

**Louis Hartz at 50:  
On the Varieties of Counterrevolutionary Experience in America**

If we want things to stay as they are, things  
will have to change.

– Giuseppe di Lampedusa

This past year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*, and like the wedding anniversary of many a married couple, it raises the question: How have these two – Hartz and America – stayed together all these years? Hartz was a Marxist who gave up, though not entirely, his Marxism. America, according to Hartz, never had a Marxism to give up. Hartz was intellectual and erudite, dropping references even well read academics will find obscure. America is neither. Hartz was a professor of paradox. America dislikes both. Critics and their countries seldom make each other happy. But has there ever been a union more ill conceived than this?

We have here more than a simple attraction of opposites. Opposites attract, after all, because they recognize and desire something in the other that they lack or long ago suppressed in themselves. But Hartz and America together constitute such a map of misreading it would take a Harold Bloom – or Edward Albee – years to decipher it. Hartz claimed that feudalism never came to the United States. As Karen Orren has shown, however, early Americans did transplant English medievalism to these shores, producing a “belated feudalism” in the workplace that lasted well into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Hartz deemed America incurably liberal, a permanent chorus of John Locke and Adam Smith. Yet non-liberal voices have frequently sung here, often to great acclaim.<sup>2</sup> Hartz claimed that no feudalism plus liberalism equals no socialism. Scholars...well, they've been less successful in dislodging this last part of Hartz's argument.

The United States, for its part, has been equally blinkered about Hartz. Still read and assigned to graduate students across the country, *The Liberal Tradition in America* is often taken by its advocates as a celebration of the American consensus and by its critics as an apologia for the Cold War. That Hartz expressed no pleasure about the Cold War or America's escape from European radicalism – indeed, he would eventually flee the United States to wander the earth in search of alternative ideologies, and die in

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Ideals of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Istanbul<sup>3</sup> – has rarely deterred his readers. They have agreed that Hartz is a booster, not a critic, of the American consensus. It may be true of “every polemicist,” as Hartz wrote, that “being ignored...is the handwriting on the wall,” but surely being misunderstood is an equally bad omen.<sup>4</sup>

The anniversary of *The Liberal Tradition* raises another, more difficult, question, however: How can a book that gets so much so wrong nevertheless seem so right? I have read and taught Hartz and his critics for years. My adviser in graduate school was Rogers Smith, who more than anyone else has documented the persistence of non-liberal and anti-liberal forms in the United States, and I have been a friend and fellow traveler of Orren for the better part of a decade. Each time I read Smith’s work, or Orren’s, I nod my head and think, yes, that’s true. But then I go back to Hartz and think, this is also true. The evidence weighs heavily against Hartz, but the picture he paints seems inescapably right.

What is that picture? It is of a distinctive social type, the person who assumes that his beliefs are everyone’s and so reacts to political difference and challenge with a casual shrug or fitful rage. In his opening chapter, Hartz identifies “a vast and almost charming innocence of mind” in the United States, “indifferent to the challenge of socialism” and not “given to far suspicions and sidelong glances.” (6-7) Less than five pages later, however, that calm erupts into “violent moods of...mass Lockianism” – Hartz is speaking of America’s two red scares – in which political “eccentricity” is hunted down and purged as a form of social “sin.” (12) It is this mutation – from a lazy imperialism of the mind into a ferocious reaction of the heart – that concerns Hartz, who finds its apotheosis in the domestic and international counterrevolution that was the Cold War.

If intellectual imperialism and political reaction are indeed the themes of Hartz’s book, or at least the themes still worth exploring – and that is what I intend to do here – we would do well to confront and discard two of his other arguments, for they will only cloud our understanding of these themes. First, that there is something peculiarly liberal about the American counterrevolution, with its fusion of messianism, revanchism, and repression. McCarthyism, the paradigmatic expression of this fusion, certainly had its liberal elements in the form of individuals (Harry Truman, Arthur Schlesinger, and Hubert Humphrey) and ideas (freedom, capitalism, and democracy). But liberals and Democrats were collaborators with McCarthyism, not its initiating forces. To truly understand the crackdown on the Left during the 1940s and 1950s, we have to begin where that movement of repression began: with big and small business, the FBI, the American Legion, the Catholic Church, and the conservative coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats in Congress. And the animating hostilities of this right-wing assembly – against

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<sup>3</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955, 1991), p. 157. Hereafter cited in text.

unions, liberals, radicals, Democrats, Jews, atheists, blacks, and modernity – bear far more resemblance to the worldview of the old European Right than to any postulate of liberalism.<sup>5</sup>

Hartz implicitly acknowledges that nothing inherent in liberalism dictates America’s bad feelings about radicalism. Throughout his book, he counterpoises America’s “absolutist” and “irrational” liberalism to Europe’s more tolerant and reasoned strains, suggesting that liberalism as an idea is not necessarily prone to reaction. (10, 13) Hartz wonders “whether American liberalism can acquire through external experience that sense of relativity, that spark of philosophy which European liberalism acquired through an internal experience of social diversity and social conflict.” (14) Liberalism, he intimates, contains resources within itself that may enable its American proponents to disentangle themselves from repression and reaction. “Here is a doctrine [liberalism] which everywhere in the West has been a glorious symbol of individual liberty, yet in America its compulsive power has been so great that it has posed a threat to liberty itself.” (11) The problem, in other words, is not liberalism as such but the kind of liberalism America sponsors, which winds up betraying itself and morphing into its opposite. Hartz’s concern, we might say, is not so much liberalism as it is illiberalism in extremis.

Second, Hartz believed this mix of breezy imperialism and wild reaction was uniquely American. But even the most cursory perusal of European history yields multiple instances of a similar blend. “I contend that we are the first race in the world,” wrote Cecil Rhodes, “and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.” (See Teddy Roosevelt.) Speaking of British war aims in 1917, Lord Balfour told the New York Chamber of Commerce that “since August, 1914, the fight has been for the highest spiritual advantages of mankind, without a petty thought or ambition.” (See Woodrow Wilson.) And in 1935, Arnold Toynbee identified the success of the British Empire with “the supreme interest of the whole world.”<sup>6</sup> (See George W. Bush or Michael Ignatieff.)

If we discard these two assumptions of Hartz, we can begin to explore an aspect of American life that is admittedly far removed from, and even contradicts, his overt argument, but which is more attuned to his deeper cuts at the conservative, even counterrevolutionary, elements of politics in the United States. For that, in the end, is what is most useful in Hartz for us today: not his flawed account of a dogmatic, hegemonic liberalism but his deft navigation of the reactionary currents of American political culture. Skeptics might argue that I am performing here the same dialectical jujitsu Hartz so often performed on American political thought, claiming that a writer is arguing the exact opposite of what he plainly states. The explicit corollary, after all, of Hartz’s no feudalism, no revolution thesis is his no feudalism, no

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Sperling McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1957-1954* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1998); Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 179-225.

<sup>6</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1939, 1964), pp. 76-77.

reaction thesis. “Lacking Robespierre,” Hartz wrote about America, “it lacks Maistre.” (5) But as I hope to show, my approach is warranted, both as a revisionist appropriation of Hartz and as an analysis of the varieties of counterrevolutionary experience in America.

It was in the course of investigating the southern defense of slavery that Hartz stumbled upon his most arresting insight about the counterrevolutionary persuasion. “If it seems on the surface like a French Revolution in reverse,” Hartz wrote of the southern position in the Civil War, it “is really nothing of the kind. The fact that it seems like one in reverse, that the ‘reaction’ of the South is also a ‘revolution,’ ought to suggest this to us at once.” (148) Though the slaveholders imagined themselves as Burkean aristocrats and the South as a vast medieval estate, Hartz claimed that they and their society were thoroughly liberal. Calhoun’s theory of concurrent majorities was an adaptation of Locke; slaveholders defended rebellion and minority rights with a fervor Shays and Madison would have appreciated; they constructed a constitutional theory so rationalist it would have “staggered even Sieyès” (159); they believed in capitalism. So when the southerners imported Burke, they were forced into the very un-Burkean position of transplanting a European feudalism that was as far removed from the native soil as Jacobinism was from the Old Regime. Their conservatism, in other words, was anti-traditional, even revolutionary – the ultimate proof, for Hartz, of its bankruptcy and inauthenticity. (145-200) “How can a man be an iconoclastic ‘conservative’?” Hartz asked. “How can Maistre breathe the spirit of Voltaire?” (151)

What Hartz identified as the fatal flaw of the southern argument, however, is a critical feature of counterrevolutionary thought everywhere. Counterrevolutionaries, of course, often claim that they simply seek a restoration of the old regime. But in the course of challenging their revolutionary opponents, they are inevitably driven to construct an entirely new regime and a new form of politics, which bear little resemblance to the regime they claim to be defending. And that is so for two reasons: first, counterrevolutionaries realize that the old regime cannot be restored; and, second, their experience of seeing the revolution destroy that regime teaches them a lesson about politics that the old regime’s defenders never learned: that human agency, including willed acts of violence and force, can order social relationships and patterns of authority. Just as revolutionaries interrupt inherited time for the sake of an imaginary future, so do counterrevolutionaries interrupt revolutionary time for the sake an imagined past, a past so stylized and remote from present realities that it qualifies as the future.

What initially catapults counterrevolutionaries to full political consciousness – and what distinguishes them from their more benighted comrades on the Right – is their realization that the world has changed irreversibly, that the old regime is gone, and for good reason: its defenders were faithless, corrupt, and impotent. “The first condition of an ordained revolution,” wrote Maistre, “is that whatever

could have prevented it does not exist and that nothing succeeds for those who wish to prevent it.”<sup>7</sup> Not only does the counterrevolutionary realize that he and his society cannot return to life as it simply was, but he also suspects that it precisely this sort of wistfulness on the part of the old regime’s defender that got them into trouble in the first place. They and their kind, argues the counterrevolutionary, lacked the vision and the will to impose themselves upon society. Settling for ambling processions and empty rituals, the old regime’s defenders had none of the passion or élan that animated the old regime when it was young. For the counterrevolutionary, then, the more immediate enemy is not the revolutionary but his putative allies on the Right. Thus, Maistre devoted much of his *Considerations on France* to a critique of the church and the aristocracy, which he dismissed with a line from Racine: “Now see the sad fruits your faults produced,/ Feel the blows you have yourselves induced.” (10) More recently, one could point to the legendary distaste of the New Right for the amoral realpolitik and compromises with the welfare state that were the hallmarks of the Republican Party of Nixon and Kissinger during the 1970s.

Having settled accounts with the old regime, counterrevolutionaries grow quickly indebted to their revolutionary antagonists. Indeed, Maistre’s most rapturous comments in *Considerations on France* are reserved for the Jacobins, whose brutal will and penchant for violence he plainly envies. Thanks to their efforts, Maistre argues, France was purified and restored to its rightful pride of place among Europe’s family of nations. “The revolutionary government hardened the soul of France by tempering it in blood.” The Revolution rallied the people against foreign invaders, a “prodigy” that “only the infernal genius of Robespierre could accomplish.” (16) The revolutionary oath of the clergy, Maistre insists, separated the wheat from the chaff, identifying those churchmen who refused to take it as the true servants of God. The dispossession of church properties stripped the clergy of their worldly concerns and forced them to a purer faith. (18-19) And through the miracle of the Terror, the Revolution forged the very sword upon which it finally impaled itself. Had the Old Regime been prematurely returned to power, Maistre wonders, “would the sacred sword of justice have fallen relentlessly like Robespierre’s guillotine?” (14)

Through their confrontation with the Left, counterrevolutionaries come to prize originality over imitation, and adopt the future as their preferred tense. Even Burke, so often depicted as a simple-minded tribune of a nostalgic past, believed that every society necessarily lives in a state of temporal flux, that the stasis championed by defenders of the old regime is as much a fantasy as is the brave new world of its critics. If Burke did not wholly embrace the new, neither did he shy away from it. He preferred instead to walk into the future with eyes wide open, alive to its possibilities as much as he was mindful of its perils. “The whole at one time is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy,” he declared, signaling his liberation from the false air of permanence hovering about the

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Lebrun (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 1994), p. 5. Hereafter cited in text.

English garden or the French country estate. Every society “moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete.”<sup>8</sup>

Incapable of the languor of their fathers and grandfathers – nothing so disturbs the idyll of inheritance as the brutal replacement of one world with another – counterrevolutionaries trumpet the revolutionary virtues of political creativity, of imagination yoked to violence. “If Providence *erases*,” Maistre wrote, “it is no doubt in order to *write*.” (20) Though they reject the revolutionary’s ends, particularly equality, counterrevolutionaries savor his means – to the point, sometimes, of transforming his means into their ends. Counterrevolutionaries come to see war, not peace, as the way of the world, and nothing seems more promising of salvation to them than blood running in the streets. “There is nothing but violence in the universe,” wrote Maistre. “God made the world for war,” “human blood must flow without interruption somewhere or other,” and “peace is only a respite.” (23, 31) *Pace* Hartz, then, it is no failing of the southern thinkers in the United States that they spoke Maistre but breathed Voltaire. As Saint Simon noted long ago, Maistre did too.<sup>9</sup>

What is it about the counterrevolutionary that gives him this particular vantage in his struggles with his enemies on both the Left and on the Right? One possible source of his insights is that unlike traditional defenders of the old regime, the counterrevolutionary often shares a biography similar to that of the revolutionary. If not exactly Rousseau – who, finding himself stranded outside the gates of Geneva, proceeded to educate all of Europe about the evil of alienation and the remedial good of plebeian republicanism – the counterrevolutionary does frequently hail from the periphery, arriving at the core ready to instruct its old elites in the ways of renewal and rejuvenation. Indeed, the roster of outsiders staffing counterrevolutions throughout history is rather remarkable: Maistre, the Savoyard, tutored counterrevolutionary France; Burke, the bourgeois Irishman, defended aristocratic England; Alexander Hamilton, bastard child from the Caribbean and rumored son of racially mixed parentage, advised to-the-manor-born George Washington; and it was the Austrian-born Hitler who revitalized a revanchist Germany.<sup>10</sup> Also consider also the biographies of leading figures in and around the Republican Party over the last three decades: Ronald Reagan, destitute son of an alcoholic; Milton Friedman, Jewish son of Depression-era immigrants; Irving Kristol, Jewish ex-Trotskyist; Allan Bloom, a Jew and a homosexual; and all the hyphens that make today’s Republican Party a veritable who’s who of multicultural America:

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<sup>8</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.C.D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Introduction,” in Maistre, *Considerations on France*, pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>10</sup> A similar point is often made about nationalist leaders, who seldom come from or belong to the nation they lead. Moses was raised as an Egyptian, Stalin was a Georgian, Napoleon was born in Corsica, and so on. Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), p. 258.

Clarence Thomas, Antonin Scalia, Francis Fukuyama , Colin Powell, Alberto Gonzalez, Condolleezza Rice, and Dinesh d'Souza, to name but a few.

It may also be this outsider status that enables the counterrevolutionary to adapt, in the very language he uses, to the realities of democratic and mass politics created by the revolution. Listen carefully to how Maistre recommends the restoration of the king. “No doubt he is human,” Maistre declares, with humanness here connoting an almost pedestrian, and reassuring, capacity for error. Precisely because the king is fallible, continues Maistre, “the nation would find in him everything it desired: goodness, justice, love, gratitude, and incontestable talents matured in the hard school of adversity.” (74) Having been laid low, the king is familiar with the ways of the demotic. (It is no wonder, then, that George W. Bush likes to tell his story of loss and salvation – from alcoholic ne'er-do-well to born-again Christian – for it bears all the signs of a strategic transposition: from blue-blood aristocrat to red-state man of the people, from a man who was born with everything to a man who has borne everything.) All but conceding that the audience and judge of the king's legitimacy is now the people – an admission neither Loyseau nor Bossuet would or could have made – Maistre concludes, “How the king would cherish them and by what efforts of zeal and love would he seek to repay their fidelity.” (72-73) So pandering and hucksterish is Maistre's tone we might reasonably confuse him with a pol at the hustings.<sup>11</sup>

This then is the portrait of the counterrevolutionary that Hartz glimpsed in his writings on the South: Though the counterrevolutionary rejects the aims of the revolution, especially the commitment to equality, he is its most avid student. (Not for nothing did Mussolini – and a good many neoconservatives – spend his early years as a socialist.) Convinced that the old regime collapsed from its own sins and weaknesses, the counterrevolutionary looks to the revolution for the instruments of a wider renovation. From the revolutionary, he comes to appreciate the political utility – and creativity – of violence. From the revolutionary, he develops a taste and talent for the masses. But most important the counterrevolutionary learns from his opponents that it is possible to order political time. Where classical

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<sup>11</sup> One can see a similar counterrevolutionary adoption of revolutionary rhetoric in the conservative backlash against the feminist movement. When Phyllis Schlafly took up her pen against women's liberation, she explicitly rejected the picture of women as shrinking violets, comfortable and complacent in their placid kitchens, succumbing to their husbands' every demand. Instead, Schlafly celebrated “the power of the positive woman,” wielding power over her husband “that he can never achieve over her with all his muscle.” Sounding like the opening pages of *The Feminine Mystique*, Schlafly's *The Power of the Positive Woman* railed against the meaninglessness and lack of fulfillment among American women (though she blamed that on feminism rather than sexism). [Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), pp. 7-32] One can also see the influence of the feminist revolution, with its frank discussions of female sexuality and women's pleasure, in the writings of Christian anti-feminist Beverly LaHaye. In 1976, La Haye, with her a husband Tim, wrote a sex manual, *The Act of Marriage*, which Susan Faludi has rightly called “the evangelical equivalent of *The Joy of Sex*.” There, the LaHayes claimed that “many women are much too passive in lovemaking... Lovemaking is a contact sport that requires two active people.” God, the LaHayes told their female readers, “placed [your clitoris] there for your enjoyment.” Both authors complained that “some husbands are carryovers from the Dark Ages, like the one who told his frustrated wife, ‘Nice girls aren't supposed to climax.’ Today's wife knows better.” Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), p. 251.

theorists believed that politics was cyclical, and defenders of the old regime believe that politics belongs to an unchanging, eternal end time, the counterrevolutionary believes that political time is linear, amenable to human artifice, and that if it can be propelled forward – as the revolutionary claims – it can be sent spinning backward. But however much the counterrevolutionary may seek to reverse time, he is always and inevitably pressing it forward. Too alert to the weaknesses of the old regime, he knows that whatever he is creating must be different – and better – than that which preceded him. Progress is thus a necessary article of his faith. The counterrevolutionary does not reject the past; he merely sees it in the future. Perhaps that is why the United States – eternal land of the born again, that consummate symbol of the reactionary modernist – is so preternaturally disposed, not to liberalism, but to counterrevolution.

Turning now to the United States, we can see much evidence of this counterrevolutionary persuasion in two critical movements: in the southern defense of slavery leading up to the Civil War and in the conservative assault on the Left during the Gilded Age.<sup>12</sup> Like their European counterparts, the counterrevolutionaries of the South believed that their comrades on the plantation were cowed and confused and unable to mount an adequate defense of their privileges. The Nat Turner rebellion, wrote Thomas Dew, destroyed “all feeling of security and confidence” among the slaveholders. So frightened were they that “reason was almost banished from the mind.”<sup>13</sup> The successful insinuation of the abolitionist critique into the mind of the South also made the slaveholders wobbly. “We ourselves,” William Harper wrote of the southern response to the abolitionists, “have in some measure pleaded guilty to the impeachment.”<sup>14</sup> It was time for the slaveholders to straighten their backs and become true lords of the lash and the loom. No more dying Washingtons freeing their slaves, no more Jeffersons trembling before God. From now on slavery would be treated as a positive good. And like Maistre taking instruction from the Jacobins, the slaveholders repeatedly urged their brethren to look to the example of the abolitionists. “As small as they are,” Calhoun declared of the abolitionist movement in the North,

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<sup>12</sup> For an interesting treatment of how US elites have managed throughout all of American history to be both revanchist and progressive, often by draping their revanchism in the mantle of progressivism, see Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Roderick Dew, “Abolition of Negro Slavery,” in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1981), p. 25. Hereafter cited in text.

<sup>14</sup> William Harper, “Memoir on Slavery,” in *The Ideology of Slavery*, p. 123. Hereafter cited in text. During the controversy over nullification, John C. Calhoun would frostily complain, in a related vein, that South Carolina’s extremist stance did not mean that “Carolina...has acted precipitately” but that “her sisters States” in the South “have acted tardily.” Also see his “Speech on the Reception of Abolitionist Petitions” and “Speech on the Oregon Bill.” *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), pp. 426, 475, 562. On the perception among the Carolina slaveholder aristocracy that their fellow slaveholders in the South were weak and timid, see Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 33-93

they “have acquired so much influence by the course they have pursued.” By remaining steadfast, united, and utterly intransigent on questions of principle, they had forced the northern parties listen to them. If southern slaveholders heeded their example, they would similarly triumph. “As they make the destruction of our domestic institution the paramount question, so let us make, on our part, its safety the paramount question. Let us regard every man as of our party, who stands up in its defence; and every one as against us, who does not, until aggression ceases.”<sup>15</sup>

Racism was tailor made to this counterrevolutionary task. It combined ideas of equality and inequality, and fused the radical’s vision of political plasticity with the conservative’s notion of the stubbornness of history. It proved, as we shall see, an ideology of extraordinary and protean – extraordinary because protean – resilience, precisely because it had something for everyone, save of course for the slaves themselves.<sup>16</sup>

According to Josiah Nott, races are “marked by peculiarities of structure, which have always been constant and undeviating. Human races – as opposed to other species of animal or plant – are particularly immutable.”<sup>17</sup> From these deep and enduring differences of physical structure, moral differences, equally enduring, followed. “Is it not a law of nature, that every *permanent* animal form...carries with its physical type a *moral* of its own, which cannot be obliterated, changed, or transferred to another, so long as the *physique* stands?”<sup>18</sup> More than classifying men and women into distinctive types, racial theorists made the quite radical argument that humanity’s every attempt to rise above its physical nature was a misbegotten enterprise. We are, they claimed, beings of the utmost and comprehensive constraint. Our character, personality, individuality – none of these is self-fashioned or amenable to artifice. Each is an irrevocable and irreversible given.

If the intransigence of biology was the back story of race, it followed that there was only one race, properly understood, in America: the black race.<sup>19</sup> According to Nott, white people reason, imagine, and create – activities of transcendence that do not jibe with the liabilities of race. The white man “takes up the march of civilization and presses onward.” (“Two Lectures,” 235) He frees himself of his inheritance, his circumstance, history itself. For that reason, “the Caucasian races have been the only truly progressive races of history,” which means nothing so much as that whites were not truly a race. (*Instincts*

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<sup>15</sup> Calhoun, “Speech at the Meeting of the Citizens of Charleston,” in *Union and Liberty*, p. 536. Also see Sinha, pp. 73, 75.

<sup>16</sup> On the protean and syncretic nature of right-wing thought in Europe, especially during the Nazi period, see Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The “Final Solution” in History* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 90-109.

<sup>17</sup> Josiah C. Nott, “Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races,” in *The Ideology of Slavery*, p. 200. Hereafter cited in text.

<sup>18</sup> Josiah C. Nott, *Instincts of Races*, in *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South. A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003), p. 203. Hereafter cited in text.

<sup>19</sup> My analysis here is indebted to Barbara J. Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001), pp. 48-56.

of Races, 206) Among blacks, however, “one generation does not take up civilization where the last left it and carry it on as does the Caucasian – there it stands immovable; they go as far as instinct extends and no farther.” (“Two Lectures,” 235) Blacks can no more rise above their station than they can sink below it. They are what they are, have been and will be. As Harper wrote, “A slave has no hope that by a course of integrity, he can materially elevate his condition in society, nor can his offence materially depress it...Compared to the freeman, he has no character to establish or to lose.” (103)

No mere contradiction or sleight of hand, this dual portrait of whites as individuals and blacks as a race was the perfect counterrevolutionary argument. It ascribed to whites all the virtues of a ruling class – capable of action, freedom, politics itself – and to blacks all the deficits of a class to be ruled. “This unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people,” wrote Jefferson of black slaves.<sup>20</sup> Even among free blacks in the North, Dew argued, “the animal part of the man gains the victory over the moral.” (52) After the Civil War, Nott would write that “all the powers of the Freedmen’s Bureau, or ‘gates of hell cannot prevail against them’ [the inequalities between whites and blacks].” (*Instincts of Races*, 206)

But while race thinking prescribed the most vicious forms of domination, it also absorbed a mutant strain of the egalitarianism then roiling America and turned it into a justification for slavery. With “the menial and low offices being all performed by the blacks,” Dew observed, whites had removed “the greatest cause of distinction and separation of the ranks of society” from their mix. (66-67) Anticipating the writings of W.E.B. DuBois, Edmund Morgan, and David Roediger, the slaveholders argued that racism and slavery made white men equal.<sup>21</sup> “Jack Cade, the English reformer, wished all mankind to be brought to one common level,” wrote Dew. “We believe slavery, in the United States, has accomplished this.” (66) Racism and slavery discharged the egalitarian debts of America – not by paying them (Alexander Stephens would claim that the Framers’ ideas of equality “were fundamentally wrong”)<sup>22</sup> but by democratizing feudalism. Slavery – or failing that, racism – made every white man a king, able to enjoy the twinned pleasures of equality and inequality, of freedom and domination. As Daniel Hundley put it, the slaveholders are “not an *exclusive* aristocracy...every free white man in the whole Union has just as much right to become an Oligarch as the most ultra fire-eater.”<sup>23</sup> According to James Henry

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 270. Hereafter cited in text.

<sup>21</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998), p. 700 [tk]; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Stephens, “The Cornerstone Speech,” *Defending Slavery*, p. 91. Hereafter cited in text. Also see Calhoun, “Speech on the Oregon Bill,” pp. 566-70.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 37. Also see Oakes, pp. 141-43, 230-32.

Hammond, “In a slave country every *freeman* is an aristocracy.”<sup>24</sup> Calhoun went one better: whites did not need slaves to join the aristocracy; by virtue of being white, they were an aristocracy. “With us the two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black; and all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals.”<sup>25</sup> The United States had no Old Regime. It had something better: a pleasing spray of old regimes tossed across the land.

However vigorous were these last nods to the past, the defenders of slavery remained firmly fixed upon the future. Refusing the identity of the staid traditionalist, they preferred instead the title of the heretic and the scientist, that fugitive intelligence which marched to its own drummer and thereby advanced the cause of progress and civilization. Like all the great moderns – Galileo, Harvey, and Adam Smith were among their models – the slaveholders were guided, or claimed to be guided, by the light of truth and reason. “We are passing through one of the greatest revolutions in the annals of the world,” declared Stephens just after secession. “This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth [of racial slavery].” Just as Galileo was initially persecuted and now revered, so would the South one day be hailed for its innovations. “May we not, therefore, look with confidence to the ultimate universal acknowledgment of the truths upon which our system rests?” (90-92; also see Dew, 27, 51, 53; Nott, *Instincts of Races*, 208)<sup>26</sup>

In announcing this orientation to the future, the southern writers adopted an ethos geared less to liberalism or conservatism – ideologies arising from past centuries of conflict in Europe – than to fascism, the one ism of the twentieth century that could and would make a legitimate claim to novelty.<sup>27</sup> They beat the drums of race war, repeatedly offering deportation and extermination as final solutions to the Negro Question. If blacks were set free, Jefferson warned, it would “produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one race or the other.” The only alternative was an “effort...unknown to history. When freed, he [the slave] is to be removed beyond the mixture.” (264, 270) Anticipating the writings of Robert Brasillach, the French fascist who argued that compassion meant that Jewish children should be deported along with their parents,<sup>28</sup> Dew claimed, “If our slaves are

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993, 2003), p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> Calhoun, “Speech on the Oregon Bill,” p. 564.

<sup>26</sup> In his speech against the Wilkins Act of 1833, Calhoun compared the criticisms he received for his positions on nullification and other controversial matters to the “denunciation” that had fallen “upon Galileo and Bacon when they first unfolded the great discoveries which have immortalized their names.” In 1837, he declared that the “experiment” of racialized slavery “was in progress, but had not been completed.” The “judgment” of modern society on the legitimacy of such slavery, he warned, “should be postponed for another ten years,” when the experiment would presumably be concluded. *Union and Liberty*, pp. 434, 467-68.

<sup>27</sup> On the novelty and innovation of fascism, see Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004), pp. 3, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 200), pp. 82-85.

ever to be sent away in any systematic manner, *humanity* demands that they should be carried in families.” (39) If the slaves were freed, Harper concluded, “one race must be driven out by the other, or exterminated, or again enslaved.” (129)<sup>29</sup>

Like the Nazis, the southern defenders of slavery spoke of the need for lebensraum. We often forget that Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, spurned Europe’s pursuit of overseas colonies, arguing instead that his countrymen should “direct our eyes toward the land in the East” where Germany could escape the industrial present and build an agrarian future. In Poland and Russia, the Germans could “finally put an end to the prewar colonial and trade policy and change over to the land policy of the future.”<sup>30</sup> For their part, the southern defenders of slavery spoke of expanding to the west, where they too would create an alternative modernity, an agricultural utopia that would validate their new political economy of land and forced labor. They dreamed of vast empires, like the Roman or the Egyptian, but on the Mississippi. (Why Memphis, after all, or Cairo, Illinois?)<sup>31</sup> “In our own country, look at the lower valley of the Mississippi,” wrote Harper, “which is capable of being made a far greater Egypt.” (120) In “the great valley of the Mississippi” James Hammond thought he saw “the acknowledged seat of the empire of the world,” perhaps even “an empire that shall rule the world.”<sup>32</sup>

Lurking beneath the South’s notions of race war and land empires was a vision of life as permanent struggle, of history as a dynamic register of agonistic conflict. Not for the slaveholders the pastorals of old Europe, where time stood still or moved forward at glacial pace. “Mutation and progress is the condition of human affairs,” wrote Harper. Like Nietzsche and European Social Darwinists, they believed that social friction and political contest made for passion and greatness. The problem with the abolitionist creed, Harper believed, was that it would create a society where “if there is little suffering, there is little high enjoyment. The even flow of the life forbids the high excitement which is necessary for it.” Only in struggle and domination could “the moral and intellectual faculties...be cultivated to their highest perfection.” (93) Slavery, Dew concluded, would produce not only an efficient economy but the most dynamic and expansive society the world had ever seen. (73-75)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Also see Calhoun, “Speech on the Reception of Abolitionist Petitions,” in *Union and Liberty*, pp. 472-73; Oakes, p. 234.

<sup>30</sup> Mayer, pp. 103-106.

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Dick Howard and Rogers Smith for these references.

<sup>32</sup> James Henry Hammond, “The Mudsill Speech,” in *The Ideology of Slavery*, pp. 82-83. For a discussion of the economic and political “roots” and “taproot” of slave expansion and the cultural push toward westward migration among the slaveholders, see Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 243-70; Oakes, pp. 69-95, 147-50.

<sup>33</sup> This dimension of slaveholder theory found its counterpart in the reality of everyday economic struggle among those slaveholders striving for upward mobility. See Oakes, pp. 127-30.

It was during the Gilded Age that Hartz thought he heard the two purest voices of the American counterrevolution: in “the golden charm of Horatio Alger” and in the “terror” of the business assault on socialism. (208) The first transformed capitalism from a rich man’s game into a poor man’s promise. No matter how lowly their birth, everyone could now dream the American Dream. The second used the equation of America and capitalism to intimidate leftists, tarring them with the brush of anti-Americanism and socialism. If there was any moment when liberalism – with its commitment to private property, individualism, and a limited state – could be properly assailed as America’s preeminent counterrevolutionary ideology, this was it.

There is much truth in Hartz’s account of the Gilded Age, but it omits two key notes of the counterrevolution: the feudal element of Andrew Carnegie’s capitalism and the imperialist elements in Teddy Roosevelt’s democracy.<sup>34</sup> Carnegie was the perfect public face for the movement to quell the farmer and worker revolts of the late nineteenth century. An immigrant son of a poor weaver, he and his life story embodied the spirit of what Hartz called “the new Whiggery,” that triumphant marriage in the late nineteenth century of capitalism and democracy. (Hartz, 203-27) Yet Carnegie, as we shall see, frequently tried to push beyond the Horatio Alger myth, identifying the entrepreneur and corporate mogul as emblems – or, to be more precise, reformulations – of an earlier, more nobile age. Roosevelt – with his spectacles, Harvard pedigree, and deep aristocratic roots in the Hudson River Valley – was less suited to the counterrevolutionary task in America. But through his writings on imperialism, he managed to conscript the lower classes of American society into a reactionary project of such vast proportion it still resonates today, more than a century later. Appealing to what Marx famously called “the imperialism of the peasant class,”<sup>35</sup> Roosevelt turned American plebes into rulers of the darker-skinned peoples of the earth. Though Carnegie would reject Roosevelt’s democratic imperialism and Roosevelt would reject Carnegie’s feudal capitalism, the two men formed a Nietzsche-and-Hayek tag team, fashioning a project of counterrevolutionary markets and morals that would find its ultimate fulfillment in George W. Bush’s America.

Born in Dunfermline, Scotland in 1835, Carnegie was reared in a milieu of artisanal radicalism and antimonian revolt. Cromwell was a childhood hero, William Cobbett was a friend of the family, and Carnegie never lost the sympathy for the French Revolution and general spirit of plebeian revolt he had absorbed in his youth. Standing atop his empire of steel, he channeled these currents of modern history into various schemes of industrial design and reform. He did not shy from technological innovations, hiring chemists to oversee the extraction of iron from ore and scientific managers to help run his factories.

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<sup>34</sup> Hartz does offer some tantalizing comments on the feudal dimensions of the Gilded Age, but he does not truly pursue this theme. See Hartz, pp. 220-223.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972, 1978), pp. 609-10.

He publicly identified with the cause of labor unions. Seldom missing an opportunity to bury the past, he happily built a steel plant on a Revolutionary War battlefield in western Pennsylvania.<sup>36</sup>

And yet, from his earliest days, Carnegie displayed a penchant for medievalism that he never quite lost, which found its ironic consummation, as we shall see, in his confrontation with the striking workers at Homestead. “Where one is born is very important,” wrote Carnegie, “for different surroundings and traditions appeal to and stimulate different latent tendencies in the child.” For Carnegie, it was the “noble Abbey” of Dunfermline, built in 1070, that most sparked his imagination. From its shadow Carnegie absorbed the “poetry and romance” of an older age. Whenever he had to walk home at night from his uncle’s house, he had to choose between two paths: “one along the eerie churchyard of the Abbey among the dead, where there was no light; and the other along the lighted streets by way of the May Gate.” Carnegie always opted for the churchyard, “falling back in all emergencies upon the thought of what Wallace [the medieval Scottish hero] would have done if he had met with any foe, natural or supernatural.” Confronted with a choice between the Enlightenment and its other, Carnegie chose the other. (*Autobiography*, 7, 14)

Though American industry would seem an unlikely place for this romance of the ruins, Carnegie thought he found it in his furnaces of steel. Amid the clank of machinery and the impersonality of the market, Carnegie saw a space for the feudal hero. He depicted the back office as a medieval court, where courtier-employees should try to get the “attention” of the boss-king through virtuoso displays of ingenuity and valor. Anticipating the more florid notions of Ayn Rand, Carnegie frequently told his admirers to “break orders in order to save owners. There never was a great character who did not sometimes smash the routine regulations and make new ones for himself. The rule is only suitable for such as have no aspirations, and you have not forgotten that you are destined to be owners and to make and break orders.” (*Autobiography*, 47)

But it was in the fields of philanthropy and labor relations that Carnegie found the most fertile ground for his feudal imagination. Carnegie recommended that the rich man conspicuously give away his largesse, while he was still alive. That way he could express his personal character and enjoy, in life as opposed to death, the acclaim of the people. After Leland Stanford gave away his millions to establish a university on the Pacific coast, Carnegie described the California industrialist with a quote from Griffith’s eulogy for Cardinal Wolsey in *Henry VIII*: “in bestowing, madam,/ He was most princely.” Like the kings of old, the wealthy philanthropist was “a trustee for the poor,” the agent of “the good of the people.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie*, in *The Andrew Carnegie Reader*, ed. Joseph Frazier Wall (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), pp. 3-15, 57-59, 62-63. Hereafter cited in text.

<sup>37</sup> “Wealth,” in *The Andrew Carnegie Reader*, pp. 140, 143, 152-53.

If philanthropy made a man a king, labor relations could make him a lord. It was a mistake, Carnegie argued, for employers to have “salaried officers” run their factories. Managers had no “permanent interest in the welfare of the workingmen.” They cared solely about balance sheets and shareholders. Strikes were inevitable in firms where “the chairman, situated hundreds of miles away from his men...only pays a flying visit to the works and perhaps finds time to walk through the mill or mine once or twice a year.” By establishing a deep and intimate relationship with his workers, however, the owner would come “into direct contact with his men” and know “their qualities, their struggles, and their aspirations.” By personally attending to the needs of the workers on these modern manors, owners could recreate the tender familiarity of the feudal estate.<sup>38</sup>

So it was undoubtedly with great pain and embarrassment that Carnegie was forced, late in life, to rehearse the events that took place in July 1892 at his steel plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Having praised the virtues of labor unions and onsite management, Carnegie found himself in that critical month summering in his Scottish castle on Loch Rannoch, while his general manager Henry Clay Frick, a bottom liner if there ever was one, busted the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. Informed by Carnegie that “we...approve of anything you do” in the company’s negotiations with the Homestead plant’s union, Frick proceeded to cut wages, lock out more than one thousand workers, and announce that he would no longer negotiate with the union. The workers went on strike. On the night of July 5, a flotilla of Pinkertons, summoned by Frick, arrived on the Monongahela River under cover of darkness. After a fourteen-hour gun battle with the workers – in which the Pinkertons lost three men, the union nine – the Pinkertons surrendered. At that point, Pennsylvania’s governor sent in the state militia to take over the plant. Within four months, the strike was over. Its leaders were blacklisted, they and 160 other strikers were charged with everything from murder to treason, and the union was no more.<sup>39</sup>

There is enough irony here to fill a volume of Swift. The self-styled intimate of the workers flees to a medieval castle in Europe, while his rationalist manager breaks their spirit with the instruments of public and private violence. And yet it would be a mistake to dismiss Carnegie as a mere hypocrite or crier of crocodile tears. When he wrote about Homestead that “nothing I have ever had to meet in all my life, before or since, wounded me so deeply,” he meant it. (*Autobiography*, 118) Having worked so hard to find feudalism in capitalism, it must have come as a considerable disappointment to Carnegie to discover that the only medievalism on offer in modern America was that of his summer imagination – and the private armies of the night dispatched by Frick.

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<sup>38</sup> “Results of the Labor Struggle,” in *The Andrew Carnegie Reader*, p. 97.

<sup>39</sup> William Serrin, *Homestead: The Glory and the Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

Teddy Roosevelt picked up where Carnegie left off. But where Carnegie acted the part of Little Bonaparte in *Some Like It Hot*, turning down his hearing aid while his goons spray bullets at his opponents, Roosevelt publicly embraced the violence of the United States, finding it in the secret of the “strenuous life” he so desperately longed to live and lead.

1896 was a banner year for Roosevelt and the counterrevolutions of race and class that had been building in America over the better part of two decades. That year, not only was big business triumphant, having elected McKinley president and Roosevelt vice-president, but the Supreme Court also announced, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the end of the nineteenth century’s battle for a multiracial democracy. Of the two victories, the first was undoubtedly the sweeter for Roosevelt, not just for personal but also political reasons. A formidable polemicist against the radical movements of his day, Roosevelt denounced unions, socialists, and populists as a detachment of Robespierre and Marat, Marx and Proudhon, and the communards of Paris.<sup>40</sup> Under William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic Party had fallen hostage to a “dark and mean hostility and envy,” which sought “a government of a mob, by the demagogue, for the shiftless and disorderly and the criminal and the semicriminal.” Bryan’s Democrats were irreligious nihilists, who “like a paper dollar even more because it is not worth anything.” They were lawless, dishonest, and immoral, attacking “all the countless manifestations of intelligence and of organized effort which go to make up civilization.” (Speech of October 1896, 116-17, 118, 120) Though Roosevelt occasionally tried to sound Carnegie’s plebeian notes during the election campaign, his words lacked the authenticity of the Scottish-born Horatio Alger. It was when Roosevelt channeled Burke, thundering against the Jacobin Left, that he found his most convincing themes.

Roosevelt was more muted about the veil that descended upon African America in 1896. Though a firm opponent of slavery, he had come to think, like many other Republicans, that the government had done all it could do for blacks. The legislative effort to “put them on an intellectual, social, and business equality with the whites” had “failed completely.” Roosevelt was well aware that “in large sections of the country the Negroes are not treated as they should be treated.” But he believed that “hope lies, not in legislation, but in the constant working of those often unseen forces of the national life which are greater than all legislation.”<sup>41</sup> What mattered now was black self-help and local initiative, best performed in a spirit of conciliation and moderation, and with an infinite patience...toward southern whites.<sup>42</sup>

And yet these counterrevolutions of race and class were not without ambivalence for Roosevelt. Unlike Carnegie, Roosevelt never believed there was anything heroic or romantic about businessmen and entrepreneurs. These were men who saw their country as a “till,” who always weighed the “the honor of

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<sup>40</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, speech of October 1896 in Chicago, in *Theodore Roosevelt: An American Mind. Selected Writings*, ed. Mario R. DiNunzio (New York: Penguin, 1994), pp. 116, 119. Hereafter cited in text.

<sup>41</sup> “How Not to Help Our Poorer Brothers,” in *Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 123.

<sup>42</sup> Lincoln Day address to the Republican Club of New York, February 1905, in *Theodore Roosevelt*, pp. 334-35.

the nation and the glory of the flag” against a “temporary interruption of money-making.” The capitalist cared “only whether shares rise or fall in value.” He was seldom “willing to lay down his life for little things.”<sup>43</sup> He showed no interest in great affairs of state, domestic or international, unless they impinged upon his own. It was no accident, Roosevelt claimed, perhaps with a nod to Carnegie, that such men opposed the great expedition that was the Spanish-American War.<sup>44</sup>

Though he joined the racist retreat of his age, Roosevelt envied the generation of the Civil War and the cause for which they fought. Here were men who loved their nation and its ideals so much that they gave up their lives for it. Tossing aside the abacus of their advance, they refused all considerations of cost, and saw only the glory of the crusade. “Thank God for the iron in the blood of our fathers, the men who upheld the wisdom of Lincoln, and bore the sword or rifle in the armies of Grant!” (“The Strenuous Life,” 185) However much he might assent to the winnowing of national idealism that succeeded the Supreme Court decision of 1896, Roosevelt could not help but feel sad over the end of an affair that once stirred women to see their men off to fight, never certain whether they would see them again.

Could Roosevelt ever find the “strenuous life” – the thrill of difficulty and danger, the strife that made for progress – in the wreckage of modern America? Certainly not in the accommodations of Jim Crow or in the playpen of the market, and certainly not on the frontier, which Frederick Jackson Turner had declared closed. The holy warrior would have to look elsewhere, to the foreign wars and conquests America had undertaken at the end of the century.

Even here, we should note, Roosevelt encountered frustration. Though his reports from the Spanish-American War were filled with bravado, a careful reading of his adventures in Cuba suggests that his exploits there were something of a disappointment. Each of the famous charges Roosevelt led up or down a hill was met with an anti-climax. The first culminated with him seeing just two Spanish soldiers shot by one of his men: “These were the only Spaniards I actually saw fall to aimed shots by any one of my men,” he wrote with wry chagrin, “with the exception of two guerillas in trees.” The second found him leading an army that neither heard nor followed him. So it was with a certain amount of grim appreciation that he recited the dyspeptic comments of one of the army’s leaders in Cuba, a certain General Wheeler, who “had been through too much heavy fighting in the Civil War to regard the present fight as very serious.”<sup>45</sup>

In the bloody occupations that followed the Spanish-American War, however, Roosevelt discovered the true bliss it was in that dawn to be alive. Roosevelt was sure that America’s occupation of the

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<sup>43</sup> Address to Naval War College of June, 2, 1897, in *Theodore Roosevelt*, pp. 175-76, 179.

<sup>44</sup> Address to Hamilton Club of Chicago, April, 10, 1899 (“The Strenuous Life”) [hereafter cited in text] and *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography*, in *Theodore Roosevelt*, pp. 186, 194.

<sup>45</sup> *The Rough Riders*, in *Theodore Roosevelt*, pp. 30-32, 37. One might also point to Roosevelt’s Naval War College address, where several thousand words in praise of manliness and military preparedness come to a climax in a call for United States to build a modern navy that might well never be used. *Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 178.

Philippines and elsewhere were as close to a replay of the Civil War as he and his countrymen were ever likely to see. “We of this generation do not have to face a task such as that our fathers faced,” he declared in 1899, “and woe to us if we fail to perform them!...We cannot avoid the responsibilities that confront us in Hawaii, Cuba, Porto [sic] Rico, and the Philippines.” Here – in the islands of the Caribbean and the Pacific – was the confluence of blood and purpose he had been searching for his entire life. The task of imperial uplift, of educating the natives in “the cause of civilization,” was arduous and violent, imposing a mission upon America it would take years, God willing, to fulfill. (“The Strenuous Life,” 185, 188)

Imperialism, as Roosevelt discovered, was a counterrevolutionary ideology of unparalleled potency. It turned the anti-imperial inheritance of the American Revolution on its head, making those who counseled against foreign expeditions out to be ignoble and self-interested seekers of mammon.

I have even scant patience with those who make a pretense of humanitarianism to hide and cover their timidity, and who cant about ‘liberty’ and the ‘consent of the governed,’ in order to excuse themselves for their unwillingness to play the part of men. Their doctrines, if carried out, would make it incumbent upon us to leave the Apaches of Arizona to work out their own salvation, and to decline to interference in a single Indian reservation. (“The Strenuous Life, 188)

From now on, conquest would be the true progressive’s duty, which only timidity or selfishness would lead him to shirk. Imperialism also would reeducate a ruling class that had lost the knowledge of and taste for national greatness. “England’s rule in India and Egypt has been of great benefit to England,” Roosevelt reminded his readers, “for it has trained up generations of men accustomed to look at the larger and loftier side of public life.” (“The Strenuous Life, 188) Foreign involvements would create a genuine ruling class in America, more righteous and ethical, and less grubby and money-minded, than Carnegie’s minions.

If such a ruling class found itself unwelcome at home, it was no matter: the conquest of foreign peoples – particularly the Filipinos, who proved to be somewhat recalcitrant – would give Americans, all Americans, a shared experience of mastery. “They must be made to realize,” Roosevelt said of the Filipino guerillas fighting the American occupation, “that justice does not proceed from a sense of weakness on our part, that we are the masters.” “What the Spaniard has been taught the Malay must learn – that the American flag is to float unchallenged where it floats now.”<sup>46</sup> Under the flag of empire, all Americans would proudly stand. At last, the dream of the Southern slaveholders would be fulfilled: of a nation of rulers, transposing their domestic divisions to a more benign, less internally threatening setting.

It was a beautiful dream. But like Carnegie’s romance of a capitalism simultaneously democratic and feudal, modern and anti-modern, Roosevelt’s dream could not bear the weight of its own reality. Though Roosevelt hoped the men who ruled the Philippines would be “chosen for signal capacity and

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<sup>46</sup> Address to the Lincoln Club of New York, February 1899, in *Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 182.

integrity,” running “the provinces on behalf of the entire nation from which they come, and for the sake of the entire people to which they go,” he worried that America’s colonial occupiers would come from the same class of selfish financiers and industrialists that had driven Roosevelt abroad in the first place. And so his paeans to imperialism ended on a sour note, of warning, even doom. “If we permit our public service in the Philippines to become the prey of the spoils politicians, if we fail to keep it up to the highest standard, we shall be guilty of an act, not only of wickedness, but of weak and short-sighted folly, and we shall have begun to tread the path which was trod by Spain to her own bitter humiliation.” (Lincoln Club address of 1899, 182; “The Strenuous Life,” 189) But if the dreams of both Carnegie and Roosevelt ended badly, Roosevelt at least had the advantage of being able to say that he always had suspected his would.

We live today amid the revival and ruins of these two men’s visions. It strains no rule of historical analogy to claim that George W. Bush has galvanized the feudal elements of American capitalism and the imperial elements of American democracy. Like his predecessors of a century ago, Bush and his allies have applied a progressive, modernist gloss to the medieval enterprises of domestic rule and foreign conquest. Untrammelled power for employers and capital are now depicted as the way stations of freedom and equality, while the US military is seen as the avant garde of women’s rights, toleration, and multiculturalism. This is a counterrevolution straight out of the history books, which can only seem strange to those observers of the American past who have not been truly paying attention.

But what of the glimmers of fascism we saw in the southern defense of slavery? In the past year, two eminent members of the scholarly community have suggested that some portion of the fascist inheritance is alive and well in today’s America. Two Novembers ago, Fritz Stern told an audience at the Leo Baeck Institute that there was a parallel between the Christian Right and Nazi Germany. “There was a longing in Europe for fascism before the name was ever invented,” Stern went onto explain to the *New York Times*. “There was a longing for a new authoritarianism with some kind of religious orientation and above all a greater communal belongingness. There are some similarities in the mood then and the mood now, although also significant differences.”<sup>47</sup> This past July, in *The New York Review of Books*, Tony Judt also addressed the fascist parallel:

There is a precedent in modern Western history for a country whose leader exploits national humiliation and fear to restrict public freedoms; for a government that makes permanent war as a tool of state policy and arranges for the torture of its political enemies; for a ruling class that pursues divisive social goals under the guise of national “values”; for a culture that asserts its unique destiny and superiority and that worships

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<sup>47</sup> Chris Hedges, “Warning from a Student of Democracy’s Collapse,” *The New York Times* (January 6, 2005), p. B2; Fritz Stern, “A Fundamental History Lesson,” *In These Times* (October 10, 2005).

military prowess; for a political system in which the dominant party manipulates procedural rules and threatens to change the law in order to get its own way; where journalists are intimidated into confessing their errors and made to do public penance. Europeans in particular have experienced such a regime in the recent past and they have a word for it. That word is not “democracy.”<sup>48</sup>

While it is significant that such august voices of what used to be called the establishment have raised these questions, their reference points lead me to wonder: Why, when the topic is American fascism, do we look to European rather than American precedents? Admittedly, both Stern and Judt are Jewish scholars of European history who are themselves from Europe (Stern in fact fled Nazi Germany in 1938). Notwithstanding their personal biographies and scholarly interests, it does seem curious that when the question of American fascism is raised, it is to Europe rather than America that we look.

And here we come back to Hartz. Like many Marxists and their critics, Hartz was obsessed with the question of why there is no socialism in America. Convinced that the logical terminus of European history was some version of social democracy, Hartz never bothered to ask a different, arguably more pertinent, question: whither American fascism. If only he had paid more attention to the evidence he uncovered in the defense of slavery. If only he had examined that luminous phrase “the reactionary Enlightenment” – the title he gave to one of his chapters on the South, which so perfectly describes the mix of modern and anti-modern, the fusion of democracy and feudalism, that is the American counterrevolution – more closely. Had he done so, his answers would have been instructive, and undoubtedly interesting.

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<sup>48</sup> Tony Judt, “The New World Order,” *The New York Review of Books* (July 14, 2005).