinations of their supportive Zionist lobbies no longer protect them from the consequences of their criminal behavior; then, and probably only then, will the Zionist system crack and an Israeli election of import take place.

Resistance versus Emancipation: Foucault, Marcuse, Marx, and the Present Moment

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

I. The Changed World of 2011-12

We live in a far different world than just a few short years ago. Not only have we suffered the greatest economic downturn since the 1930s, but we have also witnessed the emergence of new forms of mass struggle. Foremost among these have been the 2011-12 Arab revolutions, still ongoing. Not since 1848 has the world experienced such a wave of revolutions crossing borders in such a short period. Moreover, unlike some of the other democratic upheavals of this century (Iran 2009, Ukraine 2004, Serbia 2000, etc.), the Arab revolutions have articulated not only political but also economic demands. The spread of these revolutions to countries whose governments boasted of their anti-imperialist credentials like Libya and Syria has also tested those on the Left who place opposition to U.S. imperialism ahead of everything else. (For more elaboration of this point see my "Year Two of the Arab Revolutions, *Logos* 11:4, Spring-Summer 2012: https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2012/spring-summer_anderson/.)

Several other key struggles have emerged in the wake of the Arab revolutions, among them the summer 2011 British youth riots triggered by minority youth, a serious challenge to racially based state/police oppression and austerity economics. We have also seen serious movements against austerity and economic oppression, above all in Greece (begun before 2011), but also in Spain and Israel, as well as the labor upheaval in Wisconsin. In the U.S. and the UK, the 2011-12 Occupy movement has galvanized a new generation of young radicals, most notably in Oakland, California where they were able to shut down of one of the world's largest ports, while also linking their movement to earlier protests against the murder of an African-American youth, Oscar Grant, by local transit police.

One could make a number of critiques of these new movements concerning their organizational practices or their political stances. In the discussion that follows, however, I would like to concentrate on a philosophical orientation that influences contemporary radical movements, centered on the all-too-common preoccupation with notions of "resistance."

II. Foucault and Resistance

Over the past decade or so, post-structuralist currents of thought have often merged with anarchism and some elements of Marxism to produce new notions of resistance. These notions include, among others, resistance to power, resistance to the state, resistance to surveillance, resistance to cultural hegemony, and resistance to capital.

To be sure, this constitutes an advance over forms of intellectual radicalism – from Althusser to Adorno – that stressed hegemony almost to the exclusion of resistance. But this advance has come at a price, as will be discussed below.

Before going there, however, it must be asked, where does this 21st century usage of the term "resistance" originate? Not, seemingly, in the broad-based national resistance movements against fascism during World War II. One can instead trace the current usage of the term resistance to a more recent source, the writings of Michel Foucault on power and resistance. Although resistance is not emphasized in his earlier writings, by 1976 Foucault famously takes up resistance as well as power. By now, he sketches power as a "relation," "not something that is acquired, seized, or shared" (*History of Sexuality*, Vol. I, trans. Robert Hurley, NY: Vintage, 1978, orig. 1976, p. 94). This notion of power as relational was surely meant as an allusion to – and perhaps as a sublation or supersession of — Marx's notion of capital as a social relation, not a thing.

Foucault writes further: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power…. Their [power relationships'] very existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance…. Hence there is no single locus of Great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there are specific cases of resistance… They are the other in the relations of power; they inscribe themselves as irreducible in relation to it" (pp. 95-96, trans. slightly altered based on the French original).
Note – and I will touch on this below – Foucault's explicit attack on Herbert Marcuse's notion of a Great Refusal, one of the French philosopher's rare direct engagements with the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School.

III. Critique of Foucault's Concept of Resistance

Why has this term, "resistance," largely replaced earlier ones like "emancipation," "liberation," "a society free of exploitation," "a society free of alienation," and the like, and at what cost? At the level of political activism, one obvious cost of adopting or even adapting Foucault's notion of resistance is linked to the fact that not all forms of resistance are equivalent.

Is resistance to state power by the Right the same as that by Marxists or anarchists?

Is resistance to Western imperialism by religious fundamentalists the same as that by national liberation movements?

Is the Catholic Church's resistance to state-sponsored contraception in the USA equivalent to the labor movement?

Are women religious fundamentalists who seized the Red Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2007 in order to crack down on free expression similar to socialist feminists in the same society like Malala Yousafzai, whom those with politics similar to the former tried to assassinate this year? (For an interesting discussion of Yousafzai's politics, see Bill Weinberg, "Will American

Left Betray Heroine Malala Yousafzai?" *World War 4 Report*, October 12, 2012 https://www.ww4report.com/node/11487.)

This kind of problem lay at the root of Foucault's embarrassing support for Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership over the Iranian revolution in 1978-79, during which he dismissed worries expressed by an Iranian feminist. As Khomeini assumed power in 1979, Foucault wrote about Islamic resistance to imperialism, this after mockingly referring to Marxist-Leninist notions like "the struggle of classes, of the armed vanguards" as outdated and misplaced (Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 239): "Thus, it is true that as an 'Islamic' movement, it can set the entire region afire, overturn the most unstable regimes, and disturb the most solid ones. Islam — which is not simply a religion, but an entire way of life, an adherence to a history and a civilization — has a good chance to become a gigantic powder keg, at the level of hundreds of millions of men. Since yesterday, any Muslim state can be revolutionized from the inside, based on its time-honored traditions." (p. 241).

A second problem is that Foucault's concept of resistance lacks a notion of emancipation. As the autonomist Marxist John Holloway argues, "in Foucault's analysis, there are a whole host of resistances which are integral to power, but there is no possibility of emancipation. The only possibility is an endlessly shifting constellation of power and resistance" (Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, London: Pluto, 2002, p. 40).

In their 2011 introduction to a volume of Herbert Marcuse's writings, Douglas Kellner, Clayton Pierce and Tyson Lewis raise a similar point, albeit in a more philosophical vein: "With the rise of postmodernism and the discourse of power – in particular Foucault's critique of the Great Refusal – it has become fashionable to replace revolution with the terms resistance – or even with micro-resistance. Resistance is here internal to power, and ultimately produced by power, thus challenging power from the inside." Kellner et al. go on to quote Slavoj Zizek's criticism that such a concept of resistance "does not allow for the radical gesture of the thorough restructuring of the hegemonic symbolic order in its totality" (Introduction to Marcuse, *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation*, NY: Routledge, 2011, p. 63).

IV. Marcuse's Great Refusal

What did Marcuse actually mean by the "Great Refusal"? In his 1964 book *One-Dimensional Man*, which sold very widely in France in the years before the publication of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* in 1976, Marcuse located revolutionary opposition to modern capitalist society not in the employed parts of working classes, but among bohemians, the unemployed, and racial minorities who refused "the rules of the game":

"Underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable…. Their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system…. The

critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal" (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, pp. 256-57).

However much it was expressed in a language of deep pessimism about the human prospect, it is clear that Marcuse's revolutionary vision encompassed the need to totally overturn the capital relation, the class society upon which it was based, and its noxious byproducts, from aggressive militarism to stultifying social conformity in the consumer society. In short, a total uprooting was needed, however unlikely that might seem as a concrete historical possibility. Marcuse's key difference with Foucault was as follows: Unless these forms of resistance became forms of emancipation, linked to a vision of new human relations, they would founder and achieve little or nothing except the gesture of a Great Refusal.

To a considerable extent, Marcuse's Great Refusal was rooted in the Hegelian notion of negativity, of absolute negativity, wherein a positive is constructed even as the old is being negated. This was of course what Marx had meant in the *1844 Manuscripts* when he termed negativity the "moving and creating principle" of Hegel's philosophy (Marx, "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic, in Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, NY: Ungar, 1961, p. 176).

But Marcuse's Great Refusal also carried overtones of the Kantian "ought," wherein the normative and the descriptive undergo a radical separation. This can be seen in Immanuel Kant's rather abstract critique of war. Where Hegel's universals were concrete, in the sense of being linked to real possibilities in the given world, Kant's were more abstract, sometimes just panaceas like "perpetual peace" that he advised warring nations to adopt from his perch as a philosopher, without mapping out any real social forces capable of making such a change.

The generalized "scream" against injustice and oppression with which Holloway begins *Change the World without Taking Power* may also suffer from some of these problems, as when he writes: "The loss of hope for a more human society is not the result of people being blind to the horrors of capitalism, it is just that there does not seem to be anywhere else to go, any otherness to turn to…. So perhaps we should not abandon our negativity but, on the contrary, try to theorize the world from the perspective of the scream" (p. 9).

V. Dunayevskaya, Marcuse, and Foucault

When viewed from the vantage point of Foucault's unending constellation of power-resistance-power, Marcuse's Great Refusal holds some similarities to the critique of twentieth century Marxism articulated by my mentor, the Marxist-Humanist philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya:

"Without such a vision of new revolutions, a new individual, a new universal, a new society, new human relations," and "without a philosophy of revolution, activism spends itself in mere anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, without ever revealing what it is for" (Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982, p. 194).

Dunayevskaya also conceptualized some very specific oppositional social forces and groups — rank and file labor, youth, women's liberation (as it was called then), Blacks and other racial minorities, and Third World national liberation movements — that would be, if self-mobilized and united, powerful enough to give life to the aspiration for a new society. In contrast, Marcuse's emancipatory politics in the form of the Great Refusal remained more of an existential attitude without much of a serious possibility of its realization, because its form of negation was indeterminate rather than determinate or specific. (On the lack of a concept of determinate negation in Marcuse's thought, see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.)

Moreover, by leaving his Great Refusal at such a high level of indeterminateness, Marcuse opened himself up to the very type of critique that those like Foucault would level at him and at the emancipatory Marxism of the 1960s more generally. According to Foucault, the Great Refusal was a lot of hot air mixed with noble sentiments, as seen in many of the political pronouncements of radical philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre. To Foucault, such philosophers were always ready to take a stand but not to do the intellectual labor necessary to really develop expertise. Recall Foucault's evocation of the specific intellectual rather than the generalist one like Sartre, something he himself practiced in his prisoner support work of the 1970s, during which he researched and wrote an important book on the prison, *Discipline and Punish*. Of course, that book also came with a lot of limitations as well, especially in how it minimized the emancipatory currents that were running through the modern Western prison system in the 1970s, as seen most dramatically in the Attica prison uprising of 1971.

VI. Marx and Concrete Universals: The Dialectics of Ethnicity and Class

Does Marx's work – and that of his philosophical mentor Hegel – take us beyond the conundrum left to us by Foucault and even Marcuse and Holloway? Does he offer us emancipatory universals that are really concrete? Even if this is the case, do his universals still speak to us today and can they still guide our practice?

As I have argued in my recent book, *Marx at the Margins*, Marx's critique of capital was both global and local, both universalizing and particularizing. Over four decades, Marx examined the relationship of race, ethnicity, and nationalism to revolution, particularly in Poland, the US during the Civil War, and Ireland. These writings belie the notion that Marx's conceptualization of capitalist modernity constitutes a "totalizing" grand narrative under which the particulars of race, ethnicity, and nation are subsumed.

Take for example, his writings on Ireland of 1869-70, where he connected class with nationalism, race, and ethnicity – a discussion that began with his writings on Poland and on the American Civil War. Inside the First International, Ireland was a major reason behind his break with the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, who did not want the International to get involved in "non-class" issues like the defense of Irish political prisoners. For his part, Marx thought that this issue was intimately connected to the class struggle in Britain. All of this led him to some important theoretical reflections.

By 1870, Marx saw the Irish independence struggle as deeply linked to the struggles of British workers against capital. This is seen in the "Confidential Communication" of March 1870, a rejoinder to Bakunin that he drafted on behalf of the General Council of the International. English working-class consciousness, Marx wrote, was attenuated by anti-Irish prejudice, in a dynamic similar to that of white racism in the US:

"The common English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers wages and the *standard of life*.… He views him similarly to how the poor whites of the Southern states of North America viewed black slaves. This antagonism among the proletarians of England is artificially nourished and kept up by the bourgeoisie. It knows that this split is the true secret of the preservation of its power" (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* [hereafter MECW], Vol. 21, p. 120; emphasis in original).

Moreover, the Irish independence struggle could, he wrote in this argument with Bakunin, become the "lever" that could pry apart British and thus global capitalism as part of an international revolutionary struggle:

"Although revolutionary initiative will probably come from France, England alone can serve as the lever for a serious economic Revolution.… It is the only country where *the capitalist form*, that is to say, combined labor on a large scale under the authority of capitalists, has seized hold of almost the whole of production.… The English have all the *material* conditions for social revolution. What they lack is *a sense of generalization and revolutionary passion*. It is only the General Council [of the International] that can provide them with this, that can thus accelerate the truly revolutionary movement in this country, and consequently *everywhere*.… If England is the bulwark of landlordism and European capitalism, the only point where official England can be struck a great blow *is Ireland*" (MECW 21: 118-19; emphasis in original, trans. slightly altered).

The last sentence about landlordism referred to Ireland's revolutionary peasantry, whose opposition to the system was enhanced by a national factor, that the landlord class in Ireland was to a great extent British, not Irish. Ireland was also where the landed aristocracy, part of the British ruling class alongside the industrial capitalists, had important holdings. It is notable that this period was also marked by the emergence of the Fenian Movement, a revolutionary nationalist movement with a strong class dimension directed against Irish as well as British landlords.

VII. Marx: Productive Forces and Leisure Time

Of course, Marx's core writings examined the capital relation and its overcoming, not national emancipation. After all, that was the point of his discussion of Irish and British labor, of Ireland's national emancipation and Britain's working class revolution, both of them of course only potentials. All of this also rested upon the conquests of the capitalist era, especially the building up of the productive forces. As he wrote at length in the *Grundrisse*, these new productive forces created the possibility of creative leisure time for all in place of stultifying

toil, if and when capitalism could be overcome:

"*The creation of a large quantity of disposable time* apart from necessary labor time for society generally and each of its members (i.e. room for the development of the individuals' full productive forces, hence those of society also), this creation of not-labor time appears in the stage of capital, as of all earlier ones, as not-labor time, free time, for a few. What capital adds is that it increases the surplus labor time of the mass by all the means of art and science… It is thus, despite itself, instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce labor time for the whole society to a diminishing minimum, and thus to free everyone's time for their own development" (Marx, *Grundrisse,* trans. Martin Nicolaus, NY: Penguin, 1973, p. 708).

Eventually, Marx maintained, this unrealized potential challenges capitalism itself, and the workers move to overthrow it: "Once they have done so… the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that… disposable time will grow for all. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor time, but rather disposable time" (p. 708).

For Marx, however, this painful pathway through the capitalist mode of production was not one that all societies had to follow, now that a few key ones had developed those productive forces, albeit amid all the exploitation and alienation of capitalism.

VIII. Marx: Multilinear Pathways of Development and Revolution

At the end of his life, Marx examined the issue of whether Russia and the large agrarian societies of Asia were inevitably destined to modernize in the Western capitalist manner. In his well-known 1881 letter to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich, he concluded that alternate pathways of development were possible. He based his judgment in large part upon the marked differences between the social structure of the Russian village (and often its Asian counterparts), with its communal property and production relations, and the village under Western European feudalism's somewhat more individualized social relations. He added that his recent studies of Russian society "convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for a social regeneration in Russia" (Teodor Shanin, *Marx and the Russian Road*, NY: Monthly Review, 1983, p. 124). In the 1882 preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels suggested that a local uprising sparked by these communal social formations in Russia could form the starting point for a global communist revolution, if such an uprising could link up with the revolutionary labor movement in the Western capitalist lands.

Moreover, Marx made a key philosophical point during one of these discussions, one that challenges the postmodernist accusation (by Jean-François Lyotard and others) that Marx's work constitutes yet another universalizing "grand narrative" or totality in which all particulars are swallowed up. This is also relevant to Foucault's point about "specific cases of resistance" vs. an overarching Great Refusal. It is a point that takes us back as well to the difference between an abstract universal in the Kantian manner and the Hegelian type of concrete

universal.

In an 1877 letter responding to a discussion of *Capital* by the Russian writer N. K. Mikhailovsky, Marx defended himself from the charge of unilinearism, of the notion that Russia had to follow the pathway of Britain, first building up its productive forces and only then being able contemplate concretely the possibility of a truly emancipated, socialist society. In response to his critics, and to his supporter Mikhailovsky's ham-handed attempt to defend him by ascribing to him just such a formalistic theory, Marx denied explicitly that he had developed "a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples" (*Marx and the Russian Road*, p. 136). This also reversed Marx's position in his 1853 *New York Tribune* writings on India, where he implicitly supported British colonialism as a necessary stage in the modernization of Asia, a position he and Engels also took with regard to China in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848.

Thus, by the 1880s, Marx was not only theorizing very concretely about Russia's revolutionary possibilities in all their specificity, while at the same time linking the Russian peasant-based revolutionary movement to that of the radical labor movement in the West. He was also sketching this philosophically by explicitly denying the need for "a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples" (*Marx and the Russian Road*, p. 136).

IX. Hegel's Concrete Universals

All of this was rooted in the most critical and revolutionary side of Hegel's legacy, that found not in his more conservative texts like *Philosophy of Right* or *Philosophy of History*, but in his most abstract works like *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, and *Philosophy of Mind*. As Dunayevskaya has noted: "Precisely where Hegel sounds most abstract, seems to close the shutters tight against the whole movement of history, there he lets the lifeblood of the dialectic – absolute negativity – pour in" (*Philosophy and Revolution*, NY: Delacorte, 1973, pp. 31-32).

But like Marx, Hegel also avoids abstract universals of the Kantian sort; in fact, he harshly critiques them. Hegel famously attacked "abstract universality," as exemplified by those who presented things as a "night, in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black" (*Phenomenology of Spirit,* NY: Oxford, 1977, p. 9 [¶16]). Hegel's barb was directed against those kinds of Enlightenment reason that he regarded as overly formalistic, which conceptualized human experience via categories that neglected historical or cultural variety and particularity. In short, the universal had swallowed up the particular.

At the same time, Hegel's particulars often point in the direction of the universal. Thus, the slave develops a "mind of his own" in the famous discussion of Lordship and Bondage in the *Phenomenology*, and this is an important step on the development of human consciousness, part of the road of absolute negativity. At the same time, the master's self-satisfied willfulness and exaggerated sense of his self-importance constituted a cul-de-sac on that same road to the emancipation of human consciousness.

Moreover, with Hegel, the universal can sometimes exert a pull on the particular, steering it toward universal human emancipation. This is not an easy process, and there are many stops and starts. Some of them are gigantic failures, like the Great Terror, which, as Hegel saw it, devoured the French Revolution because it tried to leap too quickly toward absolute freedom. Here, Hegel offers a critique *avant la lettre* of modern totalitarianism and its show trials and purges, from Stalin's Russia to Nazi Germany to Mao's China.

The pull of the universal, of the emancipatory future, is always there, even if for the moment driven deep down, beneath the surface of society. For example, at one point – in a statement that infuriates empiricists and realists – Hegel writes that "the fact is, before it exists" (Hegel, *Science of Logic,* trans. A. V. Miller, NY: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 477). C.L.R. James later articulated this in Marxist terms in his famous expression, "the future that is in the present" ("Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity" [1947], *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*, London: Alison & Busby, 1980, p. 79).

X. Marx and Human Emancipation

Hegel's concrete universal is undoubtedly related to Marx's own concept of human emancipation. In 1859, Marx famously described capitalism as merely a part of the "prehistory of human society" (Introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW, p. 264). This of course rested upon a concept of socialism, and of the emancipation of labor. This theme can be found throughout his work, as in his youthful *German Ideology* (co-authored by Engels) with its vision of communist existence as one where the individual would perform both mental and manual labor, gathering food and also philosophizing. It marks as well his mature theorizing in *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) about overcoming "the antithesis between mental and physical labor" (MECW 24, p. 87).

Marx alludes to this notion of a fully emancipated human existence not only in various shorter texts, but also throughout the central works of his critique of political economy, from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*, as Peter Hudis has shown in his *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes:

"When the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a *predetermined yardstick?* Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?" (*Grundrisse*, p. 488).

A decade later, in *Capital*, Marx elaborated his concept of commodity fetishism, wherein human relations are like those between things, totally objectified and instrumentalized. To be sure,

this is a distorting lens, but it is also a form of reality, for under capitalism, that is what human relations "really are." A most chilling passage. And while Marx contrasts the subtle and hidden commodity fetish to the open brutality of feudal domination over the peasantry, his most important contrast is to the not-yet-society that is nonetheless pregnant within capitalism itself. This is where the veil of the fetish that hides the reality of social relations is to be swept away by the self-activity of the working class: "The veil is not removed," he writes, until the production process changes, "until it becomes production by freely associated human beings and stands under their conscious and planned control" (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes, NY: Penguin, 1977, p. 173, trans. altered). This requires a "material foundation" that has been developed through a long and painful process, over many centuries (p. 173).

Free and associated labor is also the term Marx used to describe the Paris Commune of 1871 in the *Civil War in France*. There, he wrote that the Commune constituted "the political form as last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour" (MECW 22, p. 334). Similarly, as early as 1843, he had written of the difference between merely political and fully human emancipation: "Political emancipation is not the completed contradiction-free form of human emancipation" ("On the Jewish Question," in Marx, *Early Political Writings*, edited by Joseph O'Malley, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 34; for a recent discussion of the early Marx's concept of emancipation, see George Comninel, "Emancipation in Marx's Early Work," in *Marx for Today*, edited by Marcello Musto, NY: Routledge, 2012, pp. 73-91; see also my *Marx at the Margins* for a discussion of the limitations of this essay's characterizations of Jews and Judaism.)

Such a dialectical, prefigurative standpoint is a far cry from Foucault's concept of a plurality of "resistances," a concept that fails to present a vision of a future in which such resistances might no longer be necessary.

To be sure, Marx also mentioned "resistance" from time to time, for example, in his discussion of labor's struggle, against the voracious demands of capital, for a shorter working day: "As soon as the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent, it began to offer resistance, first of all in England, the native land of large-scale industry" (*Capital*, Vol. I, p. 390). But he tied it to a broader concept of human emancipation.

Even Holloway, one of Foucault's most incisive critics from the Left, does not fully elaborate such an emancipatory future at a philosophical level, grounded as he is in a form of dialectical negativity, that of Theodor Adorno, in which the positive in the negative is sidelined if not rejected outright. As Arvind Ghosh and Peter Hudis write:

"What Holloway fails to single out, however, is that for Marx mere negativity by itself does not surmount the fetishism of commodities. In chapter 1 of *Capital*, Marx does not say that that the spell of commodity fetishism can be broken simply through 'everyday resistance' or pure negativity. He instead says that the spell of fetishism is broken when we have 'for a change, association of freely associated men'" ("Can We Change the World without Taking Power?"

Open Space Forum [India], October 19, 2005 https://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=49). This points to a limitation in Holloway's notion of the "scream," as mentioned above.

XI. Concluding Points

(1) The theories of resistance found in Foucault, and also in many contemporary debates, exhibit several problems, among them notions of resistance that fail to distinguish among different types of resistance to power, whether reactionary or emancipatory.

(2) Another problem is that the notion of resistance often implies a sort of circularity or permanence of resistance – and of power – which occludes the possibility of an actual overcoming of capital and the state in a positive, emancipatory manner.

(3) The Great Refusal of Marcuse, which Foucault unjustly attacks, is a key example of a truly emancipatory politics. At the same time, however, Marcuse's Great Refusal is too abstract, with vestiges of Kantian formalism, thus providing an opening to the kind of critique Foucault makes.

(4) A return to Marx after these debates over resistance and emancipation shows that his general dialectic – rooted in Hegel — is not one of abstract universalism but has plenty of room for the specificities of nation, ethnicity, and race, issues on which he makes important and original contributions. Marx's theorization of race, ethnicity and nationalism in relation to class and to revolution remains very relevant today, as seen for example in the British youth riots of 2011.

(5) Especially in his later writings, Marx theorizes indigenous forms of opposition to capital and their need to connect to the working classes of more technologically developed sectors (and vice versa). The persistence of these issues can be seen most prominently today in parts of Latin America like Bolivia.

(6) Finally, Marx's entire intellectual project is guided by a vision of an emancipated human future. This is the vantage point from which he measures, critiques, and attempts to sublate or transcend capitalist society.

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How the Right Got Adam Smith Wrong on the Eve of Environmental (and hence Economic) Catastrophe

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

I. The Libertarian/Right Wing Attempted Appropriation of Smith

Down in South Carolina, at the College of Charleston, Adam Smith Week is held every spring. We read on their website that it is "sponsored by the Initiative for Public Choice and Market Process (IPCMP) that was founded in 2008 with a generous gift from the BB&T Charitable Foundation and the Charles G. Koch Foundation."

"Adam Smith is one of the most recognizable figures in economics, and his contributions to the fields of philosophy and economics are still relevant today," says Pete Calcagno, Ph.D., associate professor of economics and Director of the IPCMP. "His concept of the invisible hand is considered the classic statement on *laissez faire* capitalism" (emphasis in original).

Meanwhile, over in the United Kingdom, there is a self-described "independent libertarian, free market think tank that engineers policies to create a freer, more prosperous world" which calls itself the Adam Smith Institute. Up in Michigan, Mark Skousen, organizer of the popular libertarian "FreedomFest: Keep the Revolution Alive" conferences held yearly in Las Vegas, lectures to the students at the "Center for Constructive Alternatives" at Hillsdale College, that Adam Smith was basically a libertarian. Skousen explains that his history of economic thought book, *The Making of Modern Economics,* is organized around judging how much all other economists either add to or subtract from this libertarian reading of Adam Smith's position.[1]

Libertarian and far right-wing readings and attempted appropriations of Adam Smith are not new. For example, a generation ago, the highly esteemed University of Chicago economist George Stigler, in "The Adam Smith Lecture", told the gullible National Association of Business Economists that,

"It is hard to believe that *any* task, no matter how great its magnitude, is so large that the market cannot deal with it, if it is capable of being dealt with by man. Did not Great Britain in Smith's time leave the governance of India, already a nation of several hundred million beings, to a corporation called the East India Company? Was not the early economic development of Canada entrusted primarily to the Hudson's Bay Company?" (1988: 7-8, emphasis in original)

What a bad Smithian joke. Certainly, according to Smith, you can let the governance of a great

nation such as India be in the hands of a corporation: if you want mass starvation, a shrinking economy, and looting on a gross scale by management!

What is behind these narrow one-sided right-wing readings of Smith (or, in the case of Stigler, a certified economic Nobel Laureate, a crass misrepresentation of Smith's views)? There are various causes which I have discussed in other publications (Pack, 1991; 2010). Yet, I think the most important cause or reason, is what Aristotle called the final cause or goal. I believe this essential goal is to use the luminous legacy of Adam Smith to aid in the smashing of the liberal welfare state; the elimination of state rules and regulations which impinge upon the freedom of big business (or, as Marx would say, capital) to use its power and property completely uninhibited; and the brutal destruction of all labor unions. As John Kenneth Galbraith explained a generation ago, big government and big strong labor unions acted as countervailing powers to the power of big business. What I believe is happening is big business and its representatives are currently using Smith's legacy as an ideological, persuasive tool in their well endowed fight to eliminate these potential countervailing powers. By the way: note that some of capital's hired heads are no doubt simply cynical intellectual mercenaries striving to maximize their pecuniary income; but many others are indeed "true believers". Be that as it may, to the extent big business, capital, is successful in pursuing it goals of eliminating all countervailing powers, there will be continued stagnating and indeed lower wages for most U.S. workers (Pack 2009). There will also be ecological and hence economic chaos in the unfortunately all too seeable future as the manmade causes of destructive global climate change and global warming continue unabated.

The narrow one-sided libertarian and general right wing readings of Smith's work also serve to cover up and obscure a more critical, radical side of Smith. This important aspect of Smith's work encouraged Karl Marx in his critique of political economy (Pack 2013). It was also quite critical of what Smith called commercial society (or, what we may call capitalist society); it is this critical side of Smith that I will now discuss.

II. Smith on Taxation

Taxation in modern societies for Smith is necessary and a sign of freedom. For Smith, "Every tax, however, is to the person who pays it a badge, not of slavery, but of liberty. It denotes that he is subject to government, indeed, but that, as he has some property, he cannot himself be the property of a master" (*Wealth of Nations* [*WN*], 808). Smith was the son of a tax collector, and Smith himself became a tax collector after he wrote the *Wealth of Nations*: that would be quite an odd position for Smith to acquire if he really was a libertarian!

As opposed to most libertarians and right wing economists, Smith was not in favor of regressive taxation or any attempts to redistribute income from the poorer to the economically more advantaged members of society. Taxes are needed to support the state, and they should be proportional, or actually slightly progressive. Therefore, Smith calls a tax upon silver one of the most proper of taxes, since silver is a "mere luxury and superfluity" (683). Similarly, in discussing toll roads, he recommends that when tolls upon luxury carriages be "made

somewhat higher in proportion to their weight, than upon carriages of necessary use, such as carts, wagons, and etc. the indolence and vanity of the rich is made to contribute in a very easy manner to the relief of the poor …"(683). So, go ahead and tax the indolence and vanity of the rich. Similarly, the government or its agents should estimate the imputed rent of a house and tax that, since "A tax upon house-rents, therefore, would in general fall heaviest upon the rich; and in this sort of inequality there would not, perhaps, be anything very unreasonable. It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expence not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion" (793-794). Or simply tax ground rents in general. Frequently, rents are a form of income derived from the mere ownership of property, not from hard work. Hence, they are a worthy object of taxation: "A tax upon ground-rents … would fall altogether upon the owner of the ground-rent, who acts always as a monopolist …Both ground rents and the ordinary rent of land are a species of revenue which the owner, in many cases, enjoys without any care or attention of his own… Ground-rents, and the ordinary rent of land, are, therefore, perhaps the species of revenue which can best bear to have a peculiar tax imposed upon them" (795-796). So, unlike the contemporary right-wingers, Smith did not advocate taxing property income at a lower rate than non-property income. Indeed, other things being equal, property income should probably be taxed at a higher rate!

III. Smith was not a Dogmatic Proponent of Laissez Faire Capitalism

According to Smith, most of the government rules and regulations in his day were made by and for the benefit of the rich and powerful; it was these rules which Smith vehemently argued against. Yet, Smith was not necessarily against all government rules and regulations, particularly those designed to help the workers and the poor. Hence, "whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counselors are always the masters. When the regulation, therefore, is in favour of the workmen it is always just and equitable; but it is sometimes otherwise when in favour of the masters" (142). Regulations favoring the workmen are always just and equitable – you will not find this thought in most libertarian and right wing writings. Moreover, again contrary to most of these interpretations, Smith was also not some kind of Burkean conservative. This is because the second key reason Smith argued against the government rules and regulations in his day is they were archaic and outdated. Due to historical change, "Laws frequently continue in force long after the circumstances, which first gave occasion to them, and which could alone render them reasonable, are no more" (362). In his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* Smith told his students "it is absurd to preserve in people a regard for their old customs when the causes of them are removed" (529).

III.i Special Rules for the Financial Services Sector

As most of us also realize today, special rules are needed to control the financial services sector. Indeed, this is the one area where Smith explicitly argued for price controls. He wanted limits on the maximum rate of interest; that is, Smith was in favor of usury laws and against usurers. Hence, "The legal rate, it is to be observed, though it ought to be somewhat above, ought not to be much above the lowest market rate. If the legal rate of interest in Great Britain,

for example, was fixed so high as 8 or 10%, the greater part of the money which was to be lent would be lent to prodigals and projectors" (339). According to Smith, in the absence of price controls on the maximum rate of interest, or even if that rate is set too high, too much money would be lent out to people with poor credit risks or on risky projects. Note that if the U.S. had followed Smith on this issue, the current global great recession could not have occurred in its present form. Our current world economic crisis developed directly out of fraud and abuses in the subprime mortgage market: a market that in Smith's view should not even have been allowed to legally exist!

Smith also gave detailed recommendations on the types of reserves banks must keep on hand to pay their creditors. The result of his recommendations would be that banks would be required to keep more cash on hand, thus cutting into their profit margins. Too bad for the banks! Smith explains that "though this might no doubt be a considerable inconveniency to them, it would at the same time be a considerable security to their creditors" (44), i.e. their depositors who could more easily and securely withdraw their deposits during bank runs. Smith explains his general position on liberty with particular reference to the bankers:

"To restrain private people, it may be said, from receiving in payment the promissory notes of a banker, for any sum whether great or small, when they themselves are willing to receive them; or, to restrain a banker from issuing such notes, when all his neighbours are willing to accept of them, is a manifest violation of that natural liberty which it is the proper business of law, not to infringe, but to support. Such regulations may, no doubt, be considered as in some respect a violation of natural liberty. But those exertions of the natural liberty of a few individuals, which might endanger the security of the whole society, are, and ought to be, restrained by the laws of all government; of the most free, as well as of the most despotical" (308).

So the financial services industry has the ability to endanger the security of the whole society and therefore should be subject to special regulations – in some ways things have not changed that much in the last 250 years! Smith then immediately proceeds to explain that "the obligation of building party walls, in order to prevent the communication of a fire, is a violation of natural liberty, exactly of the same kind with the regulations of the banking trade which are here proposed" (*ibid*). So here Smith also matter-of-factly states that there must be building and zoning regulations; again, not a libertarian position.

III.ii. Other Rules and Regulations

Smith was in favor of the government providing "public works which facilitate the commerce of any country, such as good roads, bridges, navigable canals, harbours and etc." as well as the post office (682). Smith approved of the government regulating the quality of money, as well as other important commodities such as woolen and linen cloth: "Hence, the origin of coined money, and of those public offices called mints; institutions exactly of the same nature with those of the aulnagers and stamp-masters of woolen and linen cloth. All of them are equally meant to ascertain, by means of a public stamp, the quantity and uniform goodness of those different commodities when brought to market"(25).

Smith advocated that the government set up tests of varying difficulty that people must pass to set up a trade, or become a lawyer, or a public official. In Smith's view the result would be "… the study of science and philosophy, which the state might render almost universal among all people of middling or more than middling rank and fortune" (748). Given the apparent difficulties so many candidates for office in the U.S. (especially those of the Republican Party) have in mastering even the barest rudiments of the theory of evolution, this could conceivably disqualify quite a huge pool of potential candidates. For Smith, "science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition; and where all the superior ranks of people were secured from it, the inferior ranks could not be much exposed to it" (ibid.). By enthusiasm, Smith referred to the followers of austere religious sects. Enthusiasm was a rather common derogatory term in the 18th century for the perceived excessive religious zeal and fanaticism of the early Methodists and other religious groups. It denoted ill-regulated or misdirected religious emotion by what we would now call puritanical or fundamentalist religious movements. Smith feared the religion of the poor, who were attracted to these fundamentalist Christian beliefs and values. For Smith these austere sects tend to be dangerous, and one needs to beware of "popular and bold though perhaps stupid and ignorant enthusiasts" (741). Here is another surprising example of how relevant Smith's views may be to 21st century America!

Smith encouraged the production of scholars, since then teachers would be plentiful and cheap, and this again would encourage the teaching of philosophy and science. Smith also advocated using the tax system to discourage things that he disapproved of. For example,

"Some leases prescribe to the tenant a certain mode of cultivation, and a certain succession of crops during the whole continuance of the lease. This condition, which is generally the effect of the landlord's conceit of his own superior knowledge (a conceit in most cases very ill founded), ought always to be considered as an additional rent; as a rent in service instead of a rent in money. In order to discourage the practice, which is generally a foolish one, this species of rent might be valued rather high, and consequently taxed somewhat higher than common money rents" (783).

To be able to administer this tax, the government would need to have the power and ability to closely inspect the leases between landlords and their tenants; again, not something that libertarians and right wingers tend to advocate. Smith also advocated lower tax rates for things that he approved of, such as experiments (or what we might now call research and development) that might promote technological change (783-784).

IV Character Problems

Smith was not really a small "d" democrat. The common people, the poor, the working class, are too frequently misled by the wealthy, especially the business class. Hence, "in the public deliberations, therefore, his voice is little heard and less regarded, except upon some particular occasions, when his clamour is animated, set on, and supported by his employers, not for his, but for their own particular purposes" (249). So, the majority of people need to watch out that

they are not misled by their business leaders in general, and their employers in particular! One side of the problem is that workers tend to work too long and hard at boring, deadening jobs to have the time, ability, and practice in developing their critical faculties. Unfortunately, "The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur" (734). As far as intelligence is concerned, it is use it or lose it! "He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become" (735). The workers also tend not to be able to enjoy taking part of any rational conversation; of conceiving proper sentiments and hence forming just judgments; they tend to become cowards; and each particular job or occupation tends to corrupt "even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employment than that to which he has been bred" (735). Such are the dire problems caused by overworking the working class. Once again, we see here a side of Smith that is rarely stressed by our libertarian and right wing pundits!

The obverse to the workers are the landlords, what today we might call the idle rich. If the workers tend be become stupid and ignorant because of the difficulties of life, the landlords tend to become stupid and ignorant because their life is too easy. Hence, according to Smith's distinctive socio-economic analysis:

"When the public deliberates concerning any regulation of commerce or police, the proprietors of land never can mislead it, with a view to promote the interest of their own particular order; at least, if they have any tolerable knowledge of that interest. They are indeed, too often defective in this tolerable knowledge. They are the only one of the three orders whose revenue costs them neither labour nor care, but comes to them, as it were, of its own accord, and independent of any plan or project of their own. That indolence, which is the natural effect of the ease and security of their situation, renders them too often, not only ignorant, but incapable of that application of mind which is necessary in order to foresee and understand the consequences of any public regulation" (249).

Here is an excellent argument for high inheritance taxes, since inherited wealth tends to lead to a life of indolence, ignorance, and stupidity. Today's idle rich of course, tend to have their wealth invested in corporate stocks and bonds rather than in land. Today this could align their short run interests more closely with the third business, mercantile class than was the case with the landlords in Smith's society.

Yet, it is this third class or order that we really need to keep an eye on. On the one hand, the businessmen, the mercantile people, the capitalists, are merely tricky and clever. For example, "our merchants and master-manufacturers complain much of the bad effects of high wages in raising the price, and thereby lessening the sale of their goods both at home and abroad. They say nothing concerning the bad effects of high profits. They are silent with regard to the pernicious effects of their own gains. They complain only of those of other people" (98).

Hundreds of pages later Smith basically repeats himself that merchants "complain of the extravagant gain of other people; but they say nothing of their own" (565-566).

Yet, the problem is much bigger than mere trickery and cleverness. No; the essential problem is that in terms of government policy, the businesspeople are simply not to be trusted. To pursue their own selfish interests, they will lie and mislead the people.

"As during their whole lives they are engaged in plans and projects, they have frequently more acuteness of understanding than the greater part of country gentlemen. As their thoughts, however, are commonly exercised rather about the interest of their own particular branch of business, than about that of the society, *their judgment, even when given with the greatest candour (which it has not been upon every occasion*), is much more to be depended upon with regard to the former of those two objects, than with regard to the latter. … The interest of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufactures, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to that of the public … to narrow the competition … can serve only to enable the dealers, by raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens. *The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order, ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never to be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention. It come from an order of men … who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasion, both deceived and oppressed it* (250, emphasis added).

So there you have it: our businesspeople, our capitalists, are full of sophistry. They tend to lie to further their own narrow economic interests. Again, the insight of Smith, as applied to 21st century America is appallingly apt. Who is lying more to further their own narrow economic interest at the expense of the general public: our financial services industry? our pharmaceutical and health services/health insurance industry? our food processing industry? our fossil fuel industry? Hard to say.

V. Problems with Managerial Capitalism

Smith was actually quite disdainful of corporate managers. As the late John Kenneth Galbraith, one of the few people who has called attention to this side of Smith pointed out, Smith quite likely would have been appalled at our managerial capitalism (1987: 71). So, for example, in discussing the East India Company, Smith writes of "all the extraordinary waste which the fraud and abuse, inseparable from the management of the affairs of so great a company, must necessarily have occasioned" (596). Managers also have a tendency to rack up enormous expense accounts since "The directors of such companies, however, being the managers rather of other people's money than of their own, it cannot be expected, that they should watch over it with the same anxious vigilance with which the partners in a private copartnery frequently watch over their own. Like the stewards of a rich man, they are apt to consider attention to small matters as not for their master's honour, and very easily give themselves a dispensation

from it. Negligence and profusion, therefore, must always prevail more or less, in the management of the affairs of such a company" (699-700). In discussing the South Sea Company Smith wrote that "they had an immense capital divided among an immense number of proprietors. It was naturally to be expected, therefore, that folly, negligence, and profusion should prevail in the whole management of their affairs" (703). Later, in returning to the East India Company Smith comments that "the great increase in their fortune had, it seems only served to furnish their servants with a pretext for greater profusion and a cover of greater malversation" (709). By malversation, Smith means, of course, misconduct. Sometimes the professional managers will even be supported in their crookedness and plundering of the corporation by the owners themselves: "it might be more agreeable to the company that their servants and dependants should have either the pleasure of wasting, or the profit of embezzling whatever surplus might remain, after paying the proposed dividend of eight per cent … The interest of those servants and dependants might so far predominate in the court of proprietors, as sometimes to dispose it to support the authors of depredations which had been committed, in direct violation of this own authority" (711). That is to say, the managers may be supported in their wastefulness and their thefts by the board of directors, so long as the managers provided a minimum rate of return. Once again, we see the remarkable prescience of Smith to 21st century America. As Smith would have predicted, we do seem to have a severe problem with our overpaid managerial class, whose individual members have an unfortunate tendency to be deceitful, fraudulent, cheating liars!

VI. The Undue Influence of Businessmen on the Government

Yet, what really concerned Adam Smith was the undue influence of businessmen and hence their short run narrow interests, on government policies. In railing against the policies of his day, Smith wrote, "it cannot be very difficult to determine who have been the contrivers of this whole mercantile system; not the consumer, we may believe, whose interest has been entirely neglected; but the producers, whose interest has been so carefully attended to; and among this latter class our merchants and manufacturers have been by far the principal architects. In the mercantile regulations … the interest of our manufacturers has been most peculiarly attended to …" (626). Or again: "It is the industry which is carried on for the benefit of the rich and the powerful, that is principally encouraged by our mercantile system. That which is carried on for the benefit of the poor and indigent, is too often, either neglected, or oppressed" (609). As in Great Britain in the 18th century, we have a huge problem in the 21st century:

"The monopoly which our manufacturers have obtained against us. This monopoly has so much increased the number of some particular tribes of them, that, like an overgrown standing army, they have become formidable to the government, and upon many occasions intimidate the legislature. The member of parliament who supports every proposal for strengthening this monopoly, is sure to acquire not only the reputation of understanding trade, but great popularity and influence with an order of men whose numbers and wealth render them of great importance. If he opposes them, on the contrary, and still more if he has the authority enough to be able to thwart them, neither the most acknowledged probity, nor the highest rank, nor the greatest public services, can protect him from the most infamous abuse and detraction,

from personal insults, nor sometimes from real danger, arising from the insolent outrage of furious and disappointed monopolists" (438).

Such is the problem now. Our business interests are turning our government into the political services industry. Our politicians, our political managers are selling favors to the highest bidder. Those few who oppose them are indeed vilified by the business interests, either the businesses themselves, or their surrogates in the media, right wing foundations, think tanks, centers, "initiatives", etc. In Smith's views, we have a problem with "… the impertinent jealousy of merchants and manufacturers. The violence and injustice of the rulers of mankind is an ancient evil, for which, I am afraid, the nature of human affairs can scarce admit of a remedy. The mean *rapacity*, the monopolizing spirit of merchants and manufacturers, who neither are, nor ought to be, the rulers of mankind, though it cannot perhaps be corrected, may very easily be prevented from disturbing the tranquility of anybody but themselves" (460 emphasis added).

There you have it. Merchants, manufacturers, in a word capitalists should not be the rulers of mankind. Yet, to the extent they or their hired representatives are ruling us, one may expect major league problems. By rapacity Smith of course means the taking by force, plundering, greedy, ravenous. Others have noted the tendency for laissez faire capitalism to attack the social structures which support society, leading almost necessarily to either social welfare reforms, or else fascist or communist or socialist revolutions (e.g. Polanyi 1944; Schumpeter 1942; also Pack 1987). Today, the most shocking, destructive manifestation of this is that parts of our business leaders and their paid surrogates, particularly those in the fossil fuel industry, have been successfully attacking natural science itself, and the scientists themselves. For decades these scientists have had the effrontery to point out that the earth's climate is changing, and that change is caused by humans, especially by the burning of fossil fuels. So science and scientists themselves are vilified, and discredited by the fossil fuels industry and their paid surrogates. Phony debates are staged with pseudo scientists denying climate change. These pseudo scientists are funded by the business sources (see e.g. Oreskes and Conway 2010). Meanwhile, the earth continues to heat up, the ice caps melt, the ocean waters rise, the storms become more violent; our Gulf and Atlantic coasts are savaged. And our fossil fuels industry continues to rake in their destructive profits.

VII Conclusion

It is quite clear that Adam Smith was no libertarian. The right wing narrow interpretations of Smith do not do him justice. They miss the radical, critical side to Smith, the side of Smith that warns us to beware of our managers; beware of our mercantilists; beware of our capitalists. In this age of large complex corporations, how do we control our private and public managers and our large corporations? And how do we control the deleterious influence business has on government today? These are the salient Smithian questions for contemporary society. So here is the irony; or actually the developing, worsening tragedy. The very people that Smith warned us against: the merchants, the capitalists, their managers and representatives, are wrapping themselves up with a Smithian cloak. They are using a simplified caricature of Adam Smith

himself, to further their own narrow, greedy, rapacious, short run interests. They seek to destroy the liberal welfare state, destroy labor unions, destroy all countervailing powers to their own outsized abilities to do as they please, at the public, and indeed, the rest of the world's expense. I say their short run interests, because if they have their way, there will not be much of a long run future here on planet earth for human civilization. For Adam Smith's sake, but even more for our sake, and our children's sake, we should not let these people get away with this misguided misappropriation of Smith's legacy.

Notes

[1] Information on the above can be found at the Adam Smith Week, College of Charleston; Adam Smith Institute; FreedomFest; Hillsdale College; and Mark Skousen websites. A bit to my own surprise, I gave invited presentations at both Adam Smith Week and FreedomFest in the Spring and Summer of 2011.

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A “Wandering Jew:” Stefan Heym’s Humanist Socialism

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When I finally met Stefan Heym in person at the public reading of his last published novel, I encountered a man in his late eighties, at once frail and energetic. He introduced himself to his audience at the main theater in Potsdam, Germany, on that beautiful and sunny afternoon in May of 2000, by thanking the listeners for having come to see him, “on such a fair spring day, even though I am not a fair-weather author.” Those who have read anything by Heym would know that those comments were not mere banter; they illustrate his nature as a writer, intellectual, and, in the best sense of the word, moralist, who refused to fit into any straight-forward categories.

Heym remained a weathered optimist until the end of his life, committed to the hope that reason and justice could eventually triumph over tyranny, superstition, and self-destructive consumerism. When Heym appeared from behind the curtain in order to walk on stage, he seemed every bit like an 87 year old man. Everything changed, however, once he sat down and started to read from his last novel, *The Architects*. He read for about one and a half hours, with a lively voice that brought to bear his experience and wit as well as his cosmopolitan outlook, — as here was a man who had literally survived the 20th century. Uprooted many times by politics, he had become a citizen of the world. This endowed Heym with a unique perspective that forced him to develop a critical distance, even towards places where he felt at home.

When Heym was born in 1913, Germany was still an empire. He saw the rise and fall of many different forms of government, all the way from the Weimar Republic to Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic to today’s Federal Republic. Heym came into this world prior to World War I and had tasted the bitter fruits of exile, as a political refugee in several different countries. In the United States, Heym became an American writer, while maintaining hope for a more just and truly democratic future, his dream of a post-capitalist society. [pullquote]*Victimized by both McCarthyism and Stalinism, Heym’s attraction to Marxism and socialism never amounted to blind faith*.[/pullquote] He underscored his independence by refusing to join any political parties, despite considerable pressure on him to do so. Thus, Heym cannot be captured by neatly fitting categories and labels. However, the *New York Times*’ obituary of Heym did just that, placing him squarely into simplistic categories and labeling this enigmatic German-Jewish socialist-humanist as a “Marxist-Leninist novelist,” who “had assailed the East Germans in 1953 for rising up against their Soviet overlords.” During the tumultuous final months of the East German communist regime in 1989-1990, Heym had,

according to the *Times* "spoke sarcastically of this people as 'a horde pressed belly to back on the hunt for glittering junk' in West German department stores.'"[i]

One wonders how the author David Binder, a seasoned correspondent in Germany, could have misunderstood and mischaracterized Stefan Heym so profoundly. While mentioning some of Heym's most well-known novels and essays, which clearly challenged the tyrannical nature of the Soviet-style "socialist" system, Binder apparently missed what Heym had come to symbolize to his myriad readers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. To Binder, Heym was, at best, an ex-Stalinist Communist dreamer, who held onto his socialist delusions despite their catastrophic failures in the real world. By framing Heym as a "Marxist-Leninist" novelist, he trivialized and glossed over the repeated and systematic campaigns (on the part of East German party and state authorities) against Heym — a deeply convinced socialist intellectual, who stubbornly defended his independence from the party line. This is not to lionize Heym as the grand old man of socialist moralism, as he was not without flaws and misjudgments however. But Stefan Heym had displayed remarkable courage in his long life, weathering both Nazism and Stalinism, and he was confronted with conditions and choices that would look very different to someone living through them first hand, rather than merely observing them, from the safety and distance of a journalistic position. Finally Heym, who was in mortal danger in Nazi Germany, as both a Jew and a socialist, later refused to play assigned roles: in McCarthy's America, East Germany's Marxist-Leninist dictatorship, and at the Capitalist triumph at the Cold War's "end." This failure to comprehend the nature of Heym's highly-cultivated independence reveals a curious and pervasive Liberal blind spot.

Even renown figures like Tony Judt, by all accounts one of the most conscientious and thoughtful Liberal scholars during the last twenty years, have fallen prey to a series of all-too-convenient oversimplifications. While being keenly aware of the pitfalls of Capitalist triumphalism in the face of the Soviet collapse (combined with an awareness of the destructive and self-destructive socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities in Western societies), Judt nevertheless has dismissed Marxism's potential as a meaningful way to make sense of an increasingly perplexing world. While incredulously pondering why Marxists fail to see the connection between their all-encompassing totalizing theory of society and the all-encompassing totalitarian nature of societies created by Marxist-inspired forces, Judt reveals his own preconceptions of what a Marxist is: someone that excludes any and all other approaches, — *à la,* a Marxist ideological panacea. To give Judt his due, there have indeed been no small numbers of self-described Marxists fitting this definition. However, Judt strangely mirrors the totalizing aspects of his Marxist foes, when he categorically declares this to be the only potential meaning of what a Marxist is or could be. The question of who defines what "Marxism" and "Marxists" are – and how they do it — is rightfully contested. Ironically, the complacency of mainstream Liberals mirrors the complacency of dogmatic, party Marxists, — as both mistake their caricatures of Marxism for the real thing.

Slovenian cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek has noted that many of those who have gratuitously smirked at the naiveté of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* have nevertheless actually, unwittingly fully internalized its claims. Fukuyama argued that the end

of the Soviet experiment meant the inevitable global victory of a mix of liberal democracy and capitalism (characteristic of the US and its European allies during the last few decades). History thus would end in the conventional sense, inasmuch as the ideological evolution of humanity would reach its end-stage — with the supremacy of American capitalism. The implosion of East Germany, and its subsequent incorporation into West Germany, seems to suggest to many observers, including David Binder, that any and all alternatives to consumerism and corporate capitalism are hopelessly out of touch, both with what the people want and what is realistically possible. Thus Heym's stubborn rejection of capitalist consumerism attracts a generalizing scorn. However, things have changed during the last ten years, with the economic near-collapse exposing several of the old certainties, of capitalist triumphalism, in a state of rapid evaporation. Thus the structural dilemmas of neo-Liberalism are more obvious now and not just to "die-hard Marxists." [pullquote]*Our current historical situation lends itself to a critical and substantial re-engagement with Stefan Heym and his peculiar amalgamation of utopianism and skepticism.* [/pullquote] His life and work clearly reveal that, while reaching out for a socially-just and environmentally-sustainable economic order might be too easy a target (as "utopian" and unrealistic), not altering course might, in fact, require a far greater dose of wishful thinking.

The *New York Times*' rather hostile and dismissive obituary of Stefan Heym is especially peculiar, given that Heym used to be one of the paper's main points of contact among intellectuals on the other side of the Cold-War divide. In fact, Heym's decision to call his memoirs *Nachruf*, or *Obituary*, was at least in part motivated by the *New York Times*' frequent calls for insider information from him. At the end of this book, Heym explains that Alden Whitman had begun approaching him in the early 1970's. Whitman, by then the star obituary writer for the paper, had wanted to visit Heym in person — in order to get a sense of the imponderables of the writer's persona. Heym obliged Whitman, who in return flattered Heym by pointing out that he had just finished interviewing Charlie Chaplin, reaffirming Heym's self-image as a celebrity intellectual. Heym, no stranger to self-promotion, asked Whitman for a peek at his own obituary, to which Whitman rebuffed any attempts of disclosure, alerting Heym to the *Times*' iron-clad rule that the subjects of its obituaries had to at least wait until their deaths before they were granted access. Death, however, was not around the corner, at least not for Heym, who outlived Whitman, the author of his obituary.

Unable to evaluate how the world's "preeminent English language newspaper" might frame his life and work, Heym concluded that he must take matters into his own hands, writing his own memoirs, under the aforementioned title of *Obituary*, in order to not have to wait for the impenetrable curtain to fall on him as well. Heym ensured that he could satisfy his own curiosity and, of course, his readers,' about how he might be remembered, setting the record straight, having the last word, and not trusting lesser pens to grasp the deftness and importance of his high wire act.

Decades after his first encounter with Whitman, Heym went the "way of all flesh" in early 2001. He was in death as he was in life: a respected and fiercely independent public intellectual, writer, and essayist, and his life, work, and legacy remain contested – as Heym

neither shied away from controversy nor debate. While fully expecting and accepting that taking a position would inevitably lead not only to friends but also to detractors, he might still have been surprised and disappointed with the ultimate quality of the *NYT* obituary. Especially given the NYTs prolonged familiarity with Heym, its actual obituary was unfathomably superficial, formulaic, and so uninformed that one wonders whether they actually knew anything about him at all — beyond what a Google search could provide. It seems that the energy that could have been allotted for considering what Heym represented, was not there, ousted instead by a reactionary certainty that was fuelled by Cold War stereotypes rather than analysis.

The attempt to frame Heym as a "Marxist-Leninist novelist" collides with Heym's own self-understanding and a myriad of evidence to the contrary. Formulaic Marxism-Leninism, the official state ideology of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc, was exactly what Heym and other socialist dissidents had rejected. It stands to reason that neither Marx, – who famously declared that he was not a Marxist, – nor even Lenin would have identified with Heym's contemporary USSR and Eastern Bloc either. Stalin and his successors had created their unique ideology largely in order to justify their own power and legitimacy, having little in common with Marx and Lenin's more complex and multi-faceted intellectual and cultural heritage. Heym had tried to cultivate the critical and emancipatory potential within the Marxist tradition, as a counterbalance to the narrow and restrictive interests and sensibilities of party bureaucrats.

A case in point is, in reaction to his expulsion from East Germany's Writer's Association in 1979, Heym lamented how incredibly narrow-minded and ultimately pathetic the party bureaucracy was, referring to "[t]he Lilliputians conducting the *auto da fe*: one must have experienced it for oneself in order to truly grasp how deep one's faith in the power of the ideas of Heine and Lassalle and Marx and Lenin must be in order to not run away with disgusted laughter." While Heym reaffirmed his socialist ideals in spite of the bigoted and dictatorial realities in the Soviet realm, he called equal attention to the diverse sources of his understanding of socialism. By invoking not only Marx and Lenin, but also the poet, writer, and essayist Heinrich Heine as well as the enigmatic and flamboyant labor leader Ferdinand Lassalle, Heym underscored his departure from the official Marxist-Leninist canon. While the notoriously independent-minded Heine was, at times, uneasily claimed by orthodox Marxist-Leninists as part of their own ancestry, this required all sorts of ideological gymnastics, amounting to a highly sanitized version of Heine. Lassalle, on the other hand, was rejected as a bourgeois attempt to co-opt the German labor movement. Marx and Engels were well-known for all their pronounced theoretical and personal opposition to Lassalle. Thus, by explicitly including Lassalle and Heine into his intellectual ancestry, Stefan Heym expressed that, to him, being a socialist meant the ability — and indeed the necessity — to draw on a broad variety of sources. Instead of shying away from complexity, tension, and contradiction, Heym advocated engaging incongruities and a contradictory and multi-faceted reality.

In doing so, Heym is not so different from other critical, German-speaking Marxists of his generation, such as Robert Havemann and Erich Fried. The latter was a writer who, like

Heym, had spent the Nazi years in the English-speaking world. But while Heym eventually returned to continental Europe and settled in East Berlin, Fried stayed in London. Ironically, Heym continued to write his novels in English, even after relocating to East Germany. Fried, on the other hand, continued to write in German, despite living the bulk of his life in Great Britain. As early as 1954, Fried (who had belonged to the Austrian Communist Youth Movement prior to the Nazi takeover and was later active in Communist exile organizations in London) distanced himself from the party line. In fact, in a letter to Robert Bialek, Fried even expressed doubt about whether he could still be called a Marxist at all. At the same time, Fried emphasized how deeply Marxist though had impacted him and how likely it would be to continue to inform his thinking in the future. Recognizing that Marxism needed to be expanded and infused with new insights from non-Marxist sources as well, he identified that the key problem with official Marxism was not just its Stalinist perversion, but the fact that Marx and Engels lived in the 19th century. As such, their intellectual and cultural horizons were shaped by the main developments and assumptions of their age, including 19th-century rationalism and optimism. Fried, reacting to his 20th-century experiences of two World Wars, the Holocaust, as well as Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus called for a re-examination of Marxism — in the light of new experiences and insights.[ii] It stands to reason, that Heym would have identified with Fried's sentiments.

Chief among literary Heym's critics in Germany has been the influential literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki. Reich-Ranicki, arguably the most well-known literary arbiter in German letters since the 1960s, proved to be an equally imperious and divisive figure, whose positive or negative assessments of any German writer could either make or break a person's career. Though not uncontested, as the chief literary critic of key German newspapers (such as *Die Zeit* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), Reich-Ranicki was able to impact the literary tastes and judgments of several generations of the reading public.

Marcel Reich-Ranicki recognized Heym's abilities, as a witty and entertaining writer, but insisted that his prose amounted, at best, to a middle-brow style. He argued that Heym's literary reputation rested foremost on Heym's role as political rebel in East Germany, rather than purely on literary merit. However, Reich-Ranicki is also well-known for his anti-Leftist outlook, which he ironically acquired after having been a supporter of a Stalinist-type "socialist realism," and he combined his critique of Heym's literary merits with a critique of Heym's politics. After cynically dismissing Heym's rejection of formulaic, Soviet-style "socialist realism" as "a few daring banalities," he proceeded to complain about Heym's overall support of the socialist project. Though seemingly motivated by political and philosophical disagreement, as well as a noticeable personal antipathy, Reich-Ranicki insinuated that his is largely a literary and aesthetic assessment of Heym. While acknowledging Heym's abilities to capture and entertain his readership, he wryly commented that he was endowed with "more intelligence than taste" and more daring than talent.[iii] Few people would challenge that Heym displayed great courage in his life, confronting both the Nazi regime as well as East Germany's SED dictatorship over the years. Yet, it is unlikely that Reich-Ranicki should have the last word on the literary qualities of Heym's novels and short stories. To Reich-Ranicki, Heym was foremost a producer of Cold War period pieces, and his books might thus be

remarkable historical artifacts but would not stand the test of time as literature *per se*.

Over two decades have now elapsed since the collapse of the Soviet system, yet Heym's books remain in print, and new editions have come out in English as well. For example, Northwestern University Press has re-published three of Heym's most imaginative and moving books, *The King David Report* (1997), *The Eternal Jew* (1999), and *The Architects* (2006), in their *European Classics Series*. Daunt Books of London/ Great Britain also published a paperback edition of *The Architects* in 2012. There have been new translations of Heym's works into Dutch, Spanish, and Russian, and since 2009, there is an International Stefan Heym Society, with a growing membership around the globe. There is also the International Stefan Heym Prize, since 2008, of 40,000 Euros, to be awarded every three years to writers who combine high literary distinctions with an engagement for social justice. Thus far, three writers and essayists have been awarded the Heym Prize, starting with the Israeli Amos Oz (2008), the Croat Bora Ćosić (2011), and the German Christoph Hein (2013). In his career, Heym has garnered the attention of more scholarly critics as well. One of the most productive and descerning of those is Peter Hutchinson of Cambridge University. In 1992, he published what still is the most complete and well-researched biography of Heym in English. Hutchinson's title, *Stefan Heym: The Perpetual Dissident*, aptly describes the main trajectory of the writer's life. Cambridge University Press republished an updated version of this volume in 2006, as part of their *Cambridge Studies in German Series*.

Born as Helmut Flieg, into an upwardly mobile German-Jewish family in 1913 in the Saxon industrial city of Chemnitz, Heym was drawn to issues of social justice and political participation at an early age. While still attending high school in Chemnitz, the irrepressible and articulate young man published a political poem in a regional newspaper, resulting in his expulsion from school. The poem criticized German industry and the government for its armaments deals and profiteering with foreign countries. Still known as Helmut Flieg, Heym was forced to relocate to Berlin in order to graduate with his *Abitur* certificate, the prerequisite to going to university. There he enrolled at the University of Berlin, taking courses in philosophy, German studies, and journalism, while also freelancing for various political and literary journals, such as the famous Left-Liberal *Weltbühne*. The Nazi seizure of power on January 31, 1933, forced him as a young student to leave Germany for Czechoslovakia. But before resettling in Prague, he witnessed the burning of the parliament building in Berlin, — the infamous *Reichstag* fire. Hitler and his underlings had blamed the Communists and subsequently dismantled the last vestiges of the rule of law and parliamentary democracy. Doubly endangered as a Jew and a Socialist, Flieg fled to Prague and started, from that point on, to only publish under pseudonyms, — in order to protect his family from any additional persecution in Nazi Germany. While trying out several different aliases in German and Czech newspapers, the young writer eventually settled on "Stefan Heym." This move, however, did not actually protect his family in Germany, as sadly, in 1935, Heym's father saw no alternative but to take his own life. Many others of his family would, later on, be murdered by the Nazis in various concentration camps.

Heym managed to secure an American scholarship in 1936, leaving Prague for the University

of Chicago, where he pursued a Master's degree in German literature, submitting his thesis on Heinrich Heine's famous play *Atta Troll*. Heym was drawn to Heine for a variety of reasons. In many ways, Heine also mirrors Heym's thinking and predicament. Like Heym, Heine was a left-wing German-Jewish intellectual who was forced to spend much of his life in political exile abroad. Heym remained interested in Heine for the rest of his life and actually died while attending a Heinrich Heine conference in Israel in 2001.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, Heine moved to New York City and, between 1937 and 1939, served as an editor and eventually the editor in chief of the anti-Fascist German language paper *Deutsches Volksecho*. In 1942, Heym saw his first major novel, *Hostages* published. This novel dealt with anti-Nazi exiles in Czechoslovakia and established Heym's reputation as a major writer in English. A few years later, Heym acquired an international reputation with his global bestseller *The Crusaders*, a novel about his own experiences with the US Army in the European Theater during World War II, and Heym was indeed able to draw on his extensive experiences as a US soldier during the war. Having enlisted in 1943, Heym went to Europe as a sergeant in the psychological warfare division of the First US Army, where he participated in the D-Day invasion and urged German soldiers to capitulate to Allied forces.

In 1945, Heym moved to liberated Germany as part of the US occupational troops. He founded and edited a newspaper, the *Neue Zeitung* in Munich, which incidentally led to Heym's dismissal from the US Army for "pro-Communist leanings." Neverthelss Heym returned to the US where he lived until 1952, but the atmosphere of McCarthyism and Red-baiting finally became intolerable for him. The Korean war was the last straw, and Heym decided to leave the US for Europe. After stops in Warsaw and Prague, Heym and his first wife Gertrude settle in East Berlin. The Ulbricht regime was more than happy to decorate itself with an international figure of Heym's caliber, and they invited him to write a regular column about social and cultural issues for the *Berliner Zeitung* newspaper, which Heym did between 1953 and 1956. However, in 1953, Heym was confronted by the uprising of June 17th, against the Ulbricht dictatorship, and he became increasingly critical of the East German regime, trying to understand the political, socio-economic, and cultural reasons for the rebellion. The result of his reflections was a manuscript for a novel, tentatively titled *The Day X*. By 1956, the novel was ready for print, however the East German censors did not allow its publication. Despite the increasing difficulties that he experienced in the GDR, Heym never understood himself as an enemy of the state but as a socialist critic.

The East German regime continued in its efforts to reign Heym in. As his international reputation was too lucrative for the GDR to openly reject, breaking with him was not an option. Hence, the regime applied a carrot and stick approach: the stick amounted to more and more encounters and difficulties with the censorship system, which rejected many of his manuscripts. At the same time, the regime showered Heym with awards and prizes, including the prestigious Heinrich Mann Prize (1953), the Literary Prize of the East German Union, as well as the Franz Mehring Prize (both in 1954), and in 1959, Heym received the National Prize, arguably East Germany's most prestigious prize. Eventually, the regime enhanced its pressure

on Heym, and by 1969, he was heavily fined for illegally publishing his novel *Lassalle* in West Germany. By this point, Heym was the most widely read East German author in the West, and the regime was still hesitant to embrace more drastic measures.

By 1976, the East German system may very well have liked to punish Heym more severely, inasmuch as he was one of the key signers of the famous petition of East German intellectuals condemning the expulsion of the singer and song writer Wolf Biermann from the GDR, while he was on tour in the West. Heym realized that the regime's inability to deal with a critical song writer, in any other fashion but to silence and rob him of his citizenship, amounted to a declaration of moral bankruptcy. The honor and integrity of one's commitment to an emancipatory understanding of socialism demanded open protest, and Heym did just that by signing this petition.

In 1979, he submitted his newest manuscript to East German publishing houses. This novel *Colin* dealt with the Stalinist features in GDR society, as well as the how the regime had tried to ignore and white-wash this legacy. When the censors turned down this manuscript, Heym decided to publish it in West Germany despite being pressured not to. This time, the regime responded with greater force. In addition to being sentenced to a hefty fine, Heym was expelled from the East German Writer's Union, robbing him of the GDR's indispensable professional literary network.

Yet, despite the regime's efforts to silence him, he found ways to circumvent them. As the regime did not dare to either imprison him or prevent him from traveling, he continued to write, attend conferences, and give interviews to the Western Press. And in 1981, Stefan Heym spoke at a joint East and West German writer's gathering, in support of the Peace Movement in Scheveningen, Netherlands. Heym not only called for an end of the Cold War but declared that German unification was both possible and natural. The statement was in open defiance of the official East German doctrine, of the rise of a separate East German socialist nation in addition to the traditional German nation as represented by West Germany. It is critical to understand that Heym's conception of German re-unification did not imply what was to come later, when East Germany was absorbed by West Germany. Instead, Heym envisioned a unification of equals, where both East and West Germans could contribute their experiences jointly, to build a new society that combined political with economic democracy.

Hence, on September 18, 1989, Heym was one of the initiators of a resolution entitled "For Our Country." In this document, Heym and the other co-signers identified the SED regime as the reason for the GDR's increasing instability. East Germany's official media at first ignored this declaration, but popular pressure compelled one newspaper, *Der Morgen*, by October 18, to publish it. In October, the regime began to openly disintegrate, and on November 4th, Stefan Heym was one of the key speakers calling for a "renewed and better socialism," – as an alternative to capitalist restoration *via* a West German takeover. Heym jubilantly celebrated the revolution against the regime, pointing out that the occasion was all-the-more happy, given that revolutions in the past had been failures. Referring to the defeated revolutions of 1848 and 1918/1919 in Germany, he expressed his hope that this revolution of 1989 could lead to a

democratic and just future. But after the Wall fell on November 9th, Heym became disappointed with how easily many East Germans succumbed to the allure of mass-produced and flashy consumerism. Kohl promised his voters Western currency and "blossoming landscapes," if they supported him in his plan, — for the hasty incorporation of East Germany into West Germany.

The collapse of East Germany provided West Germany's conservative chancellor Helmut Kohl with the opportunity to openly campaign in East Germany (which at that point, at least on paper, was still a sovereign and independent country), for a speedy dissolution of the GDR. Those East Germans, who like Heym, favored a more measured process of East and West merging as equals, — each willing to learn from the other and creating something new by doing so, — were pushed aside by an avalanche of Western money. Even Kohl's main West German political competitor, Oskar Lafontaine from the Social Democratic Party, was unable to compete with Kohl's siren call. Lafontaine and many others, like the economist Jürgen Kuczynski, warned about the socio-economic and cultural dislocations that an overly-rushed push for unification would inevitably result in. Moreover, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Wall opened a unique opportunity for reform and renewal in the West as well. However, those opportunities were squandered in favor of Western triumphalism. Not only the East German regime but all of East Germany's institutions and experiences were declared wholesale failures that needed to be leveled to the ground. Instead of a more balanced, case by case assessment, as well as potentially new and more innovative solutions, West German institutions were superimposed upon East German society in an uncritical fashion. Deindustrialization and mass unemployment transformed what used to be East Germany into a demi-colony that, to this day, is not able to sustain itself economically.

However, Heym was not afraid to swim against this current and continued to voice his opposition in post-unification Germany, and the integrity of his voice garnered international recognition. In 1990, the University of Bern offered him an honorary doctorate, followed by another from Cambridge University in 1991. In 1990, he also received the *La Grand Livre de Mois* Gutenberg Prize, followed by the Jerusalem Prize for Literature in 1993, and in 2000, Heym received the Peace Medal of the IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War).

In 1994, Heym threw himself into politics again, despite his advanced age. Asked by leaders of the former Communist Party, which had reconstituted itself as the Party for Democratic Socialism, whether he would be willing to run for federal parliament on one of their "open lists," Heym agreed after some deliberation. He insisted, however, that he would not join this or any other political party. After a competitive electoral campaign, Heym became the oldest member of the German *Bundestag* in 1994. As it is a German parliamentary tradition that the oldest member of parliament open the new legislative period with a speech, Heym thus prepared his speech only to find that, suddenly, on the day before he was scheduled to deliver it, the government of Helmut Kohl spread the rumor that Heym had supposedly worked for the infamous East German *Stasi* secret police and was thus morally compromised. The office of Manfred Kanther, Minister of the Interior, claimed that certain documents had come to light, in

which Heym was identified as a former Stasi collaborator. The corporate media picked up the story immediately. For example, the *Berliner Zeitung* printed, in its November 11th 1994 issue, that "Stefan Heym [is] in the whirlpool of Stasi affair."

Heym was accused of having given the East German Stasi confidential information on the former Communist official Heinz Brandt in 1958, therefore, Parliamentary President Rita Süssmuth called Heym at nine pm on the evening prior to his scheduled speech as Elder President, urging him to voluntarily decline, in order to avoid even more of a scandal. Heym, however, decided not to yield and strongly rejected the charges. It would have been a rough night, as the 81 year old Heym and his second wife Inge poured over his Stasi files to see whether anybody could have framed him. When Heym delivered his address the following day, Kohl and most deputies of his conservative party were openly and aggressively disrespectful. In fact, Süssmuth was the only Conservative who applauded him, while leading members of the government showed their contempt either by reading newspapers and/or other documents, or by smiling derisively. But shortly later, Heym's innocence was officially confirmed.

It is instructive to re-examine what Heym actually said in his parliamentary address. Most of all, he sought common ground between East and West, across the political spectrum. His was not a call for confrontation, but for dialogue and good will. Heym opened his remarks by putting himself into a broad tradition, mentioning among his predecessors the Social Democrat Willy Brandt as well as the venerable women's rights activist and Marxist Clara Zetkin, the latter, who had inaugurated the German parliament in the Fall of 1932, merely months before Hitler was made Chancellor. Zetkin and many other politicians had to flee for their lives. Almost 200 deputies had been incarcerated by the Nazis, and over half of them were later murdered by the regime. Heym mentioned that he was among the survivors, who many years later returned in a US military uniform. He expressed his hope that the democratic system of post-Cold War Germany would be more robust than that of the ill-fated Weimar Republic. While acknowledging that East Germans had gained much since re-unification in 1990, Heym emphasized that the East Germans had also freed themselves from the SED regime. Thus, they came not as hapless victims but with dignity and the ability to contribute their experiences. He focused on the significance of civil society, for the resolution of today and tomorrow's challenges, including poverty, environmental degradation, and the erosion of meaningful democracy. Humanity, Heym noted, could only survive in solidarity, with everyone being able to develop his or her potential. Magnanimity, tolerance, and the cultivated ability to imagine new and humane alternatives to the status quo were essentials he stressed.

In his marvelous *The King David Report*, Stefan Heym lets one of the novel's most intriguing and complex characters, the eunuch Amenhotep, say*:*

being a student of events past and present, have you not noticed that the mind of man is strangely split in two, as is his tongue. We seem to be living in two worlds: one that is described in the teachings of the wise men . . . and another which nobody speaks of but which is real . . . And praised be that split of the mind, because it enables a person to do what is necessary by the laws of the real world and yet believe in the teachings of the wise men.[iv]

Amenhotep, who has pragmatically accommodated himself to the status quo, warns the central character, Ethan, that "in a world of eunuchs it does not pay to act like a man." [v] Stefan Heym understood that the disconnect between what we think we aspire to and what we actually do, in the real world, has been essential in order for the mainstream to maintain its peace of mind. Yet, this cognitive dissonance has been very dangerous, — as the catastrophes of the 20th century have illustrated. Like another one his literary characters, Ahasver, Heym was a "Wandering Jew," at once a flawed human being as well as a tenacious idealist, who maintained his socialist humanism until he died, – incidentally while attending a Heinrich Heine conference in Israel. Near the end of the *King David Report*, Heym's protagonist Ethan confides to us all:

I also recognized that I was caught up in my time and unable to go beyond its limitations. Man is but a stone in the middle of a sling, to be slung out at targets he knows not. The most he can do is to try to make his thought last a little beyond him, a dim signal to generations to come. I have tried. Let me be judged accordingly.[vi]

Notes

[i] David Binder, "Stefan Heym, Marxist-Leninist Novelist, Dies at 88 on Lecture Tour in Israel" *New York Times* (18 December 2001).

[ii] Volker Kaukoreit, editor, *Alles Liebe und Schöne, Freiheit und Glück: Briefe von und an Erich Fried,* (Berlin: Wagenbach Verlag, 2009), 21-23.

[iii] Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Ohne Rabbat*, (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993), 86.

[iv] Stefan Heym, *The King David Report* (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1997), 122.

[v] Ibid., 252.

[vi] Ibid., 238-239.

Ghazal: America the Beautiful

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

Do you remember our earnestness our sincerity
In first grade when we learned to sing America

The Beautiful along with the Star-Spangled Banner
And say the Pledge of Allegiance to America

We put our hands over our first grade hearts
We felt proud to be citizens of America

I said One Nation Invisible until corrected
Maybe I was right about America

School days school days dear old Golden Rule Days
When we learned how to behave in America

What to wear, how to smoke, how to despise our parents
Who didn't understand us or America

Only later understanding the *Banner* and the *Beautiful*
Lived on opposite sides of the street in America

Only later discovering this land is two lands
One triumphant bully one still hopeful America

Oh those spacious skies gosh that yearning
To breathe free wow that equality under law in America

Sometimes I still put my hand tenderly on my heart
Somehow or other still carried away by America

Alicia Ostriker has published fourteen volumes of poetry, most recently a reprint of her anti-war sequence *The Mother/Child Papers*, which received the 2009 National Jewish Book Award for poetry, and *The Book of Life: Selected Jewish Poems 1979-2011*. Previous books of poetry include *No Heaven, The Crack in Everything, The Volcano Sequence,* and *The Little Space: Poems Selected and New*. Her critical works include *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, *Feminist Revision and the Bible,* and *Dancing at the Devil's*

Party: Essays on Poetry, Politics, and the Erotic. Ostriker lives in Princeton, NJ, and teaches in the Low-Residency MFA Poetry program of Drew University.

Home of the Blues

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

I’d like to be like Whitman & not let anger
resentment despair my eye from Beauty
born of itself
burning with light
streaming from my pen
Odes not only to Love
but Love made of Love
Permeated with & emanating total pure Love
The descriptive rolling road blistering jewels
reflecting oceans of understanding
faces, subtle & exquisite

Lambent and prism splashed
Purer than gold
Purer than the waters of Baptism
as pure as dirt
as fire
as willing sweat
Pure as the water from the skies
emptying through your eyes

Ah, can’t escape the shameful disastrous hypocrisy
of religions, governments, political movements
Knowing great ideas don’t fail, people do
Do I need a God to overcome
we are imperfect
That our ideas are better than us?
After all this religious fervor of millennia
is this world less murderous
more just, less dangerous?

I would put this knowledge to bed
What good has it done me? Or anyone else?
I’d rather be into art for its own sake
A believer in the positivity of Random Creation
whirling in a dervish of Illusion

I'd rather be Alfred E. Neumann
A what me worry it's all good, charmer
I'd rather be a six pack a night, bills paid
Rather be University literary magazine credentialed
perfect smoking my pipe, impressing youth
with arcane knowing, go on vacation
to islands in the sun
I'd rather be someone who covertly alludes to problems
in coded and coddled language, than to call it
from the bottom, the solar plexus of defiance
But I can't, don't ask why, I've not only got a right
to sing these blues, but I've an obligation

Oscillating in a maelstrom of unpredictable winds
unborn of the sun
So from that solar plexus of defiance
the uncontrollable plaint, blues of a darker color
I've got a right to spit them out unchewed

I woke up this morning hardly knew which way to turn
It was dark it was cold I was not frozen
It must be what I've chosen
Got to earn, the times are not generous
maybe some people will be
If believing would help if I believed it would help me
I'd believe
God I don't believe you're listening, pretty sure you
don't exist, but if you are listening
I could use a little help
I am no longer a man, I'm no longer Whitmanic
I'm a contradiction from Hell just like America
A Deist calling on God? I got the Blues
All the beneficial bounty, all the music
& all the deception & cruel crimes
Backed by guns of money & pain
& worse
America the Contradiction
America Home of the Blues

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Poem Written During and After Hurricane Sandy

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Poem Written During and After Hurricane Sandy

And you know that Tilt-a-Whirl down on the south beach drag?
I got on it last night and my shirt got caught
And it kept me spinnin', they didn't think I'd ever get off
–Bruce Springsteen, 4th of July,
Asbury Park (Sandy)

The Hudson winds are blowing into our window panes.
It seems inevitable one of them will crack.
CNN reports the river has begun to overflow
and Hoboken's mayor on TV is cautioning a rolling flood.

It is never the right time to go through a super-storm.
These chronic Lyme disease days aren't a good time for me.
My 90-year-old parents have just moved into assisted living
and it ain't the best time for my dad's swollen feet either.

We've known for weeks that at least one super-storm was coming—
the every-four-years crush known as a presidential election.
As Hurricane Sandy continues to build its bullying strength
I am a wishful atheist hoping, but not praying, for only minor harm.

The power in our apartment begins to fizz and flicker, going dark
for two or three minutes, then back to the light. My Holocaust-survivor,
civil-servant mom seems to have advanced memory loss, and if this
night proves tragic, she has earned the right to let go of this one.

It looks like there is an almost even chance that coreless Romney
will win. Although it is true Obama, on so many issues, has been a huge
centrist disappointment—we know, after New Orleans,
that natural or human-made disasters can always get worse.

And yet so many around the world struggle daily against the odds,

hoping the swirling winds will pause even for a decade or two.
But our lights have just gone out for the night
and it is not happy news that is expected to arrive in the morning.

We are back into the midnight meditations of the radio era—
no AC electricity, phone, heat, or television in our apartment.
And yet the radio newscasters continually tell us
to check their websites for absolutely critical news updates.

Since we have no internet access, Vivian and I go to sleep,
fearing a string of ominous Jeopardy answers
for the coming days. The questions include: how bad, and for whom?
And how long before the necessary help will arrive?

At sunrise, we are among millions waking early without power
but we are also among the lucky ones,
living in a fifth floor apartment that has not flooded nor thundered
away,
as my friend Danny calls with three feet of water sitting in his
basement.

Radio reports describe deep floods throughout our mile-square
Hoboken
and along most New Jersey and New York City shore lines. With
increased
chills that could be from either a cold apartment or my Lyme disease,
I repeat to myself the mantra that I am among the lucky ones.

How ironic that they have named the hurricane that hit landfall
at the Jersey shore after a well-known song
by the state's best songwriter, Bruce Springsteen—and the radio
says most of the Jersey shore's popular boardwalks have been
obliterated.

Atlantic City, Cape May, Ocean Grove, Belmar, Long Island,
Staten Island, Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Rockaway Beach,
tree-tangled suburbs, the entire island of Manhattan below
34th Street—
so many communities phoning bone-breaking distress into the radio.

There are unsafe drinking-water warnings for many Jersey towns.
Which ones? Again, the damn radio says to check government websites
whose online addresses I don't even bother to write in my notebook.
I hope the quarts of bottled water I have bought will be enough.

The telephone landlines are down and cell phones barely work.
But I get through by cell phone to my mom and dad, who have also
survived the night. They have no power either, but the Senior Center's
kitchen has a generator and decent-tasting meals.

On the radio, elected officials from New York and New Jersey
are congratulating each other for having kept their eyes open.
A Republican governor is even thanking a Democratic president,
while millions wonder how that will translate on the wet ground.

It does seem clear that Obama's emergency response teams
are far out-performing the same offices when they were run by Bush.
National Guard rescuers have already arrived in Hoboken, but it is
difficult to imagine early applause lines will reach the hidden corners.

Two days after the storm, I get a newspaper and see my first pictures.
The devastation is unbelievable in sections of New Jersey and NYC
that I have never even heard of, like Hamilton Beach.
It seems neither FEMA nor the Red Cross has heard of them either.

On Day One after the hurricane, nine out of my ten cell-phone attempts
resulted in the recording: "we are unable to complete your call."
Two days after the super-storm, the message has evolved:
"we are unable to help you with anything."

WCBS radio reports that fire has burned down over 100 homes
in Breezy Point, Queens. A woman in Staten Island complains loudly
over the radio about the lack of government help. In some cases,
that kind of media coverage seems to be what is needed to get help.

Near one shoreline, an intruder sailboat has pushed through a building's
front door, a picture right out of a Dali painting or Breton poem.
Some car lines for gasoline are reportedly over eight hours long—
even Beckett wouldn't have expected so much patience from his
audience.

On Election Day, where will all the displaced people vote?
Whose half-broken computers will count the final tally?
Vivian points out even bluebirds have been displaced. Internet rumors
say Romney's family owns some of Ohio's swing-state voting machines.

Crushed by falling suburban trees, electrocuted by downed power lines,
drowned on second floors of century-old shore cottages, swept by
full-moon tides
into pitch-black ocean depths, over 110 people have died these last few

days,
and tens of thousands have permanently lost their homes.

A woman from Rockaway Beach calls Hurricane Sandy a mini-Katrina
and there is more talk than ever in the mainstream media
about climate change. Why wasn't our era's most pressing
life-or-death issue even mentioned in the three presidential debates?

With boardwalk rides hurled into the ocean or onto the streets,
who is around to bust Springsteen's Asbury Park fortune-tellers now?
Stepping back, it can seem amazing that humans have any electricity
at all,
and yet post-disaster restoration is almost always frustratingly slow.

That the presidential election takes place while millions are still
suffering
seems more surreal than a hydrogen jukebox. And yet Obama's
nail-nibbling victory, called at 11:18 Tuesday night, brings a big sigh
of relief.
In his acceptance speech, he even mentions global warming first time
in years.

But whether the President will push for real environmental policy
change
or tackle poverty may take months or years to decipher. Meanwhile,
other good
news: the economic-justice challenger, Elizabeth Warren, has won;
as have
state ballot initiatives on gay marriage equality and the legalization
of pot.

It is heartwarming that the progressive human heart will continue
to beat—
until it stops, at the end of a long exhilarating life,
or in the sudden crash of falling oaks. People work tirelessly
for a lifetime simply to increase their chances.

At the end of the day, the Universe usually rolls over its animals,
whether small, mid-sized, or dinosaurian. Nature almost always
wins—even if it takes a few hefty nicks and bruises along the way.
But even Nature must face the risk of another Big Bang.

When the Universe is finally threatened by a midnight storm,
I hope it won't come back to me looking for sympathy.
Too many around the world are still without food or shelter; and my

family,
friends, and I have seen and felt more than enough over the last
90 years.

In my early twenties, I used to run games on the Wildwood boardwalk,
where the roller coaster is now somewhere floating in the sea.
If I can ever beat this Lyme disease, I'm going to try
swimming to one of the more stable seats on that ride.

Folks have mainly survived these recent days by neighbors helping
neighbors—taking in friends, setting up spontaneous soup kitchens,
offering free cell-phone charging sites, portable generators sent where
needed,
groups of young people clearing out sharp and moldy debris.

If there are still any crazy oil-politicians who deny climate change,
I will soon have a new hurricane to sell them. While solar, wind,
and geothermal power will not by themselves rebuild broken homes,
the next 90 years may depend on making new & kinder scientific
friends.

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Aging in Films and Amour

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Hollywood in the past often depicted aging characters in stereotyped terms: the grumpy old codgers played by Walter Brennan; kindly grandmas played by Spring Byington; founts of aged wisdom played by actors like Sam Jaffe (today played by Hal Holbrook); or the idiosyncratic, freewheeling elderly women played by Ruth Gordon. And the films usually made all of them secondary or supporting characters. I'm probably leaving out some admirable films, but I can recall only one serious mainstream Hollywood film about aging, Leo McCarey's *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937). Made during the Depression, it centered on an elderly couple who after a bank takes over their home, are forced to move in with their grown children, and who are then separated. It's an unsentimental quietly observant film, depicting the difficulties of being forced into a situation where nobody can be conceived as a villain. It turns out that the life styles of the traditional parents and the modern children are at odds, and can't be reconciled. *Make Way for Tomorrow* is a low key, psychologically true, and moving work that McCarey, refusing to bow to studio pressures, fearlessly concludes without offering some miraculous way out for the elderly couple.

However, McCarey's film was an anomaly even in its time, when audiences were on the average older. Today most contemporary Hollywood films are aimed at teenage audiences, and films about old age would have a hard time filling the multiplexes. In fact, in 2010, North Americans ages 12 to 24 made up only 18 percent of the population, but bought 32 percent of the 1.34 billion tickets sold. Hollywood is youth-obsessed–many of the hit comedies (e.g., *Hangover*) are geared towards an adolescent's notion of humor with jokes about sex, bowel movements, and the over-indulgence of alcohol as the staples. It's hard to find a contemporary American film that deals incisively with the idea of getting old. (Of course, you could also say that it's a rare occasion when Hollywood produces a serious film on any subject.)

Over the years, however, there have been a number of great works depicting aging from Europe or Japan– films that avoid stereotyping and mawkishness. Among them are: De Sica's slightly sentimental *Umberto D* (1952), Kurosawa's*Ikiru* (1952), Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953), and Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957). Some more recent films centering on aging characters are less than masterworks, but are first-rate, and are psychologically trenchant. They include: Louis Malle's *Atlantic City* (1980), David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999), Sarah Polley's *Away from Her* (2006). None of these films is a product of mainstream Hollywood.

My lists are far from inclusive. The point is that the great films about aging have usually been made by directors who aren't American. And I'm not talking about British feel-good works like John Madden's well crafted *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) filled with sparkling star turns by the best British actors, convincing us that old age provides an opportunity to

transform the nature of one's life. The film I'm thinking about is Michael Haneke's *Amour*–it won the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes–a work in the tradition of the aforementioned great European and Japanese films.

Haneke, an Austrian, is normally the coolest and most cerebral of directors, whose best works (*Code Unknown, Cache, The White Ribbon*) are both formally imaginative and intellectually arresting. Haneke also usually projects a darkly pessimistic view of the human condition. However, *Amour* is the least formally complex–it is linear, and generally maintains the unities of time and space–and is the most tender of his films, though never mawkish or sentimental.

Amour takes place almost totally in a book and painting-filled, tasteful, lived-in Parisian apartment (a replica of the apartment where Haneke's own parents lived). The film focuses on two cultivated, retired music teachers in their 80s who have had a long and loving marriage and a strong friendship: Georges (the understated Jean-Louis Trintignant – *The Conformist*), and Anne (the still beautiful Emmanuelle Riva–Hiroshima Mon Amour), played by two great actors whose past performances remain indelible for anybody who has attended French films for the last 60 years, and who are still able to reveal a great deal about their characters without the need for dialogue.

Anne suddenly becomes ill–a blockage in her carotid artery-has an operation, which doesn't work, and a stroke that ultimately leads to her being bedridden. Georges, loyal and totally supportive, but relatively frail, dedicates himself to taking care of her. They choose to insulate themselves from the world, except for a few visits from their daughter Eva (Isabel Huppert), who seems to have had more a formal and superficial rather than intimate link to them over the years. It may be that's her choice, but there is a suggestion that Anne and Georges always gave primacy to their own relationship never neglecting their child, but also not making her a central figure in their lives.

At first a slightly brittle Eva breezes in, without being deeply affected, but on another visit she expresses genuine emotion over her mother's plight, though she is at a loss as to how to be help. Georges doesn't welcome her involvement, and is proprietary about taking care of Anne-he feels he knows best and sees it as his bailiwick, and wants no interference. There are a few other visitors: a former music student of Anne's; the building's concierge and wife; and two nurses brought in when Georges is overwhelmed by providing full-time care-one a skilled professional, the other insensitive and odious, whom Georges, with justifiable harshness, dismisses. So, it's only the two of them, and the outside world is barely allowed to intrude.

Anne's body gradually breaks down. Haneke does not shy away from the indignities of her deterioration, but doesn't center on them. Instead, he uses a series of ellipses, which conclude with all day sleeping, moments of dementia, speech that is hard to decipher. Georges sits by her bed at night, and during the day cooks, changes her diapers, and helps her exercise. Anne maintains her dignity throughout the ordeal, but in her utter dependency she flares up at him and at herself, though their profound link is never threatened. But though Georges may pride himself on his infinite patience and devotion, he still has a nightmare, which suggests his

feeling trapped by the situation he's in, or vulnerable to attack. Haneke constructs this nightmare like a horror film, Georges finding his hallway flooded, the elevator boarded up, and out of the dark a hand begins to choke him.

The film has a few other set pieces that break from its narrative–a lyrical montage of the couple's 19th century landscape paintings set to classical music, and two (unnecessary?) scenes with a stray pigeon that provide a necessary aesthetic pause and release.

But on the whole, the film is riveted on the couple, never sentimentalizing their relationship nor manipulating the audience's emotions. And there is no back-story provided about Georges and Anne's pasts, and little explicit revelatory talk. But the actors tell us what we want to know about themselves in beautifully framed and lit long takes, medium close-ups, and two -shots.

Both are smart, sophisticated, and controlled–Georges always speaks in a measured fashion about Anne's decline–and they clearly share a world and space that is an extension of their lives. Georges's eyes are alive, he is observant and watchful, and he can be sharp with others in the few encounters he has with other people, while Anne is fearless and avoids self-pity, though not despair. Anne calls him "a monster, also capable of great kindness" and we see Georges' kindness throughout, but the monster is held at bay; unless we view Georges' final act as a horrific one. The action comes abruptly, and throws the viewer emotionally, but it is done to end her suffering, and does not seem surprising, given Anne's anguish and desire to die. Haneke makes no judgment.

The film sees their love as all-encompassing, and George keeps on day-dreaming of her playing piano or washing dishes (even when she's dead)–it's a separation he can't live with. She's his whole world, and although what happens to him is not spelled out, it's not hard to imagine. But Haneke avoids providing a Hollywood catharsis through which– in his words–"false answers" are provided. He concludes the film with Eva back in her parents' apartment silently contemplating what has occurred.

Haneke has chosen to avoid making a Social Problem-film about old age, offering no critique of the health care system or of what to do with a growing aging population. In his words, he set out to explore the existential question: "How to manage the suffering of someone you love?"

Amour is a clear-eyed work that does not shrink from the desperation it depicts, but it never indulges in any aria of despair. Still, amid all of Georges' compassion and love, the anguish of death's imminence is ever-present. It's a quietly harrowing and truthful film, devoid of false notes or magical resurrections. The couple cope, as well as possible, in their own way, but the situation they face is universal and unrelenting. Amour depicts in painstaking detail what we all must ultimately confront–aging and mortality. It's a great film.

Kurt Vonnegut among His Admirers

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Books Reviewed in this Essay:

Gregory D. Summer, *Unstuck in Time: A Journey through Kurt Vonnegut's Life and Novels* (Seven Stories Press, 2011).

Charles J. Shields, *And So It Goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A Life* (Henry Holt and Company, 2011).

Tom McCartan, *Kurt Vonnegut: The Last Interview: And Other Conversations* (Melville House, 2011).

"What are people for?" a character asks in Kurt Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), and Vonnegut toyed with the question, or variations of it, in thirteen additional novels and numerous short stories, articles, essays, interviews and speeches. Yet books about Vonnegut and his work since his death in 2007, especially ones aiming to elucidate the writing via his biography, might prompt exasperated readers to ponder other questions, like: "What are these books for?" And: "What do their authors think books are for?"

Gregory D. Sumner hints at what he thinks he's up to in *Unstuck in Time* when he says a character's act is "both a prayer and a form of therapy." In essence, according to Sumner, so is fiction. Vonnegut, then, wrote as a means to cope with life's hardships, and each fictional character derives from an actual person, usually Vonnegut himself. Sumner not only searches for real-world equivalents for characters; he also puts them on the couch, offering cloying therapeutic assessments of the various authorial stand-ins and, thus, of Vonnegut himself. Pseudo-meaningful formulations such as "like the author" and "like the author's mother" consistently accompany descriptions of characters throughout *Unstuck in Time.* Sumner traces most of the issues he identifies back to survivor's guilt stemming from both the suicide of Vonnegut's mother and the novelist's wartime experiences. A character's efforts "to repair the damage caused by his clumsy assertions of manhood may well be the author's expression of his own helpless desire to heal his mother, to reconnect and make her whole again," Sumner says. Regarding a scene from *Sirens of Titan* (1959), he wonders, "Did the author experience this kind of disorientation on his return from Europe in the summer of 1945?" Sumner clearly presumes that he did. Sumner claims that in one novel "trauma is transmuted into hope and renewal"; he praises another one as "a major step in the author's rapprochement with the past." As for his own objective for discussing Vonnegut in "this companion to his life and books," Sumner aspires to praise, to encourage the healing process and to cheerlead. It's biographical criticism in an earnestly admiring mode.

The shaky premise of such an approach is that to understand and appreciate literature one must turn, not to the work, but to the writer. With a full-fledged biography, the aim is indeed to understand the individual, but in *And So It Goes*, Charles J. Shields constructs another funhouse hall of mirrors in which the books reflect the author's life and the author's life is reflected in the books and the reader exits without deeper knowledge of neither – but perhaps with a sense that intimate revelations about an author's real-life story translate directly into inside information about literary imagination. The operating assumption seems to be that details about one thing (an author's life) automatically augment knowledge of something else (an author's work).

Like Sumner, Shields indulges in pat psychoanalysis, reducing characters to symptoms of their creator's mental health. Regarding *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), in which Billy Pilgrim (born, like Vonnegut, in 1922) becomes "unstuck in time" and bounces among being a prisoner of war in Dresden, a human zoo animal in outer space and an optometrist in late-1960s America, Shields surmises: "Perhaps the root of Vonnegut's … time-disordered fables lies in a psychological condition not understood until later: post-traumatic stress disorder." Sumner invokes the same malady in connection with *Hocus Pocus* (1990), determining of narrator Eugene Debs Hartke: "As with all of Vonnegut's protagonists, Gene's guilt … draws in some measure from the author's own sense of having failed the women in his life, beginning with his mother. In marriage his faithlessness took the form of emotional withdrawal, a remoteness typical of soldiers who suffered from PTSD." Yet Shields outdoes Sumner in sheer psychobabble balderdash with passages like this one, in which he refers to Billy Pilgrim's interludes on an imaginary planet with "a twenty-year-old pornographic movie starlet named Montana Wildhack," with whom captors permit Pilgrim to mate unobserved:

This pretend Eden-like paradise on Tralfamadore where there is love, privacy for sex, and desire for it resolves Kurt's tie to his mother, too. The dead end of pleasing his histrionic mommy, the artiste manqué, by living and writing on the Cape has ended. Montana is to Billy what Loree [Rackstraw, with whom Vonnegut began having an affair when he was writer-in-residence in the Iowa's Writers' Workshop in the mid-1960s] was to Kurt when he as "adrift"; life energy restarts in both the author and his protagonist through the act of physical love, a strongly sexual relationship with a love who will never leave. When Montana gives birth to a child, the parallel with Kurt successfully taking up *Slaughterhouse-Five* again in Iowa is complete. Procreation and artistic successful creation are one.

Only those who find that sort of thing useful, or plausible, or palatable, will make it through *And So It Goes* without cringing. By the way, for what it's worth, Vonnegut didn't finish his best-known book for several more years after first "sleeping with his Muse in Iowa City."

Sumner and Shields evince absolutely no hesitation identifying which characters serve as Vonnegut's mouthpieces. In Vonnegut's third novel, *Mother Night* (1961), Howard Campbell's "aversion to nationalism," Sumner says, is "an expression of the author's leaning." Two characters in *Bluebeard* (1987), he confidently states, "represent different aspects of Vonnegut, the damaged veteran." When Shields articulates the "fairly clear" moral of 1963's

Cat's Cradle ("no one has the right or the competence to hold the key to ending the world"), he says the narrator, Jonah, "speaks for Vonnegut." Both Sumner and Shields identify Kilgore Trout, who shows up in several novels, as Vonnegut's "alter ego."

Despite their certainty about who speaks for Vonnegut, Sumner and Shields fumble when it comes to what he had to say on one major subject. Vonnegut plainly calls himself an atheist in multiple books and in several interviews, including some gathered by editor Tom McCartan in *Kurt Vonnegut: The Last Interview: And Other Conversations.* Studying anthropology, he says in a 1977 *Paris Review* interview that both Shields and Sumner cite as a source, "confirmed my atheism, which was the faith of fathers anyway." He continues: "Religions were exhibited and studied as the Rube Goldberg inventions I'd always thought they were." Organized religion get satirized, if sometimes gently, in several novels, including *Cat's Cradle,* in which Vonnegut coins the term *foma* for comforting untruths and, since all religions are made up any way, he depicts people start practicing a harmless one engineered to encourage compassion rather than the usual brutality. As if trying to claim Vonnegut for Christianity, Sumner, a professor of history at a Catholic university, never identifies Vonnegut as an atheist; the word never appears in *Unstuck in Time.* He acknowledges that Vonnegut had been "encouraged to be skeptical of received truths" and regarded religions as fabrications, but he spotlights Vonnegut's more friendly remarks on religion, like his claim that psychiatric patients should join churches (for companionship) and his advocacy of what could be taken as Christian virtues, like kindness and self-sacrifice. In the months prior to his death (as multiple interviews in McCartan's book show), Vonnegut proudly referred to his status as honorary president of the American Humanist Association, an organization committed to the idea that people can be good without belief in any god, but Sumner instead attempts to align Vonnegut's outlook with the Bible, referring to Vonnegut's supposed "New Testament humanism," asserting (without providing evidence) that Vonnegut "found inspiration in the Old Testament story of Lot's wife," and repeatedly mentioning Vonnegut's stated admiration for the Sermon on the Mount.

Sumner ignores Vonnegut's explanation that humanists were influenced by science, not the Old Testament, and his fondness for repeating, in connection with the Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a remark made by his great grandfather Clemens Vonnegut: "If what he said was good, and it was marvelous, what did it matter if he was god or not?" Sumner doesn't say Vonnegut believed the Sermon on the Mount came directly from god, but he nonetheless misrepresents Vonnegut's views by refusing to call them by their actual name and by giving greater weight to his less critical comments on religion. Shields is somewhat better, but still a bit fuzzy, on this front. At some places in *And So It Goes* he accurately calls Vonnegut an atheist and a descendent of freethinkers, but in others he calls him an agnostic and even a Unitarian. He recognizes that Vonnegut didn't find everything religious "offensive" and points out that "he wrote respectfully about Jesus." Ultimately, the very best thing a religion could be, in Vonnegut's opinion, was a benign lie that consoled communities, but neither Shields nor Sumner seems willing to state clearly what Vonnegut often did.

Certainly Vonnegut did write, and talk, a great deal about himself. "Unlike most writers, he was an extrovert, who enjoyed having people around, attending social events, and being

interviewed," according to Shields. "Speaking was a big part of my business," Vonnegut remarked in an interview a year before his death. The half dozen interviews comprising *The Last Interview* illustrate how much he relied on the same material in talks over his long career. In the *Paris Review* conversation published thirty years before the final one from which the volume takes its name, Vonnegut describes how he became the sole person to benefit from the firebombing of Dresden, which he made use of in a best-selling novel composed decades after he survived the event and which killed, he says, 135,000 people. "I got three dollars for every person killed," he calculates. He deploys the same bit again three years later in another interview selected by McCartan. (By then, his take per corpse had increased by one dollar.) Both times he mentions that he'd already included it in an introduction to a special edition of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. When he used the line again in a 1983 conversation chronicled in Martin Amis's *The Moronic Inferno* (1986), he'd refined it by saying sales of the novel netted him "several" dollars for each person killed. Even more frequently, he relays a comment his long-time friend Bernard O'Hare made after World War II. Vonnegut asked his fellow former POW what he'd learned from his military experience, and O'Hare replied, "I'll never believe my government again." (Vonnegut earlier recounted the comment in a *Playboy* interview reprinted in his 1974 nonfiction collection *Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons* but not included in *The Last Interview*.) Vonnegut also frequently mentions his scientist brother, another Bernard, who, Vonnegut says, discovered that "silver iodide will sometimes make it rain or snow." I could list several other examples from McCartan's slim book.

There's nothing unusual or objectionable about a raconteur drawing on his rehearsed repertoire, of course, but there is something wrong with such a repetitive compilation: it's unnecessary. The *Paris Review* interview, by far the longest selection in *The Last Interview* (and readily available online as well as in Vonnegut's 1981 "autobiographical collage" *Palm Sunday*), contains all of Vonnegut's main points about writing and war and religion and loneliness, the ones he returned to over and over. Besides, anyone wanting full immersion in Vonnegut's spiel could turn to *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut* (University Press of Mississippi, 1988), edited by William Rodney Allen, which contains the *Paris Review* interview, another from *The Nation* also picked by McCartan, and twenty more besides. The titular last interview with Heather Augustyn for *In These Times*, also available online, where it originally appeared, amounts to just over three pages of McCartan's redundant assemblage.

By structuring *Unstuck in Time* as a book-by-book tour of Vonnegut's novels, Sumner hit on a different way of producing a very repetitious work. Chapter after chapter he points out how Vonnegut revisits the same themes: the need for acting decently, the dangers of technology, how it hurts to be alone, the benefits of having extended families, and so on. Sumner reuses the same quotations – sometimes even on the same page. His analysis tends toward the banal. Comments like this are typical of his critical incisiveness: "A diligent student of good writing practice, Vonnegut was interested above all in connecting with his audience, and he stayed sensitive and alert to its needs." Concise sentences and brief chapters attest to this. Here's Sumner on *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965): "What makes this work a breakthrough and gives it staying power – it was always a favorite in the eyes of the author, and remains so among his devoted readers – is its unabashed heart." Isn't that nice?

Readers wanting refreshers on the plots and characters of Vonnegut's work, but preferring not to read the actual books, however short, might find *Unstuck in Time* a valuable resource. Then again, Sumner's summaries can make the stories seem ridiculous and suggest that Vonnegut had reasons for fearing that he wasn't taken seriously. Here, for instance, is how Sumner explains Vonnegut's second novel:

Sirens of Titan … posits a world in which all human endeavors turn out to have been engineered by remote intelligences, toward the most mundane end imaginable. The protagonist, a wealthy profligate lost soul named Malachai Constant, is led across the solar system on the way to finding his purpose in life…. Amid concentric circles of manipulation and competing narratives to make sense of it all – and the flying saucers and mind-control devices and Martian sleeper agents that Vonnegut throws at us in quick succession in this wildly convoluted tale, comic book trappings that we never take seriously – Malachai Constant embraces the truths that reside *within*. [Emphasis decidedly his.]

Despite the novel's science-fiction trappings, it abounds, Sumner insists, in the identical autobiographical elements that he finds in abundance in all of Vonnegut's novels. (He pays scant attention to the short stories and only mines the nonfiction for biographical background.)

With almost every loving look at a Vonnegut novel, Sumner follows the same pattern. He intertwines recapitulation of the narrative with glances at what he believes are the relevant episodes from the writer's life, states what he takes to be the critical consensus on the work in question, and then gives his glowing estimate of its lasting value. Not a few times, this necessitates acknowledging that others found the fiction something less that first rate. Sumner, however, will not be swayed. He allows that *Breakfast of Champions* "took a bashing among critics" before declaring it "at once one of Vonnegut's most beloved and most controversial enterprises" and insisting that it "remains fresh today thanks to its outrageousness and relentless honesty about an author and a culture in crisis." Although *Slapstick* (1976) "was mostly savaged by the critics," Sumner quotes at length from one "exception to the overall negative response," a review by John Updike. Sumner happily reports that reviews for the next book, *Jailbird* (1979), "fortunately, were mostly enthusiastic." He concludes his chapter on that novel in a manner that suggests his own enthusiasm for Vonnegut has at least as much, if not more, to do with the message as any artistry. He says the novel's protagonist learns "that community, kindness, small acts of generosity can get us through all kinds of rough weather. His triumph, and Vonnegut's too, is an openness to such moments of grace. Meanwhile, we keep alive the struggle, hold close the mythical inspiration of Debs, Sacco and Vanzetti, Powers Hapgood – long distance warriors, men to follow." The "we" in that breathless last sentence must refer to people like Sumner: readers devotionally enamored with what Vonnegut, and labor leaders he admired, had to say on social issues. Sumner wraps up *Unstuck in Time* by noting that "all of his novels remain in print" – something Vonnegut himself boasts several times in McCartan's collection – and by asserting, "His legacy is secure." I'm unconvinced. Martin Amis, in a more clear-eyed assessment, predicts: "In my view, *Slaughterhouse-Five* will retain its status as a dazzling minor classic, as will two or three of its predecessors." (He presumably classes *Cat's Cradle, Mother Night* and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* as the

others with potential staying power.) Nothing Sumner says persuades me otherwise. Perhaps an English major Shields quotes got it right by saying, “What J.D. Salinger was to me in high school, Kurt Vonnegut is to me in college,” and implying that after graduation, one moves on.

To his credit, Shields concedes that not everything Vonnegut composed glows with literary greatness. Vonnegut had his breakthrough with *Slaughterhouse-Five,* inspiring young admirers to make pilgrimages to his West Barnstable house, but a falling off followed. “On the strength of Vonnegut’s reputation,” Shields explains, “*Breakfast of Champions* spent a year on the best seller lists, proving that he could indeed publish anything and make money.” (One of the most attention-grabbing claims Shields forwards involves acquisitiveness. He alleges that Vonnegut, the pacifist critic of greed, not only eagerly invested in the stock market but also owned stock in Dow Chemical, “the sole maker of napalm during the Vietnam War.” Here, though, he intends no criticism, insisting that, despite his fondness for that socialist fellow son of Indiana Eugene Debs, Vonnegut never opposed free enterprise. Vonnegut’s son Mark, in any case, disputes this and other parts of Shields’s biography, according to a *Guardian* article that appeared soon after the book’s publication. Further still, Shields says Vonnegut had someone else manage his finances, including his stock purchases, leaving it unclear how conscious or conscientious of an investor Vonnegut actually was.) Less impressed than Updike by *Slapstick,* Shields writes: “When the last sentence finally arrives, ‘And so on,’ the reader is tempted to agree, ‘Whatever.’” Having noted that “critics intimated that Vonnegut’s best writing was behind him,” the most Shields can muster on his behalf is this: “Kurt’s prose, whether it soared or belly-flopped, was entirely his.”

Shields also differs from Sumner by distinguishing between the man and his public persona. He may have put himself in his books, but how Vonnegut presented himself and how he was could diverge, at least now and then. Although Shields rejects the term *black humor,* preferring instead *comic-didactic* to describe Vonnegut’s means of instructing while entertaining, he recognizes that humor featured prominently in the novels. Readers could and did extrapolate from his narrative voice an image of the writer (as Shield in his way does too), but sometimes failed to notice mismatches. For one, “without the veil of fiction, he comes across as a pretty cheerless soul.” For another, the façade of an avuncular late-twentieth century Mark Twain belies the reality of what he sees as an unhappy existence, especially near its end. Shields (in a characterization Mark Vonnegut disputes) depicts Vonnegut as a despondent, cranky and bitter.

This brings us back to another problem with the sort of critical enterprise that treats art as therapy (and/or prayer) and critics as interpreter-analysts. If writing for Vonnegut was simultaneously psychological and spiritual practice, then it wasn’t very effective. Sumner attributes “what was reported as a suicide attempt” in 1984 at least in part to “despair over the direction of the country,” while Shields identifies Vonnegut’s motives for self-destruction as a “typical revenge fantasy” relating to his unhappy second marriage. “Creativity is often interpreted as a response to emotional pain,” offers Shields, whose account of Vonnegut’s later years suggests writing did little to alleviate the gloom.

Readers so inclined can discern autobiographical aspects in Vonnegut's books, but they shouldn't conclude that they've hit upon anything of significance. It's no more difficult to find similarities between Vonnegut and characters like Kilgore Trout, unappreciated science fiction writer, than it is to see resemblances between, say, Philip Roth and Nathan Zuckerman, Jewish writer from Newark, New Jersey, or between James Joyce and Stephen Dedalus, yet another pair of similar seeming scribblers. (Shields and Sumner both also report that Vonnegut based Trout on the writer Theodore Sturgeon, but never mind.) Indeed, "Kurt Vonnegut" shows up in several of the novels, or, as Sumner puts it, Vonnegut did "insert himself overtly into his works." Yet biographical critics noticing that Vonnegut used what Shields calls "the metafictional technique of the author entering the text," and tallying up the times he does so, demonstrate nothing other than that they've read the books and spied the name on the covers in the pages well. Further, it should surprise no one that a man's mother killing herself on Mother's Day just months before he headed off for army service, during which he endured the Allies' obliteration of a German city of no military significance, might influence the subjects and themes he subsequently explores when he becomes a writer. Yet pointing to parallels doesn't amount to much even if the aim is to gain insight into the man instead of what he made. Simplistic biographical criticism dead ends with pursuers of correlations between life and art mistaking any such similarities for insights into an author's psyche and ignoring what he invented by tediously enumerating what he did not. Whatever can't be linked back to an actual person or event tends to get overlooked. To say that every character in a book represents some aspect of the author or people the author knew is to say close to nothing, even if it takes several hundred pages to do it. While McCaran could prompt weary readers to cry out "Enough already," Shields and Sumner might spur them to exclaim, if not the questions proposed above, then another one: So what?

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Oliver Stone’s America

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

Book Reviewed: Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, *The Untold History of the United States* (Gallery, 2012).

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” William Faulkner was correct. For too long history’s outcasts and victims’ were stripped of their pasts and denied a voice for the future. The task of the historian is to look backwards so we in the present receive the tools to forge a progressive future. Much of American history is purely celebratory. While frequently “liberal,” it is rarely consistently revisionist so as to lead to a systemic critique of ballyhooed American exceptionalism. American historians are rare who seek a new past via exposing the enveloping malevolence of the American experience. Howard Zinn in his *People’s History of the United States* created a new past in which a comprehensive history from the invasion of Columbus through the 9/11 attacks finally becomes accessible. This work, while perhaps not as “scholarly” as his monographs such as *LaGuardia in Congress*, *Postwar America: 1945-1971* and *New Deal Thought*, it remains in many respects his most important publication. It hit critical mass by becoming a hot item flying off the shelves of corporate bookstores and through online purchases. *People’s History* is one of the most significant works of history to appear in the last 100 years. (Full disclosure requires I indicate Professor Zinn was my advisor and political science instructor in college.)

Oliver Stone and coauthor Peter Kuznick, an American historian, in their mammoth 750-page *The Untold History of the United States*, the print version of the ten-episode *Showtime* 2012 series, reflect the potent influence of the Zinn-revisionist critique. While it falls somewhat short of the iconic importance and scholarly quality of *People’s History*, it most certainly merits being mentioned as emblematic of that genre and for continuing a powerful revisionism that contests the hagiography of an American past actually infected with slavery, genocide, nationalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism and a limited welfare state that barely restrained capitalism. This book, like the series, is a bold, relentless and important historiographical achievement.

The work is essentially a foreign-policy history of the United States from McKinley to Obama. While there is some attention to economic disparity, the narrative emphasizes war, peace and the nuclear shadow hovering over humankind. Unlike Zinn, it focuses through the lens of the standard presidential synthesis: chapters are frequently named after presidents. Executive actions are emphasized. Government officials and inside-the-beltway journalists and the ever-present sources of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* dominate the work. Social history with its emphasis on race, class and gender is somewhat neglected: political history rules. Zinn

always included the history of a particular soldier, peace activist, feminist, coal miner, sharecropper and labor organizer in his accounts.

Untold History tells the history of policy from the perspective (though not the viewpoints) of those wielding power. *Untold History* thereby overlooks the buried history of the underside of America. Their sources are secondary, but often overlooked, ones. Stone and Kuznick consult relatively few primary sources to undergird their claim of discovering a new American past, but a general audience indeed might well find this history new and challenging. Certainly, Stone has the capacity to reach a wider audience than a revisionist historian publishing in a small circulation journal or in an academic press that few read other than specialists in the discipline. Their secondary sources, however, are impressively broad, current, and so exhaustive that even college professors teaching American foreign relations and American history would find it extremely valuable for course adoption.

Most historians, not to mention PBS, consider Harry S. Truman one of America's greatest presidents. Stone and Kuznick refuse to follow the party line and brilliantly assess Truman as poorly prepared for becoming an accidental president who ruthlessly and unnecessarily used the atomic bomb at the end of World War II against a defeated and defenseless Japan. The Japanese desperately were seeking mediation through the Soviet Union in mid-1945 for a conditional surrender, based on allowing retention of its sacred emperor (which was allowed after the atom bombings and, indeed, after the Soviets kept their promise to Roosevelt and Churchill to enter the war against Japan). The authors appropriately recognize Stalinist Russia's leading role in the defeat of Germany. However, Truman's aggressive and arrogant 'diplomacy' with the Soviets soon unraveled the wartime alliance and gratuitously aggravated tensions, leading to an avoidable Cold War and the reprehensible nuclear arms race.

One of the book's great achievements is its rescuing Vice President Henry A. Wallace from historical exile. With captivating prose and carefully selected documents, Wallace assumes a justified centrality, rarely seen in historiography, as the most articulate spokesperson for international peace and the great dissenter from Cold War confrontation. Had Franklin Roosevelt, who died on April 12, 1945, defied the warmongers and retained Wallace as his vice-presidential running mate in 1944, the air-burst fission weapons might not have exploded over the skies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the Cold War might not have occurred and a significantly more cooperative world order might have emerged after the war of so many incinerated cities. Truman instead soon ditched Wallace, his secretary of commerce, for publicly challenging the hawkish, unilateralist, and anti-Soviet policies of Secretary of State James Byrnes as well as the cynical asymmetrical (and so unworkable) Baruch Plan arms-control proposal. The Soviet Union was supposed to eliminate any potential nuclear materials and allow inspections while the U.S. would retain its atomic monopoly until after such denuclearization occurred. Just trust us. This particular tragedy of American diplomacy led to the Soviet refusal to participate in the arms-control charade, and was followed with a successful atomic-bomb test in 1949.

Oliver Stone's movie JFK (1991) won two Academy Awards. Yet it was lousy history for

advancing the conspiratorial myth that President John Kennedy was assassinated because of his alleged decision to end the Vietnam War. While Kuznick presumably wrote this book, while Stone directed and narrated the Showtime history series, he was likely responsible for qualifying JFK's storyline here: "The debate over Kennedy's true intentions in Vietnam has . . . been quite acrimonious. Kennedy's own contradictory statements . . . have added to the confusion." (315) Nevertheless, *Untold History* persists in pursuing this tale despite the historical evidence being unable to sustain it. They name seven senior officials including Robert Kennedy, Robert McNamara, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Ted Sorenson, who provided "confirmation of Kennedy's intention to withdraw" even without victory over the NLF and North Vietnamese military forces. (316) Stone-Kuznick allege that Kennedy would have ended American military involvement after the 1964 election and in less than eight weeks "have the troops out of Vietnam by 1965." (326-327) Yet there is no speech, tape recording, memorandum, diary entry or any credible primary source – other than these officials testimony – that I am aware of to sustain such a view.

Historians may speculate away (so long as they label it as such) but historical facts must be given primacy when they undermine a thesis. Noam Chomsky's *Rethinking Camelot: JFK, the Vietnam War, and US Political Culture* chronicles the Kennedy War in Vietnam and its steady escalation from 1961 to 1963 and challenges the Stone JFK argument. While Kennedy may have toyed with the idea of a 1,000 troop withdrawal, there is no evidence, in my view, of a decision to leave the war. It is impossible to prove a negative – Kennedy would not have ended the war – but it is possible to demand solid evidence from Kennedy partisans that wished to distance their hero from the quagmire and mass murder of the Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon presidencies. During the thousand days of the Kennedy administration, the numbers of troops in Vietnam increased from 685 to 16,300. They awarded the first Purple Hearts and seventy-eight "advisors" died. Special Forces were introduced and Kennedy launched direct combat operations with helicopter gunships perpetrating carnage in South Vietnam. *Untold History* does affirm Kennedy's "involvement" in the assassination of South Vietnam's dictator President Ngo Dinh Diem on November 1, 1963, a mere twenty-one days before JFK's own assassination. They avoid the conclusion that the Kennedy administration was taking nation building to a new level of interference in the internal affairs of South Vietnam. Fifty years after the assassination of JFK the nasty facts remain that he set in motion an Americanization of the Vietnam War that Johnson and Nixon would criminally extend to genocidal proportions in the widowed lands of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Untold History does avoid what I call the progressive blind spot, by which I refer to treatments of the Arab-Israel conflict deviating from progressive revisionism and adhering to unquestioning support of Israel. The writing on the Palestinians is balanced. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 led to Arab "bitterness" and war over unresolved issues. They describe the "Palestinian victims of Israel policy." (216) Illegal Jewish emigration to Palestine after the war is noted and the Irgun is aptly depicted as a "terrorist organization" for its attacks on the King David Hotel and other assets during the British Mandate. (217) Ignoring the taboo on public discussion of Israel's nuclear status, they list nations in the Middle East and Southwest Asia that possess weapons of mass destruction, including Israel's possession of

nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. (519) The Obama administration does not escape the wrath of the authors for its drone attacks, kill lists and targeted assassinations either. They criticize Dennis Ross, a Middle East advisor, for his role in derailing Special Envoy George Mitchell's proposals for a diplomatic surge to effectuate a peace agreement and end the illegal and brutal Israel settlement policy in the West Bank. An Israel Lobby that sometimes favors Israel over the national security interests of the United States is described as having "inordinate influence in the United States." (217)

The Senate recently confirmed former Nebraska Republican Senator Chuck Hagel as secretary of defense. President Obama's submission of the nomination received strident opposition from Republicans such as xenophobic militants John McCain and Lindsey Graham. They deeply resented his evolving independent position on Israel's colonization of the Palestinians, the elective, unjust war in Iraq, and the aggressive posture against Iran's nuclear program. *Untold History* includes Senator Hagel in its honor role of those politicians who opposed the Iraq invasion in 2003, even if it's a slight stretch. Hagel ultimately voted for authorization to use force in October, 2002, but it was not without considerable turmoil and revulsion regarding the looming conflict:

It is interesting to me that many of those who want to rush this country into war and think it would be so quick and easy don't know anything about war. They come at if from an intellectual perspective versus having sat in jungles or foxholes and watched their friends get their heads blown off. (523)

The so-called war on terror's tactics of torture and other criminal use of violence is thoroughly documented here. Their blistering indictment of President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney for "leaving the countries in shambles, its economy collapsing and its international reputation at an all time low," (499) is substantiated throughout their account of the Bush wars, the launching of the Great Recession, growing militarization and increasing domestic oppression by the national security state.

Unfortunately errors, typos and careless editing tarnish this important and daring work. The Triple Entente between Great Britain, Russia and France was one of the secret alliances that destabilized prewar Europe in 1914. Despite the word "triple," Stone and Kuznick incorrectly include Japan and Italy which later joined the "Allies" during the Great War (4). While the Supreme Court reversed through judicial review many New Deal programs such as the National Industrial Recovery Act (NRA) and first Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), the authors claim it was "vetoing" legislative enactments. (62) Only the president can veto acts of Congress. Their description of US concentration camps during World War II is stellar. They are correct in claiming that Hirabayahsi v. US (1943) did not specifically affirm the right of detention of Japanese-American citizens during the war but seem unaware of Korematsu v. US (1944) that explicitly found there was constitutional protection of such racist injustice during wartime. (156)

My own article, "False Dissenters: Manhattan Project Scientists and the Use of the Atomic

Bomb," finally laid to rest the question of the number of scientists in 1945 at the Metallurgical Laboratory (MetLab) at the University of Chicago and Clinton laboratory (Oak Ridge, Tennessee) who signed petitions opposing use of the atomic bombs in July 1945.1 Eighty-eight scientists signed petitions to Truman and not 155 (161). Stone repeats an error in Showtime episode 3, "The Bomb." The Leo Szilard-authored petitions described nuclear weapons as immoral but still supported conditional use of the new weapon against Japan. Seventy scientists wanted Truman to first guarantee Japan an ambiguous "peaceful pursuits in their homeland" and if a Japanese surrender were not forthcoming, then use the bomb. Eighteen scientists even demanded an atomic-bomb warning prior to attack. To exaggerate the number of signatories adds to the erroneous assumption that the Manhattan Project's laboratories were overflowing with anti-nuclear scientists. Many had reservations. Few advocated a no-use policy of the dreadful fission bomb.

A front page *New York Times* article appeared on 11 July 1945 and not on 1 July that Bess Truman, the president's spouse, participated in sending books to war-torn Russia. (note 22, 637) I doubt they were in Russian! Stone and Kuznick claim Alexander Butterfield's revelation of Nixon's secret tapes led to his impeachment. (389-390) Nixon resigned during Watergate prior to formal impeachment. President Carter's obsequious Tehran-based New Year's Eve party with the Shah of Iran, who Carter ironically described as "an island of stability," was 31 December 1977, not 1978 (411). They quote Peter Bourne, a Carter campaign official, on the linkage between the Trilateral Commission and Carter's 1976 presidential quest and source it on p. 551 of Zinn, *People's History*. (402, note 33, 675) No such quotation appears in Zinn.

Per Capita Wealth in 2000 for the United States and Japan appears astonishingly as $143,727 and $180,837 respectively! (546) US per capita income was about $30,000 and Japan's GDP per capita was $25,000 in 2000. One of the victims of American terrorism with over eighty waterboardings was Abu Zubaydah, an alleged Al Qaeda leader, who has been a prisoner for eleven years of which nearly seven have been spent at America's Stalinesque Gulag Guantánamo. In a single paragraph his name appears six times including three as "Zubaida." (509-510) They unfortunately rely at times on historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's works. Stone and Kuznick claim Obama's launching of his presidency was guided by his reliance on Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*. Maybe so but Goodwin, a frequent guest on "Meet the Press," MSNBC and CNN, is an accused plagiarist who apparently paid hush money to silence the victim of an egregious, unethical theft of another's work. Goodwin's popular *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* was largely filched from Lynne McTaggart's, *Kathleen Kennedy: Her Life and Times*. The disgraced historian, who received her Ph.D. from Harvard, was removed as a commentator on PBS and expelled from Harvard's board of overseers. She resigned from the board at Columbia University that awards the Pulitzer Prizes. Readers, including Stone and Kuznick, should be wary of the authenticity despite her crowning as putative sage of the American presidency.

Still, in this flawed but important work of history, Stone and Kuznick present an essential work on the history of American foreign policy. It merits a wide audience and hopefully will stimulate creative and purposeful dialogue among a variety of publics that are dissatisfied with the

American Empire. The book contains a rousing investigative vitality that advances the search for the truth and the people's right to challenge the merchants of death and empire.

Notes

1. American Diplomacy, 2001
https://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2001_03-06/kirstein_manhattan/kirstein_manhattan.html

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Ben Goldacre: Bad Pharma: How Drug Companies Misled Doctors and Harm Patients (Faber and Faber, 2013)

By | 2013: vol. 12, no. 1

In the four months between its UK and US publication this book has left indelible marks. Ben Goldacre's case for comprehensive reporting of drug trials has been cited in British parliamentary debates, national newspapers and medical journals. He has become a central figure in a new campaign to change the regulation of trials, requiring all results to be made public. Most remarkably, considering the vigor of Goldacre's critique of the pharma-ceutical industry and of medical journals, that All Trials campaign has won the support of British drugs firm GSK and the *British Medical Journal.* The latter has announced it will refuse to publish research papers unless all the trial data is made available for independent scrutiny.

GSK announced in February their commitment to release all clinical study reports online, going back to 2000. "I couldn't be any happier," blogged Goldacre in response. "This is huge, and internationally huge." Indeed, these recent initiatives make the response to *Bad Pharma* of the British pharmaceutical industry body, ABPI, that the book is out-of-date and that the industry has moved on, look decidedly silly. Starting with a North American promotional tour for the book from February 17th in Portland, Oregon, Goldacre is taking his crusade to the homeland of the biggest pharma firms and of a regulatory agency, FDA, which is the target of some of his strongest criticisms for failing physicians and their patients.

Epidemiologist and popularizer Goldacre already went global with his first book, *Bad Science*, which was translated into more than twenty languages. Despite the title, this was much more a critique of how science is (mis)represented in media and other public spaces than a critique of how science is done. Goldacre's TED talk on the issues in *Bad Science* has had over 1.1 million views in 18 months; the talk based on *Bad Pharma* is more than keeping pace with over 670,000 in six months.

But *Bad Science* had a much easier case to make, with much softer targets, than does *Bad Pharma*. The media's misuse of statistics or the unsupported claims made for crank diets are of a quite different order from the argument that the multi-billion drugs industry and the multi-billion medical practice that depends on this industry are "broken." Goldacre claims that drugs trials are too short, that they often test drugs against the wrong comparator, that reports of trials showing negative results routinely go missing, that participants in drug trials are lied to, that drugs are marketed for uses other than those for which they have been tested, that drugs regulators conceal data informing their decisions, that published studies on drugs trials downplay side-effects, that drugs companies resist carrying out studies of drugs' efficacy with

‘real-world’ patients, that ‘new’ drugs are often copies, that academics have papers on drugs trials written in their name by contractors for drug companies, and much, much more.

Repeatedly, Goldacre says that the many deficiencies in the testing, regulation and prescription of drugs are causing harm to patients. “Bad pharma”, in Goldacre’s account, causes “avoidable suffering and death”. None of the interests involved is spared his denunciation, though I don’t fully grasp how in specific terms university ethics committees (or, in US parlance, institutional review boards) have “failed us”. As a former chair of such a committee, I may be too sensitive but it seems to me he is arguing for extending the scope of ethics committees’ operations more than identifying failures in how they do their work.

He refers several times to the failure to test two widely prescribed statins for treatment of high cholesterol against each other in “real-world” trials: “If one of these turned out to be just two per cent better than the other at preventing heart attacks and deaths, this knowledge would save vast numbers of lives around the world”. And, just in case, the reader has missed the point, he adds: “Failing to know the answer to this question could be costing us lives, every day that we continue to be ignorant.”

Goldacre’s hand-holding technique is the same as in *Bad Science*, only more so: he says what he is going to say, he says it, and he says what he has just said, and then he says it again in the form of remedies. He takes the reader firmly – and sometimes a little patronisingly – through complex procedures. For those who need to dig deeper, there are over 360 footnotes, many with references to published studies. But the arguments are likely to be clear to the reader who sticks only with the main text. Anyway, Goldacre claims with characteristic immodesty, that for someone who wishes to understand the problem and how to fix it, “this book contains all that you need to know.”

The hundreds of references demonstrate that concerns about the drugs system are widely shared and many of the issues have been extensively researched. As this book was being completed for publication in the UK last fall, a paper was published in the open-access journal, Trials (www.trialsjournal.com/content/13/1/100#B3), that presented seven public-interest arguments against non-disclosure of trials data for commercial reasons. Goldacre acknowledges in particular the many contributions of Iain Chalmers, founder of the Cochrane Collaboration that promotes evidence-based medicine, and now a leader with Goldacre of the All Trials campaign. Contributors and editors of medical journals have in recent years been much concerned with “publication bias” (preference for positive results), access to trials data and conflicts of interest. Journals have required increasing disclosure from contributors of any relationships that may affect their assessments.

Goldacre acknowledges a little begrudgingly some of these changes but also denounces “fake fixes” – including the FDA Modernization Act and the associated data resource at www.clinicaltrials.gov – and insists that much more needs to be done to repair the system. Most of us know or at least suspect that doctors are targeted by drugs companies with various incentives to favor their products. But Goldacre also takes us behind the scenes at medical

conferences and into the planning of marketing campaigns. Hidden information and missing data are where he starts and finishes and where he is gaining most traction. Transparency and disclosure are Goldacre's main remedies. In one of his most apt medical metaphors he insists that "sunlight is a very powerful disinfectant".

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Kevin Avery, Everything is an Afterthought: The Life and Writings of Paul Nelson (Fantagraphics Books, 2011)

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In 1960 Paul Nelson founded the *Little Sandy Review* with his partner Jon Pankake and made it one of the first Zines to garner a small but influential audience, which grew not by hype but solely by word of mouth. The *Little Sandy* had a circulation of perhaps a thousand (my guess) and all of us who were into "deep Folk" read it and loved it for its unyielding emphasis on integrity and authenticity. Nelson, based in Minneapolis, knew the young Dylan and became his first real champion. Nelson seems to have sensed instantly that this failed frat boy from Hibbing, Minnesota was going to rearrange the musical gene pool, as he watched the scruffy lad absorb all the hard-to-find LP's that he and his partner harbored. Author Kevin Avery has done us a great service in bringing Paul Nelson's woefully neglected story and life on the music culture scene into focus. This is a book for all those interested in what made 20th Century American music an anthem for the world. Avery traces the arc of Paul's life from obscurity in Minneapolis to a position as an avatar (alongside the likes of Lester Bangs) in American music criticism and then, as the dumbing-down kicked into high gear, downward through a gradual decline that left Nelson dead in a third floor walk-up in New York, forgotten and penniless.

Ten years after the *Little Sandy* phase, and long after Paul had already gone to New York, and left his wife and child for somebody else (it didn't work out), he spent some time working at Chicago's Mercury Records where he formed a friendship with my friend Ron Oberman, who knew music like no other, and who ran the label's Publicity department. They were a great and transformative combination. Mercury in those days was still one of those classic dinosaurs that, despite the ample revenue that Rock offered, kept stumbling slowly toward oblivion. The Chess Brothers, Mercury, and countless other record companies had come up on the techno side of the Rock bonanza and the Folk boom, and to suggest that they were absolutely clueless is to put it mildly. The Chess Brothers had helped create the modern Blues and R and B market from the trunks of their Cadillacs. Mercury, which was simply in the right place at the right time, stumbled from act to act never quite certain about anything beyond the bottom line. The music game kept changing rapidly, and never more so than in the years between 1960 and 1970.

Paul was in the process of selling Mercury on the New York Dolls who he had helped discover and publicize. He also brought aboard Mike Seeger, one of America's eminent Folk revivalists. Seeger was a charter member of the New Lost City Ramblers, who re-introduced the country to its extraordinary Southern string band heritage embodied in groups like the Skillet Lickers, and performers like the legendary banjoist Doc Boggs, whose name remained scrawled on the toilet wall of the Fickle Pickle club on Chicago's State Street: "Doc Boggs Lives." As Avery

notes, those early days of the Folk revival were a strange situation, as mystifying as the bumpy trajectory of Paul's career.

Mercury Records was a world of hustling A and R people, of producers who hadn't a clue (see Avery's note on Robin McBride), of ageing PR people whose expense accounts were padded with the first Egyptian Pyramid, and, most of all, Irving Steinberg, Mercury's CEO, whose anti-social skills and kack-handed beat downs made him a legend. One of the books more poignant moments is an A and R meeting at which Nelson plays the new Mike Seeger LP for the employees; a record containing obscure instrumentals and songs of the sort that qualified Seeger as an extraordinary folklorist as befits a son of America's first folk music family.

Stan (Mercury employee): "Whereas the hit single?"

Nelson: "There is no hit single."

Stan: "What are we doing with this shit if there is no hit single?"

You get the idea.

Steinberg, who occasionally would scream an underling into fawning submission and then cop to a well-honed amnesia, kept confusing the Velvet Underground – whose material Nelson helped the label purchase and release – with Deep Purple, a heavy metal ensemble as far from the Underground as Lou Reed was from a Pentecostal shouter. The New York Dolls, after signing, had a long and sordid record biz career, interlaced with the usual clichés; drug overdoses, failed tours, and record sales that slumped as the band botched its way down Rock Victim Boulevard.

Paul's great failing was the terrible temptation to "do good," coupled with a real passion for rockers who could write. While editing at *Rolling Stone* he gave significant boost to, and was a friend of, Warren Zevon, Jackson Brown, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen, among many others. He nurtured a close relationship with Rod Stewart too, who after early years of interesting work Nelson eventually realized was headed for the Borscht Belt resorts where some of us had always envisioned him headlining just over Buddy Hackett or Jerry Seinfeld.

Nelson could tell that corporate Rock was on the way and that it would obliterate the community-based hardscrabble bands that preceded it. He loathed the Eagles, who embodied the California based know- nothing lyricism and profit-driven hot licks and chart-busting albums that formed the model for the Gold Rush that followed. Hotel California and the Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven are now the stuff of bankable nostalgia and were the soundtracks that signaled the end of hippy delusions, FM Progressive radio, and the anarchic visions of the Communards whose brief day was over almost as soon as it had gotten airplay.

At *Rolling Stone* Nelson came into head-on collision with Editor in Chief Jann Wenner's rigid editorial policies that ultimately drove him from the magazine and its regular paycheck. It's not

all an immediate slide into oblivion, but the signs were there. What had started as a heady period of liberation and political engagement now does a ragged Tango into corporate temerity, record business fatuity, and niggling reaction. Jann Wenner's tenure at *Rolling Stone*, from the early coverage of what had been a band-driven community revival in San Francisco, to the profit-driven poses of the 80's are as good a flow chart as any for where things went.

There is a marvelous film in Avery's book with the laser-like prescience of Nelson at its center: rising from Midwestern obscurity to New York prominence, from a heyday at Mercury and *Rolling Stone* down to drudging in a video store. All of these stations of the Rock cross were graced by the casual humiliations Nelson endured at every stage. Nelson's last decade was spent working at a video store, penniless, his best work long behind him as he listened to the Bluegrass music of the Stanley Brothers, with his wonderfully lucid rock commentaries deep-sixed. Nelson's idealism, undrugged clarity, and his teetotaler's clear conscience are what help sink him in a world where Blow and Stretch Limos, trashed hotel rooms and six figure advances supplanted good energy and left a numbed post-Vietnam world fixated on wretched excess, coming down to us as media rewrite and promo for the sodden middle-brow, televised future once promoted as liberation and vision. "Yes Virginia, the Rolling Stones once learned all they would come to know—– from their audiences."

Nelson never abandoned his belief in the power of music to transform and ennoble the efforts of those who, for a brief time, sought to get beyond the toxic media bubble that slimes the merchandise and bleeds the air of its promise. Avery's book does not stint on Nelson's failures; his guilt over a marriage and son abandoned; his later inability to fulfill assignments such as high profile pieces on people like Clint Eastwood, who had a genuine affection for him, but found that he simply could not deliver. His growing isolation and inability to confront even the simplest of life's demands (he almost botches his Social Security application but for friends who intervened); and finally his withered Muse which, at the end, simply made it impossible for him to write. As Scott Fitzgerald, a fellow Minnesotan who was one of Paul Nelson's Muses, said of Gatsby: "Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead."

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Lost and Found Books: Nelson Algren's Nonconformity: Writing on Writing (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998)

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Lost & Found Books

Lost & Found Books is a new and occasional Logos series of review essays (3000-3500 words) devoted to reconsiderations of books that reviewers argue were lost in the shuffle, fell unjustly by the wayside or are otherwise worth a revival of interest. Submissions are welcome but it is always wise to propose pieces first.

* * *

Conformity sounds like a plight you would only find debated earnestly on a *Mad Men* episode, a throwback to a bygone era of calculated timidity, of learning to peddle yourself shamelessly in the social scene, of cookie-cutting yourself to employer expectations in a tight job market, of . . . Hmm. Hang on, yes, conformity is back, though probably less sincerely so than in the 1950s. People still conform and they do so for all the obvious reasons. You just don't notice because they are acting like everyone else around you. In most milieus, being a conspicuous oddball or lone dissident can still get you hurt, fired, ridiculed or shunned. Protective coloration, not ripeness, is all.

The advantages of 'going along to get along' are dangled for the clever ones, the potentially anarchic ones, to consider. The proving ground in middle-class professional culture is smooth transition from University campus (where you never inhaled) to a shiny pseudo-zeitgeist concocted by dead-souled corporate cretins in the ever leaner and meaner workplace. Once upon a time passing this pallid test with flying colors resulted in bigger paydays, more opportunities, approval of similarly slick self-seeking peers, and affirmation that you are an enviable topnotch climber. You even can be hailed as a daredevil for perfectly tepid acts, if it makes you feel better. They got it covered. They? They are the guardians of the status quo, whatever it is, in any time, any culture or subculture, any place.

Increasingly in our brazenly and systematically swindled world, though, you can maneuver through "twenty years of schooling,' as Dylan rasped, and all the suits do is "put you on the day shift." Be glad you got a job of any kind at your master's whim. Over the last few decades, those 'straight' people, who Fox News serves and celebrates, diligently rigged the economy, deranged the legal system and purchased Congress so as to deny benefits to anyone except the

lobbying bank buzzards and corporate cronies. Every ounce of your added energy and ingenuity results in productivity gains that flow straight to the top 1%, not you.[1] This radical rearrangement didn't happen overnight or by accident. The best that the vast majority of wage slaves can hope for economically is to run in place, and be glad of the chance to lick a shiny loafer or two. Well then, why bother?

Is conformity innate? Is there a gene? The social cues at play are way too powerful for a crucial test ever to be performed that separates the cultural from the physiological influences. It's no surprise that as youngsters grow up in a postindustrial society they ache to form, or scheme to enter, cliques ranging from clubs to secret college societies to 'epistemic communities' to gain an edge in a race they are taught not to question. Ivy Leaguers over the last few decades flocked into Wall Street jobs where they lay their prostituted pedigrees at the feet of shimmering Mammon, managed to sabotage the Western hemisphere's economy, and called it progress.[2] How smart was that? Nonetheless, the staple-faced denizens in the Goth bar, no less than the fashionistas lounging in the posh Manhattan bar, are about as non-conformist as a school of fish. Each little social system nurtures and protects its eager minions, so long as they are useful.

Why it's positively unhealthy to misbehave. Richard Kraft –Ebbing in 1892 concocted the diagnosis "political and reformatory insanity" to label wayward souls who exhibited "an inclination to differ from the mass opinion." The "incubation period is long, often reaching back to childhood, he solemnly noted.[3] So science, such as it is, marches on. Still, it's hard to hold any pose for long – the Victorian era was the longest and spawned rancorous Freud – so a rupture was inevitable. *Must You Conform?* is the title of a mutinous tome that I recall long ago plucking from a library shelf in Champaign-Urbana.[4] That the question needed to be asked said a lot. The University of Illinois in the late 60s was the largest "Greek" (fraternity- and sorority-infested) campus in America. Kids competed to please Cro-Magnon post-pubescent committees and to smooch the right rear ends: networking, as it is sanitarily termed today. Paul Goodman in *Growing Up Absurd* fretted scathingly about a "dangerous conformity" as a toxic aspect of modern life.[5] Even billionaire J. Paul Getty deplored a conformity that "can do the Free World's cause more harm than a dozen Nikita Khrushchevs."[6] In its pre-Beatles heyday *Mad Magazine* thrived on lampooning the mania for conformity. All this changed somewhat in the late 60s and many crew-cut frat boys suddenly sprouted Sergeant Pepper mustaches and hair as they hurried to catch up, usually quite cluelessly, with what most regarded as the latest fashion to conform with.

The days of *in loco parentis*, dress codes, and looking alike are long gone, aren't they? Now it's rainbow hair, nose rings, requisite tattoos and punctures. But marketers got it outflanked, issuing opaque slogans about the 'hip transgressive,' 'urban chic' and so on.[7] Still, things were different in those heady days of yore. Out of savings from summer construction jobs I paid nearly all tuition, room and board at a flagship state university. Couldn't happen anymore. That older generation wasn't shackled by the massive debts of today's students, and thus their latitude to experiment and to disagree scared the hell out of vengeful 'squares' who, as Tennessee Williams experienced, 'hate anything not in their book.' Squares always lust for, and

cower to, power. Check the Nixon tape transcripts and you find Tricky Dick and his soon-to-be-penitentiaried pals plotting to uproot the economic sources of affordable University education so as to undermine youth protest movements. How do you question what you're told when the creeps in control keep you deep in hock?

Give in. As Lieutenant William Calley's high school principal approvingly observed, "Rusty wasn't a bright boy but he did what he was told." Obedience was the only saving grace of this dull but willing instrument for mass murder at My Lai. Nick Turse's recent book affirms what any unblinkered student of the Vietnam War knew, that atrocities were commonplace; war crimes, and cover-ups, were the norm.[8] Trust the authorities and that's what you wind up with. It is conformists who commit atrocities, not misfits. (To a request for a piece on a local multiple murderer, to be entitled "Crime of the Century" Algren dryly replied, "I don't want to go to Vietnam" – though he later did.)[9] As historian Andrew Bacevich, a welcome defector from that normative realm, observed, the military profession 'did not look kindly on nonconformity. Climbing the ladder of career success required curbing maverick tendencies. To get ahead, you needed to be a team player."[10] Colin Powell, yet to answer for his likely role covering up My Lai, spoke of the "pragmatics" required in getting ahead – as if ambition by itself excused sheer indecency. Yet Americans have always been conformists. Tocqueville wrote in 1835 that he 'knew of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America."[11] It's as American as Dutch apple pie.

In the early 1950s in a slim manuscript *Nonconformity: Writing on Writing*, Chicago novelist Nelson Algren, fresh from winning the National Book award for a volume that started out as war novel but transfigured into the tragedy of a card sharp junkie, delivered a jeremiad about middle class conformity greasing the skids into the paranoiac McCarthy era. What conformists strived for 'was an eternally elusive secure zone in which to live what authorities ordain as a normal life," lamented Algren. Yet there is no such thing. Life "is never lived that way, though many people persuade themselves to the contrary.'[12] Good writers remind us of what we forget or never noticed. Life in the *Father Knows Best* mode was abnormal, a televised fiction, such that this blithe candy-coated vision was worth chewing up in semi-horror movies like *Pleasantville*, *Blue Velvet and A Boy and His Dog*. Why do audiences root for the Jim Carrey character to burst the backdrop illusion of his intricately ordered artificial 'life' in *The Truman Show*? What we call conformity was a myriad of forms of sly concealment of socially unacceptable impulses and practices. And many taboos then are waning today for having been stubbornly confronted.

At the National Book Award ceremony for *The Man with the Golden Arm* in 1950 Algren, who signed a *New York Times* letter entitled "Speak up for freedom," and chaired the Chicago Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg case, was already a marked man, on the FBI's list and that of every snoop around. (Check Keywiki – a rightwing web account book charting any senselessly progressive and humane act they can detect.) Reactionary lamebrains cherish their lists, from the 'Hollywood Ten' on down, tracking who's been naughty and who's not been nice to them. It's yet another device for inducing us to buckle to moronic rules. Anyway, Algren's thoughts on conformity first saw light in an essay in the Chicago Daily News in

1952.[13] Doubleday commissioned a book and then declined to publish it in 1953 – the same year the FBI yanked Algren's passport.[14] In *Nonconformity* Algren was assessing the impact of this true "big chill' on writers, but every single intimidated American was his potential audience.

Algren commences by examining Scott Fitzgerald's archetypal American 'struggle to write with profundity and at the same time live like a millionaire"- a doomed acrobatic act. Fitzgerald at the end was left 'wondering and blinking, as he contemplated his Savoy Hotel bill, whether one could be both a good writer and a good person." Algren feared that writers were slipping – or being shoved – into the 'inert whirlpool of egotism that is world of the average businessman.' Cautious writers, Algren accused, were forgetting the "problem of the heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing." The new crop of ambitious scribes see "the way things are going, the main things are not problems of the heart but to keep one's nose clean.' As one scans the mainstream media's book review pages today one finds that Algren's complaint still carries considerable heft.

Algren was a devout chronicler of the 1% – that is, of the 1% scrabbling at the rock bottom of the social scale "where everyone has to win every round just to stay alive." He acquired the *savoir faire* of the streets, but only so much. "I was a fairly good mark, not too good a mark," recalls Algren ruefully about his sometimes costly mingling with junkies and hustlers.[15] Returning to his theme of conformity, Algren's words resonate with other critics such as dissident shrink Erich Fromm. "The average individual does not permit himself to be aware of thoughts or feelings that are incompatible with the patterns of his culture, and hence he is forced to repress them,' Fromm observed, a bit too clinically. "To that degree to which a person – because of his own intellectual and spiritual development – feels his solidarity with humanity, can he tolerate social ostracism, and vice versa." Fromm's next sentence, however, captures Algren: "The ability to act according to one's conscience depends on the degree to which one has transcended the limits of one's society and has become a citizen of the world." Presto, the nonconformist.

Algren revisits the emetic spectacle of director Elia Kazan, actor Jose Ferrer and playwright Maxwell Anderson on bended knees before the loathsome House Committee on Un-American Activities. Algren warns those tempted to do cringe likewise that "he knows enough of the heart that it cannot conform" – at least not without exacting a high price.[16] Are there extenuating circumstances? Algren invoked Finley Peter Dunne's fictitious sage barkeeper Mr. Dooley as to "turning on the gas [light] in the darkest heart you'd find they had a 'good raison for th' worst things it done' which include "needin' th' money' or profits." While Algren had a soft spot for what he termed 'lonesome monsters,' clearly the profit motive was no excuse.[17] Sociopathic traits were no alibi either. Look at Hervey Cleckley's *The Mask of Sanity*, written around the same time, and you'll find acute prophetic descriptions of the psychopathology of a Dick Cheney and just about any Wall Street honcho.[18]

Nonconformity, posthumously published in 1998, was composed during the Korean War or near enough to it, about "five years after we have begun to rearm."[19] Algren rhetorically asked

about the incipient military-industrial complex: Are we more secure for 'putting a hot-car thief in charge of a parking lot?" No nation today comes close to the US level of misnomered 'defense' and 'homeland security' expenditures. Iran terrifies our timid policy makers. Really? Algren also mauled "long-remaindered intellectuals on short leashes" who say things are "worse in Russia, as if it helps." Things are worse in Greece and Spain today. Feel better? (Well, Greece is coming to a neighborhood near you if aficionados of austerity continue to get their way.) Contemporary 'intellectuals on short leashes' infest Sunday morning news programs: George and David and Cokie and all the glossy fizzy corporate cheerleaders. A forerunner in the 1950s, by the way, arch-conservative Norman Podhoretz, whose first book *Making It* celebrates himself as a envious outsider aching to become a WASP establishment jerk, attacked Algren for his 'boozy sentimentality.' Scorn from odious quarters is inevitable and welcome.

Rather than smarmy beady-eyed Horatio Algers, Algren lauds Dreiser, Mencken, Veblen, Steffens, and Lewis. Our singular American genius Mark Twain towers among even that splendid company. Algren skewers popular novelists who disingenuously yearn only 'to give pleasure to the reading public" and plead they have "no right to impose [their] views on race and religion." So then, Algren deduces, 'if it isn't the writer's task to relate mankind to the things of the earth, it must be his job to keep them unrelated.' Repelled by the businessman's creed that "no values are greater than thrift, self-preservation, and piety," Algren speaks of outward show, of a 'neon wilderness' (an Algren title) dominated by whitewashed high-rise sepulchers full of schemers. He flatly accused the American middle class of adoring "personal comfort as an end in itself" which "is, in essence, a denial of life."[20] He detested cozy ingrown literary cliques, pulling themselves up the ladder by each other's Gucci bootstraps. "When [a writer] sees scarcely anyone except other writers," says Algren, "he is ready for New York" and what Algren terms "bellhop writing" – writing to order. "No book was ever worth writing that wasn't done with the attitude that 'This ain't what you rung for, Jack – but its what you're damned well getting."

Fitzgerald put "one little drop of something – not blood, not a tear, not my seed, but me more intimately than these, in every story." What Algren looked for in writing was not just pity but "vindictiveness" of a certain kind. (For Algren too it didn't count if the cause you championed was just your own interests.) "A certain ruthlessness and a sense of alienation from society is as essential to creative writing as it is to armed robbery'- summed up in the frank urge "to get even."[21] Of course, Algren concedes, he won't but it's worth trying. "The artist must approach his work in the same frame of mind in which the criminal commits his deed." In this moneychanger's paradise, it's easier to make people mean than to make them kind [and] society is organized so meanly that man cannot help but perpetrate villainies." (Consider here Algren's pulverizingly poetic *Chicago: City On The Make*.) The late Joe Bageant later wrote brilliantly and in the same spirit about these crushed and dyspeptic denizens in small towns and rural America.[22] "Americans everywhere face gunfire better than guilt."[23] Indeed. Moral courage may not be in shorter supply than physical courage, but it certainly gets less publicity and approval. Maybe it's why we hear so little of Algren today.

No one is entirely immune to the allure of the bright lights blazing around this remorseless cutthroat system of getting and spending. “From the coolest zoot-suit cat getting leaping drunk on straight gin to the gentlest suburban matron getting discreetly tipsy on Alexanders, the feeling is that of having too much of something not really needed, and nothing at all of something desperately needed. They both want to live and neither knows how,” he writes, and “that is the trap.” As for most therapists, we may ask, “Doctor, what’s my problem?’ And the doctor cannot speak the truth [because] to stiff-arm a customer with the alarm that his trouble is something as simple as cowardice. or as hopeless as a spiritual void, would be only to lose that [fee] to a competitor with a more flattering tale to tell.” Few resist “the advantage of “being on the side of the house.” As for the other end of the scale where junkies and down-and-outs dwell, when authorities “bear down they make our risk bigger, and the cost goes higher . . . So the junkies got to come up with more gold than ever, and the only one place to get it. Off the square.” So much for our straight-laced wars on drugs. The conformists, as usual, know not what they do.

“We presume the accused to be guilty by the act of having been accused” – all the better to strike them with sneaky drones or imprison them via a new Star Chamber. McCarthyism stank of ’the same sickness as that of Salem’ where we ‘exorcize our devils by destroying the dissenters or odd fish of the tribe.’ The syndrome that ‘We boast about our strength yet display our fear’ has never dissipated. Nor have ‘the smokescreens with which we ingeniously conceal our true condition from ourselves.” And “our assumption of happiness through mechanical ingenuity is nonetheless tragic for being naïve.”[24] It’s taken a generation or more to soak that one in. Ultimately, “when we get more houses than we can live in, more cars than we can ride in, more food than we can eat ourselves, the only way of getting richer is by cutting off those who don’t have enough,” diagnosed Algren. He didn’t need a crystal ball to discern what the 1% were up to.

Algren was no saint in the threadbare cassock sense of the word, but he stuck, sometimes crankily, to his vocation. Perhaps he might have treated his women, including great passion Simone De Beauvoir, a tad better. The supposedly streetwise author got his pockets picked by Hollywood hucksters. Algren too was a poker addict who always aimed to ‘fill the inside straight,” a mentality any worthwhile writer knows.[25] In all the arts this gamble is the supreme aim, and it remains the case even in our *Mahagonny* world where no motive other than gain is deemed sane. (Conformists always play the percentages.) Societies, as one mordant wit remarked, honor their conformists when they are alive and their troublemakers when they are dead. Yet no one remembers conformists, snivellers and sycophants, except as such. What Algren spotted in Irish playwright Brendan Behan’s chubby face reflected his own soul: Behan ‘deploys defiance while concealing pity” and so “his intellectual belief in the class struggle is modified by his emotional conviction that the only class is Mankind.”[26] Literature is fundamentally a rebel’s trade because, as Algren urged, it ‘is made on any occasion when a challenge is made to the legal apparatus by a conscience in touch with humanity.” Algren is one of those cantankerous nonconformists who reward, and deserve, rediscovery.

Notes

[1] "Recovery in US is lifting Profits, But not Adding Jobs." *New York Times* 3 March 2013.

[2] See Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (Durham: Duke University, 2009).

[3] Thomas Roder et. al, *Psychiatrists – The Men behind Hitler* (LA: Freedom Publishers, 1995), p. 23.

[4] Robert Lindner, *Must You Conform?* (New York: Rinehart, 1956).

[5] Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (Random House, 1960 , p. 80

[6] Quoted in Erich Fromm, *May Man Prevail?* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), p. 79 fn1

[7] Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outsiders* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), p. 233.

[8] Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013)

[9] Nelson Algren, *Algren at Sea: Notes from A Sea Diary & Who Lost an American?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), p. 332.

[10] Andrew Bacevich, 'The Unmaking of a Company Man' accessed at https://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/08/26-6

[11] Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America, Volume 1* (New York: Aeterna, 2011), p. 208

[12] H. E. F. O'Donohue, *Conversations with Nelson Algren* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 22.

[13] *Nonconformity*, p. 99

[14] Bettina Drew, *Nelson Algren: A Life on the Wild Side* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 237.

[15] "Nelson Algren Interview" *Paris Review* (Winter 1955), p. 6.

[16] *Nonconformity*, p. 4

[17] 'The stories that follow have the common hope that every man, no matter how lonesome nor what a monster, is deserving of understanding by us other lonesome monsters.' Nelson Algren, *Nelson Algren's own Book of Lonesome Monsters* (New York: Lancer Books, 1962)

[18] Hervey Cleckley, *The Mask Of Sanity: An Attempt to Clarify some Issues about the So-Called Psychopathic Personality* (St Louis: Mosby, 1955).

[19] *Nonconformity*, p. 10

[20] *Nonconformity*, p. 20

[21] *Nonconformity*, p. 34

[22] Joe Bageant, *Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War* (New York: Crown, 2007) and *Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir* (New York: Scribe Publications, 2011)

[23] Nelson Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1951), p. 95.

[24] *Nonconformity*, p. 76.

[25] Drew, *Nelson Algren*, p. 257.

[26] Algren, *Algren at Sea*, p. 57

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