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## Nature, Society, and Thought

a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism

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Nature, Society, and Thought

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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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# CONTENTS

Vol. 5, No. 1 (1992)

Editorial	4
ARTICLES	
<i>Ronald S. Edari</i> , "Underclass": Problems of Conceptualization and Measurement	7
<i>Joel Albers</i> , Pharmacists and the National Health Insurance Debate	23
Commentaries by Lawrence David Weiss and David Cohen	46
<i>David A. Muga</i> , Indigenous Americans and the U.S. Constitution	51
<i>Lisa Stokes</i> , "Who's There?": Deconstructed Selves in Hamlet and Ophelia	69
<i>William Pencak</i> , Socialism: An Idea Whose Time Has Not Yet Come?	97
Commentary by Erwin Marquit and Response by Pencak	106
COMMUNICATIONS	
<i>José Soler</i> , On the Colonial Status of Puerto Rico	111
BOOK REVIEWS	
Ricardo Duchesne: <i>The Transition from Feudalism: A Review Essay</i>	113
Maria Damon: <i>When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics</i> , by Trinh T. Minh-ha	120
Arthur Zipser: <i>Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action of the Unemployed, 1808–1942</i> , by Franklin Folsom	122
Thomas Kleven: <i>Securing the Right to Employment: Social Welfare Policy and the Unemployed in the United States</i> , by Philip Harvey	124

## Editorial

The crisis that overtook the socialist countries has forced Marxists to reexamine the basic assumptions on which they have based their political strategies for the revolutionary transformation of society. The principal purpose of the Workshop on New Directions for Socialists (see the announcement on the facing page) is to help single out some of the key areas that need such reexamination.

While not a journal devoted to topical issues, *Nature, Society, and Thought* may appropriately provide a channel for discussion of the theoretical issues underlying current debates. *Nature, Society, and Thought* has from its outset welcomed submissions and commentaries not only from Marxists but also from other scholars writing on subjects of interest to Marxists. In practice, however, we have not adequately developed scholarly exchange among Marxist scholars and between Marxists and other progressive scholars who either question assumptions long held by Marxist writers or who approach important scholarly areas of investigation with a methodology not usually embraced by Marxist scholarship. We hope that some of the articles in this issue will contribute to overcoming this deficiency and stimulate our readers to deepen the scope of such discussions.



# **“Underclass”: Problems of Conceptualization and Measurement**

**Ronald S. Edari**

ABSTRACT: The argument entertained in this paper is that the weaknesses of the “underclass” construction derive from the limitations of the individualistic conceptions of the Weberian class problematic and the related social-pathologist discourse on poverty. Individualistic conceptions are plagued by the problem of circumscribing discrete traits within a framework that has theoretical and methodological integrity, particularly at the structural level. In the absence of such a framework, traits are rendered coherent by the process of stereotyping the characteristics of an extremely impoverished inner-city group, in its postvictimized state. It has been the liberal social scientists who have led in the development of these “new” theoretical models of poverty in both the sixties and today. Their discourses on poverty construed the persistence of structural tendencies as the persistence of individual traits through a self-regenerating process. This, in turn, lent plausibility to the “culture of poverty” thesis, as well as the convergence of thought between liberals and conservatives. Thus, the “culture of poverty” explanation of poverty has continued to supply the theoretical underpinnings of the regressive policies implemented under the banner of “welfare reform.”

## ***Introduction***

The term “underclass” in today’s social-science parlance represents an apparently curious convergence of the liberal and conservative modes of discourse on poverty, which, at the level of actual research practices, reveals a remarkable continuity with the perspective of the

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992)

“social pathologists” of yesteryear (see Mills 1943). On this count, one of these “new social pathologists” reiterates that

there has been distinctive structural change in social conditions in the United States over the past two decades that is expressed by the term *underclass*, and that there is now a broad consensus among politicians and experts that this has occurred. The word is increasingly used in the media as a shorthand expression for the concentration of income and behavioral problems among racial minorities (mainly Black and Latino) in large older cities. (Nathan 1987, 57)

Further down the same text, the author observes that

there are still important research issues on our agenda relating to the causes and characteristics of the underclass, but there is no longer as much to be achieved by debate on underclass conditions compared to attention devoted on how we deal with these conditions. (57)

As is apparent in Nathan’s statement, the supposed “consensus” is significantly at variance with the fact that there is neither a commonly agreed upon conceptual framework for identifying the alleged “underclass” traits nor a coherent account of their genesis and the causal interconnections among them. Indeed, the more the “underclass” researchers grapple with the problems of conceptualization and measurement, with the objective of discovering the genotypic constitution of the category, the more their analyses lead us back to the older characterizations of the “culture of poverty.” This theoretical and methodological *cul de sac* is a consequence of two related constraints: (a) the grounding of “underclass” research in the Weberian problematic in which social classes are conceived in individualistic terms of “market capacity for income generation”; (b) the location of “underclass” research in the universe of discourse of the “social pathologists.” In this paper, I will examine the ramifications of these two constraints with reference to the problems of conceptualization and measurements of “underclass” traits.

***The problem of isolating the definitive characteristics of the “underclass”***

In studies of the “underclass” the major tendency has been to associate the group with problematic individual traits that are regarded as departures from some conception of “mainstream” values, norms, beliefs, occupations, and income. At times, “mainstream” is used inter-



changeably with “middle class,” but “mainstream” is preferred because, as Wilson (1987) observes, moving out of the “underclass” frequently means moving into the “working class.”

“Underclass” traits are thought to be problematic in two respects: first, because they constrain the life chances and the social mobility of individuals, and second, because the individuals who fail to make the transition into the “mainstream” either “create” or are “caught in” social problems that impose “costs” on the rest of the members of society. The logic in use here reflects both the Weberian conception of classes in terms of “market capacity” and “life chances,” and the social pathologists’ tendency to attribute social problems to individualistic causes.

Since Wilson’s studies have been taken as a point of departure by many subsequent studies, I will begin with an examination of his conception of the “underclass.” He describes the group as

that heterogeneous grouping of families and individuals who are outside the mainstream of the American occupational system. Included in this group are individuals who lack training and skills and either experience long-term unemployment or are not members of the labor force, individuals who are engaged in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency. (8)

Following Wilson, there have been a host of other studies, whose catalogue of “underclass” traits have differed only in terms of graphic detail and purported refinements. Thus Nathan claims that

the underclass involves more than things we can measure with conventional economic and demographic indicators such as low income, long-term unemployment, limited education, and incidence of welfare dependency. The underclass is also attitudinal and behavioral. (1987, 58)

The “behavioral” and “attitudinal” approach is recommended because of the need to establish a coherent universe of discourse. In this regard, Ricketts and Sawhill reviewed a number of studies and arrived at a “behavioral” definition of the “underclass,” which they claimed would resolve the conceptual anomalies inherent in other definitions. Their procedure begins by establishing “mainstream” rules of conduct, and then proceeds to define the “underclass” with reference to these norms. They write:

Behavioral norms are not invariant. But in American society, circa 1980, it is expected that children will attend school and delay parenthood until at least age 18, that adult males (who are not disabled or retarded) will work at a regular job, that adult females will either work or marry, and that everyone will be law-abiding. The underclass, in our definition, consists of people whose behavior departs from these norms and in the process creates significant social costs. An underclass area is one where the proportion of people engaged in these costly behaviors departs significantly from the mean for the entire U.S. population as a whole. (1988, 319–20)

From the foregoing discussion, the portrait of the “underclass” that reflects the consensus among liberal and conservative social scientists and decision-makers includes the following traits: poverty, long-term unemployment, unwed motherhood, female-headed families, crime and delinquency, low levels of skills and education, and welfare dependency. These are complemented by such “attitudinal and behavioral” traits as: present-orientation, lack of work ethic, violence, and tolerance of deviance.

Before I proceed any further, it is instructive to examine the conceptual problems inherent in the empiricist practice of constructing the “underclass” from a list of traits.

#### ***Some conceptual anomalies in the underclass construction***

A major problem that is apparent in the catalogue of traits associated with the “underclass” is the mixture of the levels of generality and the causal ordering of traits. Underclass researchers are well aware of some of the problems involved here and, indeed, they ritualistically predicate their interpretations with caveats such as the following:

It is unclear whether these behaviors are an adaptation to external factors (such as a history of discrimination or a lack of job opportunities) or whether they reflect the development of self-defeating attitudes and lifestyles (which persist even when objective circumstances improve). (Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, 318)

It is left to the imagination of the readers to make the following “causal” connections: due to present orientation and lack of restraint, unwed mothers do not postpone parenthood until the age of eighteen (when they can marry?); those who lack the work ethic will not seek gainful employment, will depend on welfare, and will resort to illegiti-

mate means of procuring goods and services; crime and delinquency are also caused by the attitude of tolerance of deviance. Later, I will examine at some length the structure of this form of stereotypic thinking in relation to the quest for conceptual coherence.

Despite the caveats alluded to above, “underclass” researchers usually forge ahead boldly, as if their mere statement has somehow vitiated the complex problems at issue. Illustrative of this kind of bravado is Emmett Carson’s study, which purports to demonstrate the merits of a “three dimensional definition” of a “criminal underclass,” as a subgroup of the much larger and heterogeneous “underclass.” The three dimensions include: economic—“low income”; behavioral—“engaged in some deviant activity within the last year”; and attitudinal—“exhibit some type of a social attitude toward work” (Carson 1986, 348). The rationale underlying these measures is formulated in these terms:

The theoretical argument to be advanced here posits that the underclass is not a homogeneous group. On the contrary, the underclass is composed of subgroups that have different behavioral and attitudinal deficiencies. An underclass subgroup is defined as any group of economically disadvantaged individuals who display a common deviant behavior, and who possess specific deviant attitudes with respect to the behavior they display.

In Carson’s study, the vague rationale advanced above turns out to be largely irrelevant in comprehending the results of the author’s regression analysis. More over, the percent of variance accounted for in predicting semimonthly earnings using the different “underclass” characteristics is not only low, but declines over time (349). After all is said and done, the following qualification is given: “There is no way to determine whether the attitudes in question are the result or the cause of illegal activity” (349).

The lack of clarity regarding the conceptual domain designated by the term “underclass” is not only a reflection of the “heterogeneity” of the “subgroup” at the destination point, after individuals cross the threshold of what is assumed to be “mainstream,” but also the multifaceted nature of the causal mechanisms at work. Illustrative of this quagmire of intersecting conceptual domains are the following statements by Ricketts and Sawhill:

The fact that some members of the underclass engage in illicit activities such as drug trafficking, suggests that not all members of the underclass are poor. Similarly, many poor people, one thinks particularly of the working poor and of the many persis-

tently poor people who are elderly or disabled, are not usually considered members of the underclass. (1988, 318)

In the absence of a sound theoretical rationale for isolating “underclass” traits, many researchers resort to a postfactum logic, in which the traits are taken from a group deemed to be afflicted by a multiplicity of social problems (to an extreme degree). Thus, in his study, Carson used a sample consisting of ex-offenders who “met both the economic and behavioral criteria due to program’s eligibility requirements of limited income and recent incarceration” (348).

In the same vein, McLanahan and Garfinkel write:

An underclass is defined as a population exhibiting the following characteristics: weak labor force attachment, persistence of weak attachment, and residential isolation in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and unemployment. (1989, 92)

After examining their data, they found that only a small proportion (five percent) of single mothers met the three criteria. They then add that the criteria are eminently suited to a “small and growing minority of Black, never-married mothers” (92).

The use of the above postfactum logic prompts “underclass” research to slide into the terrain of stereotypic thinking and into the labeling game. Quite often, the group in question, whether explicitly identified or not, turns out to be “poor blacks, living in the inner-city or ghetto.” But even this group may not provide a good fit. Rather, it is a subset of this group which is thought to be afflicted with an aggravated form of a “tangle of pathologies,” that offers the best possibilities for identifying “underclass” traits. Conceptual coherence is thus engendered by the process of stereotyping.

### ***The problem of measuring “underclass” traits***

The empiricism of postfactum reconstruction is compounded by the problem of measuring “underclass” traits. In response, underclass researchers often adopt *ad hoc* provisions in order to justify the use of measures whose epistemic correlation with the underlying properties being measured is quite problematic.

Let me proceed here by examining the “behavioral” approach advocated by Ricketts and Sawhill (1988), who recommended focusing on “behaviors that inhibit social mobility” as a strategy of resolving conceptual and measurement problems. They begin by itemizing “mainstream norms,” namely: attending school; postponing parenthood until age of eighteen; deriving income from work for adult males;

deriving income from work, marriage, or both, for adult females; and abiding by the law. With reference to these norms, they arrive at the following indices of “underclass” status: high-school dropouts (for ages sixteen through nineteen); prime-age males not regularly attached to the labor force (from ages sixteen upward); welfare recipients; female heads of households.

In order to capture the “underclass” reality lurking below the surface of these measures, further explanations are added to the effect that being a welfare recipient is a proxy for women not married, and not working, while female heads of household is a proxy for early child-bearing, risk of dependency, and the intergenerational risk of being raised in a single female-headed household. Once again, the measures and their justification “make sense” only because the researchers’ conceptual lens is focused on an extreme group that conforms to their portrait of the “underclass.” Indeed, given such a predetermined group, the measures predicate their own validity.

Beyond the problem of bridging the hiatus that exists between the alleged prototypic “underclass” traits used in the empirical measures, there is the question of specifying the units of analysis to which measurements pertain. Underclass researchers have shown a remarkable penchant for employing geographically based measures. The rationale for this practice is eloquently summarized by Ricketts and Sawhill: “The emphasis on location is consistent with the notion that the underclass as a group suffers from multiple social ills that are concentrated in depressed inner-city areas” (318).

The spatial measures are constantly dogged by the problem of the fallacy of composition. A seemingly simple question can lead to quite equivocal answers, as is illustrated by Wilson’s analysis of poverty in Chicago. Using the “percent of households below poverty” in each community area, Wilson sought to establish the association between the increase in the proportion of Black poor and the departure of the “middle” and “working-class” Blacks.

If members of the two nonpoor Black classes left a community with a sizeable Black population, it would seem reasonable to attribute the increase in the proportion of Black poor in that community to such a pattern of out-migration. The areas in question, however, were neither socially homogeneous nor simple in terms of the socioeconomic and demographic processes at work. As Wilson himself acknowledges, following the criticisms leveled by Dazinger and Gottschalk (Wilson 1987, 49–50), the observed pattern of the increase in poor Blacks could also have been generated by the departure of poor and nonpoor whites; the departure of other (non-Black, nonwhite) poor and nonpoor; the

in-migration of poor Blacks, and the number of nonpoor Blacks who became poor.

Even more problematic are those studies which employ spatial measures to buttress claims which go beyond the modest ecological inferences. Thus, in underlining the importance of “social isolation” as a hallmark of the “underclass” reality, McLanahan and Garfinkel assert that:

social isolation may occur because the community no longer functions as a resource base for its members, as when a neighborhood has no jobs, no network for helping to locate jobs, poor schools, and a youth culture that is subject to minimal social control. Cultural isolation, on the other hand, refers to deviations from normative standards, such as the absence of work ethic or a devaluation of family commitments. (1989, 99)

Having said all of the above, the authors might have been expected to give a more sophisticated operational definition of “social isolation.” But, nay, the actual index turns out to be the “proportion of mother-only families living in urban neighborhoods with a high proportion of poor people.” (99). The epistemic correlation between “mothers-only families living in poor areas” and “social isolation” remains lodged in the latent world of stereotypic thinking. Not surprisingly, the “findings” remain, once again, equivocal and platitudinous: female-headed families are more likely to live in poor areas, but then, proportionately more female-headed families live outside of poverty areas; while the proportion of mother-only Black families living in areas with a twenty-percent incidence of poverty decreased, those in areas with a forty-percent incidence of poverty households increased. But then the latter accounted for only a small proportion of mother-only families (five percent)!

Undaunted by their questionable assumptions and procedures, McLanahan and Garfinkel conclude their article with the following extravagant claim: “In other words, in the face of general economic progress for Black families in the last twenty-five years, the proportion of poor mother-only families who are isolated increased” (100).

This quotation above furnishes an appropriate transition to the fundamental problems of the “underclass” construction, of which the problems of conceptualization and measurement are an illustration. I shall begin the last section of the paper with an examination of the ideological predilections of “underclass” researchers, who, I would argue, should be considered the “new social pathologists.”

*Underclass construction as the ideology of new social pathologists*

It has been nearly half a century since C. Wright Mills published his widely read article: “The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists” (1943). In the intervening years, William Ryan incorporated Mills’s critique into his own influential analysis articulated in *Blaming the Victim* (1971). An even more cogent critique demonstrating the link between the perspective of the modern-day social pathologists and that of the pathologist of yesteryear is that of Charles Valentine (1968).

In his critique of the “culture of poverty” thesis, Valentine showed the continuity between the “pejorative tradition established by E. Franklin Frazier” and the explanations of Black poverty advanced by the erstwhile liberal social scientists, Moynihan, Glazer, and Matza (see Valentine 1968, chap. 2). As is well known, the pedigree of the social pathologists cut in the mold of Frazier derives from the “Chicago School,” from whence sprung other pathologists discussed by Mills (1943).

At any rate, in the furor that followed the publication of the so-called “Moynihan Report,” the protagonists often lost sight of the fact that it was Frazier who supplied the basic ingredients that went into the construction of the proverbial “matriarchal black family” as the quintessence of the “tangle of pathologies in the ghetto.” As a matter of historical record, the list of pathologies—poverty, unemployment, crime and delinquency, illegitimacy, improvident males, etc.—has not changed much over the years. In addition, the structure of causal accounting of these pathologies remains essentially in the same discourse of the “culture of poverty.” One must therefore be amazed at the fanfare with which it is announced that a “new” type of poverty has been discovered, namely the poverty that has plagued the Black “underclass,” after the implementation of the “sweeping anti-discrimination measures.”

If plagiarism, platitudes, and prejudices abounded in the studies of Black poverty in the sixties and early seventies, the same proclivities are true of today’s “underclass” research. As I have argued in the previous sections, the latter studies isolate “underclass” traits from an extremely stereotyped impoverished group which is assumed to manifest prototypical “underclass” traits. To buttress their arguments concerning “inner city dislocations,” these new social pathologists merely update the older accounts by introducing “new data.”

These data do nothing to enhance conceptual coherence and measurement, not to mention our understanding of the deeper structural mechanisms at work. The problems alluded to here are evident in Wilson’s line of thinking below.

In his discussion of what he labels as the “tangle of pathologies in the inner city,” Wilson gives the usual litany of afflictions of the Black

“underclass”: violent crimes—murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; female-headed households; illegitimate births; teenage child-bearing (1987, chap. 2). Then follows a purportedly “comprehensive explanation” of the etiology of these pathologies: historic discrimination, recency of migration, youthful population, change from goods-producing to service-oriented economy, and the concentration of pathologies occasioned by the departure of the middle- and working-class Blacks. Notable in this potpourri of traits and their causes is the theoretical and conceptual chaos of circumscribing in the same framework phenomena that are quite problematic with regard to their level of generality, ontological status in terms of epistemic correlations, and causal sequencing. In the absence of these considerations, the explanations linking pathologies to their alleged causes remain at the level of simple-minded empiricism, as is evident in the following statement:

The higher the median age of a group, the greater its representation in higher income and professional categories. It is, therefore not surprising that ethnic groups such as blacks and hispanics, who average younger than whites, also tend to have high unemployment and crime rates. (1984, 97–98)

Further down we are told:

Age is not only a factor in crime, it is also related to out-of-wedlock births, female-headed homes and welfare dependency. (99)

The empiricism running through the accounts of “underclass” researchers is what Mills identified as one of the hallmarks of the social pathologist’s treatment of social problems. In this tendency, a catalogue of discrete problems is presented without a coherent theoretical framework. The mode of analysis is impressionistic and journalistic. This manner of “problematization” is assumed to be close to the epistemology of everyday life—that is, dealing with problems as they “really are” in concrete life, rather than as they exist in the representations of some abstract theories. In this regard, Wilson implores liberals not to be caught in the debate of whether the “underclass” exists, or “to look for data to deny the very existence of an underclass” (Wilson 1987, 19).

As Mills observed, related to the social pathologists’ insistence on dealing with concrete empirical problems is their tendency to focus on individual traits as explanation of social problems. For “underclass” researchers, problematic traits are those that impair an individual’s “market capacity” and prevent the social mobility out of “underclass” status. In such analyses, any semblance of structural determination is



introduced in the limited sense of the labor-market constraints occasioned by the shift from a goods-producing to a service-oriented economy.

Admittedly, the capitalist economy tends to render labor redundant in the course of technological change. This explanation of poverty and unemployment, however, is quite limited and, when formulated within the framework of the conventional capitalist political economy, cannot offer a fundamental explanation of Black poverty. The fact of the matter is that a capitalist economy cannot offer employment to everyone who is willing and able to work. Furthermore, this state of affairs is compounded by the problems of racism, sexism, ageism, and a host of other mechanisms like the economic cycles, capital mobility, and structural crisis (see Edari 1991). All these factors, acting separately and jointly, make the problem of poverty seemingly intractable.

By eschewing structural analysis in favor of the focus on individual characteristics, the inquiry into the persistence of poverty (“amidst plenty”) is transformed into the discourse of the “persistence of traits” through the causal feedbacks of a self-perpetrating process. At this juncture, the structure of thought is hopelessly caught in the grip of the “culture of poverty” logic. To be sure, one can equivocate on matters of whether the analysis is focused on “behavior” or “culture,” but the point is moot since “behavioral norms” are themselves part of the symbolic universe designated as “culture.” It is equally a moot point to debate whether it is the same or different individuals who experience “spells of poverty.” The fundamental problem is the same, namely the ignoring of the endemic structural tendencies that are the root cause of poverty in the first place.

By ignoring the structural tendencies of capitalism, liberal analyses of poverty are invariably caught in the dilemma of explaining why poverty exists “amidst plenty.” Attempts to offer an explanation by focusing on individual characteristics often lead to the same explanation entertained by the self-consciously conservative social scientists. This was true in the sixties, and remains true for “underclass” research today (Edari 1991). There is an added twist to the structure of thought here.

According to Mills (1943), for the social pathologists the notion of progress is charged with moral valuations that depict the individual as having failed at a time when societal conditions were getting better. This reinforces the moral unworthiness of the individuals afflicted with social problems. The persistence of this line of thinking over the years is remarkable. In the early sixties, the term “underclass” was used in reference to those who were said to have been bypassed by the post–World War II prosperity (see Myrdal 1963, 10; Harrington 1982,

10). Similarly, today's "underclass" is said to have failed to benefit from the "sweeping anti-discrimination" measures. If the liberal discourse on poverty in the sixties lent plausibility to the "culture of poverty" argument, it is equally true that the liberal rhetoric concerning the "underclass" has lent legitimacy to the self-consciously conservative characterization of the poor (see, for example, Murray 1984).

In the realm of public policy, the convergence of thought between the liberals and conservatives is reflected in the frequency with which regressive policies labeled "welfare reform" have been justified by using Wilson's "underclass" research. These measures, most of which call for resocializing the poor and discouraging "underclass dependencies" through punitive requirements, are yet another example of what Mills pointed to as the logical outcome of the social pathologists' preoccupation with individual deficiencies as causes of social problems.

"Underclass" researchers not only ignore the fundamental structural tendencies of capitalism, but also overlook the fact that the very "mainstream" norms and values used to construct social problems may be part of the problem. This has been a time-honored tendency of the social pathologists. As was the case in the sixties, in today's "underclass" research a female-headed family is regarded as "deviant" in relation to some "intact" family in which a male breadwinner is the head. The question of a sexist division of labor and its expression in the very norms used to gauge deviant family patterns is never raised. The upshot of this myopia is to construct an empirical measure, the "male marriageable pool index," on the assumption that the index somehow highlights the extent of the "underclass" problem in the Black community (see Wilson, 1987, 83). In other words, "ghetto residents" have to be brought to conform to sexist norms that a significant number of people (both Black and white) are attempting to move away from. To borrow a phrase from Malcolm X, this is the proverbial situation of seeking to be "integrated into a burning house."

The romanticization of the "mainstream" reference group in "underclass" research leads to another peculiar line of thought. In order to demonstrate this, I will begin by stating that to the social pathologists discussed by Mills, the ideal form of social existence was a small town with a homogeneous, white middle-class, Protestant population. It was this slice of Americana that supplied the baseline norms and values employed in the construction of social problems. In a similar vein, "underclass" researchers such as Wilson, not only abstract standards of conduct from the current presumed "mainstream" (white?) group, but also postulate a time when Blacks of all social classes lived in the same neighborhood with some semblance of normality—thanks to segregation

and the tempering influence of the middle and working classes. In romanticizing the “good old days,” Wilson goes as far as to state that even the poorest—those with neither a job nor a home—could be found sleeping in the parks and on the rooftops, without manifesting the pathological tendencies of today’s “underclass.” This mode of analysis borders on the absurd. For one can just as easily argue that there was no problem of poverty and unemployment among the Southern slaves, or that poverty was not a problem to the cave man. On a more serious note I would like to point out that it was none other than E. Franklin Frazier who documented the alleged pathological adaptations of “lower class Negroes” when they moved from the rural South to the urban North (see Valentine 1968, chap. 2).

Frazier’s idealized comparison group was the rural Southern Black community, which, despite being confronted with virulent forms of racism, led a semblance of normal existence. On the other hand, another modern day social pathologist, Lemann, traces the origins of today’s “urban underclass” to the “share cropper mentality” of the “Southern rural Negroes” (Lemann 1986). We are thus thrown back to the original question of “who done it?”

### **Conclusion**

The argument entertained in this paper is that the weaknesses of the “underclass” construction derive from the limitations of the individualistic conceptions of the Weberian class problematic and the related social pathologist discourse on poverty. Individualistic “underclass” conceptions are plagued by the problem of circumscribing discrete traits within a framework that has theoretical and methodological integrity, particularly at the structural level. In the absence of such a framework, traits are rendered coherent by the process of stereotyping the characteristics of an extremely impoverished “inner-city” group, in its postvictimized state. The limitations of this approach are, among other things, revealed at the level of conceptualization and measurement, where the “reality” of “underclass” status often eludes the empirical measure in use, prompting the researchers to indulge in the fine art of equivocation.

The problems of conceptualization and measurement alluded to above are compounded by the uncritical use of “mainstream” values and norms to diagnose the afflictions of the “underclass.” As a consequence of taking the institutions of a capitalist society as “given,” individualistic explanations are rendered ineffectual in resolving the riddle of poverty “amidst plenty.” The reality of the matter is that in antagonistic social formations, poverty is the complimentary side of progress

and affluence. Dissecting the characteristics of the poor in their postvictimized state cannot reveal the inner logic of this process. Neither can the problem of poverty be elucidated by reference to limited structural explanations of “opportunity structure,” especially when a false reading of history is added to the effect that some people continue to languish in poverty, despite some “sweeping antidiscrimination measures.” Apart from the fact that the “opportunity structure” under capitalism is always constrained, this discourse often tends to construe the persistence of structural tendencies as the persistence of individual traits through a self-regenerating process. This is why it has been the liberal characterizations of the “underclass” in both the sixties and today that have lent plausibility to the “culture of poverty thesis.” Ultimately, there is no fundamental difference in the liberal and conservative approaches to poverty, notwithstanding the talk of convergence of perspectives.

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# Pharmacists and the National Health Insurance Debate

Joel Albers

ABSTRACT: This paper describes why the time is ripe for pharmacists, like other health practitioners, in the name of their patients and their own economic interests, to advocate a federally funded, publicly administered national health program for the United States, one that is fairly funded, universal, comprehensive, without copayments and based on human need. The case is made through analysis of the historical and economic development of the capitalist structure of the U.S. health care system with special emphasis on pharmacy.

## *Introduction*

Many serious economic problems beset the pharmacy profession today, including increased dominance by private health maintenance organizations and other private third-party payers, the growth of pharmacy chains and decline of independents, mail-order pharmacy, physician dispensing, and increased automation and technician assistance. Under the conditions prevailing in the current U.S. health care system, all of these phenomena, in the name of cost containment, are compromising patient care and contributing to the deprofessionalization and reduced profitability of retail pharmacy. Yet these issues tend to be viewed in isolation from one another rather than as a manifestation of a more fundamental structural problem plaguing the overall U.S. health care system—the corporatization of health care (Starr 1982, 420–49). Corporatization is rapidly leading to the deprofessionalization and proletarianization of pharmacists, a process vividly described by Marx and Engels: “The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted

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the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-laborers” (1976b, 487). Indeed the same inequities and contradictions which arise in most sectors of capitalist society also reproduce themselves within today’s health care sector, particularly in the last decade.

Most of organized pharmacy would agree that pharmacists must reprofessionalize by moving beyond dispensing the medicinal drug product as their primary function and toward offering patient-centered pharmaceutical care (described below) and even health promotion and disease-prevention services to patients.

Many pharmacists offer little in the way of nondispensing services since they do not get reimbursed for them. A recent report released by the inspector general of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services stated, “One of the most formidable barriers facing pharmacists at the community level is the transaction-based reimbursement structure of the industry. For the most part, pharmacists’ reimbursement [is] linked to the sale of a product rather than provision of services. Though the retail level of the drug distribution system has always operated in a competitive environment, over the past decade competition has increased dramatically with the burgeoning growth of mail service pharmacies and discount chains. Consequently, the economics of practice tend to keep prices down and to compensate with higher volume. The result typically is a focus on product and price rather than provision of clinical services for which there is no economic incentive.” (Kusserow 1990)

Various approaches toward reprofessionalization of retail pharmacy have been proposed with none constituting any structural change in the health care system:

(1) Convincing third-party payers of the need for reimbursement for nondispensing patient services by demonstrating that delivery of such services leads to optimal drug therapy. This would occur through reduction in costly drug-induced hospitalizations and less demand for surgery and other more expensive therapeutic modalities, resulting, it is presumed, in cost containment and improved quality of care.

(2) Some studies show that patients would be willing to pay for nondispensing services.

(3) Others believe that regardless of how pharmacists get paid, as health professionals they should provide nondispensing services.

(4) Certainly, there are attempts within pharmacy schools to prepare future pharmacists for greater clinical roles. Strand et al. have advo-



cated what is termed “pharmaceutical care,” a systematic approach to drug-related problem identification, classification, and resolution emphasizing the pharmacist’s responsibility for patient-specific outcomes based on written documentation. Blue Cross and other payers have agreed to study the results of pilot testing this method to determine its cost effectiveness and whether to begin reimbursement for clinical services. The pharmaceutical care concept constitutes a profoundly more organized redefinition of clinical pharmacy, but whether it can be implemented and functional within the confines of the current health care system remains questionable. Skeptics would have serious reservations about whether third-party payers will buy into the proposal. The pharmaceutical care approach is necessary but not sufficient, since it (a) ignores the need for changing the overall conditions of practice, which would require reducing administrative tasks such as billing, claims processing, and formulary status determination of drugs for insured patients, and (b) simultaneously ignores the need for provision of medical and pharmacy coverage for tens of millions uninsured. The contradiction is that the insurance companies, chain drug industry, and managed care, on which the profession would rely to adopt changes in pharmacy practice, are the very entities controlling the current adverse conditions of practice. Unfortunately, third-party payers are primarily interested in profits, not patients.

(5) Stephen Schondelmeyer, director of the pharmaceutical economics research center at University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, offers this solution: “Most patients under third-party programs pay the same price (or copayment) for a prescription no matter which pharmacy they may choose [to fill] their prescription. When price is not a factor, what factors will influence pharmacy choice? Patients are likely to choose the pharmacy where they are treated as an individual and where a pharmacist is available to answer their questions about medications. Thus, competition in a third party-dominated prescription market will be on the basis of service rather than price” (Schondelmeyer and Thomas 1990).

In light of the current austere business climate imposed by managed-care third parties, stressing efficiency and high volume prescription filling at low prices, pharmacists are likely to be less, not more, available to answer patients’ questions about their medications, much less counsel them. If anything, pharmacists, like physicians, appear headed toward greater deprofessionalization and less decision-making autonomy under the influence of managed third-party care. In addition, piecemeal reforms heretofore fail to address the denial of

health and drug insurance for thirty-seven million people in the United States.

If, however, we are prepared to accept a third-party dominated prescription market, why, then, should not pharmacy favor a Canadian-type single-payer system involving reimbursement by the federal government? As in Canada, the pharmacy profession would negotiate fees rather than bid competitively for managed-care third-party contracts that are awarded to the bidder offering the lowest dispensing fee. Such a system could dramatically reduce time spent filling out claim forms and save billions in administrative waste with no need for third parties and fiscal intermediaries, since the federal government could deal directly with pharmacy and other health care providers. It would allow for universal coverage for health care and drug insurance. Furthermore, in addition to being federally financed, a national health program would be publicly administered and planned through regional health agencies, allowing consumer involvement. Few managed-care operations (i.e., primarily HMOs) today allow consumers on their boards of directors. Thus, our current U.S. health care system hardly allows for consumer sovereignty, much less consumer "freedom of choice." Only a few states, like Minnesota, allow for mediation of consumer grievances in HMOs.

Despite much debate about possible national health programs in and out of Congress, notably involving physicians, labor, and big business, this issue seems absent from the pharmacy agenda. Unfortunately both the American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA) and American Society of Hospital Pharmacists (ASHP) have not taken a position on the issue of a national health program (personal communication with APhA and ASHP, 1991). And yet, the crucial character of this issue evokes our ethical obligation to confront it. The pharmacy profession can no longer afford to regard the prospects of a national health program merely as a neglected question, not when opinion surveys show that nearly three of every four people in the country (72% to 73%) support some form of a national health program for the United States (Blendon 1990). Indeed public support appears to be higher now than at any time since World War II. The pharmacy profession has had a long historical tradition of concern for preserving the health of the masses of poor people. It is no coincidence that people in the United States commonly referred to the pharmacist as "Doc." As health care system gatekeepers, pharmacists have long served as surrogate doctors for the poor. Even in eighteenth-century England, the poor masses of people depended on the apothecaries for the preservation of their health, while the rich relied on the doctors. It is time for pharmacy to reclaim that

legacy and support the recent physicians' proposal for a national health program calling for a federally funded, publicly administered Canadian-type system. Pharmacists in the United States should support this proposal for their own economic interests as well as in the public interest.

### ***Concentration of chain drug industry***

In the 1930s druggists practiced in self-owned small-scale drugstores operating on a free-enterprise basis. The pharmacists were in control of the means of drug production and retailing through compounding and dispensing their own medicines. Not long thereafter the druggist's compounding role was replaced by the rise of the comparatively gigantic synthetic drug manufacturing industry. No individual pharmacist could compete with the industry that had acquired the capital and technology to enable the large-scale, efficient production and promotion of medicinal drugs. This forced pharmacists to relinquish the compounding role and control of the small-scale means of production, leaving dispensing of the drug product as their chief function. Yet pharmacists continued in their self-employed practices in drugstores which they owned and over which they still had some professional control.

In succeeding years pharmacy would be dealt another serious blow to its professionalism. Like drug manufacturing, drug retailing itself developed into a large-scale industry through the efforts of Louis K. Liggett, Charles R. Walgreen, and others (Sonnedecker 1976, 305). Although rapid development of chain drugstores arose in the early 1900s, the "superstore" concept did not begin to take hold until the 1940s with expansion into mass-merchandising chains, eventually including the discount houses and combination supermarket pharmacies of today. Concentration of capital, economies of scale and diversity, and high turnover meant large profits and survival in the marketplace. For others it meant bankruptcy. But for the profession generally it meant further deprofessionalization; that is, the chains adopted a marketing strategy of selling prescription drugs at the lowest possible price while filling large volumes of drug orders, often precluding clinical and health promotional patient-oriented services from the pharmacist. Independents charge higher prices due to lower volume purchasing but generally offer more patient services.

On the question of pharmacy ownership by nonpharmacists, organized pharmacy argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 that "when purely commercial interests wholly own or control pharmacies, the policies, practices and conduct of pharmacies have frequently been unduly influenced by commercial considerations. These abuses range

from the creation of an unprofessional environment and adverse working conditions to serious infringements on the pharmacist's responsibility for the control and dispensing of drugs" (Sonnedecker 1976, 305).

Data from 1979 to 1988 show a clear trend toward the expansion of chain stores (31% to 37%) and the contraction of independent stores (69% to 63%), while the total number of stores has remained constant at 55,000 (NACDS 1988). During that same period, chain sales rose by \$15.8 billion (\$14.2 to \$36.0 billion), while independent sales increased by only \$8.9 billion (\$13.0 to \$21.9 billion) (NACDS 1988). According to National Association of Boards of Pharmacy and National Pharmaceutical Council data, this trend is even more pronounced with the number of independents declining 19% (from 47,882 to 38,785 stores) nationwide between 1983 and 1987 and decreasing by another 10% to 34,944 stores from 1987 to 1989 (Spalding 1990). Yet the number of chains increased 18.7% (15,823 to 18,786) between the years 1983 and 1987. Between 1987 and 1989, chains rose another 7.3%, to 20,153 stores.

In 1950, only 7.7% of U.S. retail pharmacy outlets were owned by chain drug stores; by 1970 the percentage increased to 12.7%. In 1987 chain drug stores accounted for 39% of the nation's 55,000 pharmacies. Chain drug stores now employ more than 52,000 pharmacists, approximately one third of the nation's pharmacists (NACDS 1990). Further concentration of capital in the chain drug industry took place with eight major acquisitions. For example, Rite Aid acquired 114 Peoples Stores, 49 Begley drug stores, and 11 Revco stores. Two of these were leveraged buyouts of chains by Cullum and by Malone and Hyde, two management companies whose knowledge or concern about appropriate use of drug therapy is highly in question (NACDS 1988).

The growth of chains has led some pharmacists to join unions. The main unions organizing pharmacists are the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union and District 1199, an affiliate of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union.

For many pharmacists today, a work week longer than forty hours, little time for breaks, high stress, repetitious work, and lack of patient contact are not uncommon. In the summer of 1990 pharmacists of the large Osco chain in Chicago went on strike for several days over working conditions and wages.

At least five surveys since 1975 asking whether pharmacists would enroll in pharmacy if they could choose a career over again indicate that 37.5% to 46% would not choose pharmacy, not recommend the profession to their children, or would have second thoughts about entering it (Brody 1991). Another survey of 1,242 pharmacists found

that 44.9% were most likely to say no to a career in their profession if they could start over, as compared to 36.1% of nurses and 22.9% of physicians. Such sentiment occurs despite an average base salary for full-time pharmacists of roughly \$41,000 (\$41,074 for chain, and \$43,638 for independent pharmacists) (Brody 1991).

An interviewed pharmacist who has worked with a national chain pharmacy for nine years had this to say about working conditions:

Right now with pharmacy I think one of the main points is that unlike any other profession you are expected to work pretty much by yourself and maybe with a technician, but you are the one that is responsible to be on call in the pharmacy for 8, 9, and up to 12 hours at a time without any breaks whatsoever. I think it is pretty difficult for anybody to comprehend what it means to fill up to 300 to 400 prescriptions in a day and expect to have a level of quality of your profession to stay as high as pharmacy wants it and requires it. I find it kind of disheartening to work in a job that you don't get treated as a human being that can leave to go on a lunch break or just a break, or even to go on a bathroom break. (Bond 1990)

Pharmacists' actions, like those of physicians, are increasingly controlled by management, by companies, whose focus on the bottom line engenders indifference to pharmacist labor and the drug product, viewing each as commodities rather than as health care services for sick human beings. The emphasis, therefore, is on pharmacists' processing a high volume of prescriptions with little time for individualized patient care. Ultimately, to paraphrase Marx's *Capital*, in health as in other industries, capitalist production is indifferent to the particular product produced. The sole purpose of production is to secure profits.

#### ***Automation and technical assistance***

High-volume dispensing is further expedited by automatic digitalized pill counters, and computers may provide greater efficiency in inventory control, ordering, patient profiles, and drug-utilization data. In fact, if not for the legal stipulation of pharmacist-to-technician ratios of one-to-one in most states, many chain and managed-care firms would most likely hire more technicians in order to keep labor costs down. Yet pharmacies cannot function legally without a pharmacist on duty, making colleges of pharmacy an important source from which is derived the labor force for chains, independents, hospitals, and other settings. The American Council on Pharmaceutical Education unanimously approved plans for the adoption of standards and guidelines for the pharmacy profession, requiring a universal six-year entry-level

Doctor of Pharmacy degree by the year 2000 (ASHP 1989, 1) rather than the current five-year degree offered by most of the nation's seventy-four pharmacy colleges. The decision was based on the belief that "the societal purpose of pharmacy dictates that it be a patient-centered practice." Yet the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) has issued a report calling for maintenance of the traditional five-year degree, since prolonging the program duration would allegedly exacerbate the pharmacy manpower shortage (Cureton and Jay 1990). It is in the interest of the NACDS, but not the public interest, to maintain the current five-year degree and the current rate of supply of the pharmacist labor force. The prohibitively high cost of health professionals' education for many low-income youths, tuition hikes, increased interest rates for loans, and cuts in grant money should be targeted and reformed to expand the supply of future pharmacists.

Thus, the pharmacist is caught between conflicting and contradictory trends. On the one hand, pharmacy is advancing scientifically and clinically in the areas of pharmacology and therapeutics, pharmacokinetics, and pharmaceuticals, and has much to offer patients. On the other hand, the economic conditions of practice are precluding adequate delivery of such services to patients; the bottom line comes first, while the health and well-being of the patient seem to come last. A case in point is the neglected area of pharmacist involvement in health promotion/disease prevention. In a study of thirteen possible preventive health activities in which pharmacists could participate, seven such activities were rated as having low pharmacist economic incentive: antismoking programs, breast-cancer awareness, DES awareness, colorectal cancer awareness, alcoholism awareness, preventing child abuse and neglect, and childhood immunizations (Bush 1983, 24-25). Whether the efficiency of automation and technician assistance will be used to free the pharmacist for clinical and health-promotional services or to enhance profits and turn pharmacists into mere appendages of the machinery depends on the type of health care system operating. Managed care appears to be most focused on the bottom line.

#### *Other sectors of health care industry*

Like the inverse relationship between the growth of drug chains and independents, private for-profit hospital chains such as Humana and Health Corporation of America are expanding while city and county public hospitals are contracting in the face of declining tax bases and dumping of uninsured patients from the chain hospitals themselves (Brown 1983). The drug manufacturing industry too is consolidating both nationally and globally with eight recent mergers (Pollard 1990).

#### *Economic and ideological aspects of U.S. health care system*

As the above scenarios indicate, to remain competitive and maximize profits in advanced capitalist societies, business enterprises must accumulate capital; reinvest to continuously upgrade technology and efficiency of production; expand facilities; minimize the cost of wage-labor, raw materials, and taxes; create new markets (the last four are often achieved through relocation to the Third World); diversify commodity production, control pricing; and eventually eliminate competition through mergers, acquisitions, and leveraged buyouts leading to oligopoly and monopoly (Mandel 1969, 29-53). The drug patent, for instance, allows complete control over pricing during the patent period. Deprofessionalization, proletarianization, and loss of decision-making autonomy of physicians is occurring today for exactly the same reasons that it did for pharmacists over fifty years ago—loss of control over the means of production.

In the early decades of the 1900s physicians could offer little more than the “morphine and magic” that they carried in their black bags at house calls. Diagnosis was performed by way of the stethoscope, percussion, and palpation of organs. Since the dawning of the synthetic drug revolution in the 1940s, the practice of medicine has become a highly technological enterprise. Private solo practice is declining since few individual physicians can afford enormous capital expenditures for high-technology instrumentation such as computerized axial tomography (CAT), nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), radiography, and clinical chemistry. Only the private industrial sector had the capital to produce the technology of medicine and, through its ownership of the means of production and marketing, to a large extent controls the practice of medicine. This is the case since those who own the means of production in society also control the ideology of that society. As Marx and Engels stated, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations” (Marx and Engels 1976a, 58).

The ideology of U. S. medicine has for a long time tended to be mechanical in outlook, viewing humans as machines in which every disorder requires a specific drug given for each specific ailment. This ideology is rooted in the theory of specific etiology, arising during the time of Pasteur, Koch, and Virchow from their discoveries in bacteriology and physiology, namely, that microorganisms were the cause of

infectious disease. Despite the magnitude of these discoveries, the stage was set for adopting the mechanical and reductionist notions that disease causation is unifactorial as an inherent defect residing in the individual, while deemphasizing the equally important multifactorial, social causes of disease. This ideology, which persists today, helps to consolidate significant control of medicine by the private owners of the means of production and distribution of health care goods and services, often through medicalization of social problems.

***Growth of managed care and the medical-industrial complex***

In addition to the expansion of drug store chains and the contraction of independent pharmacies, the burgeoning of managed care is also impinging on both the economic viability of pharmacists and their ability to deliver quality pharmacy services to the U.S. public. Managed-care facilities such as HMOs and PPOs (Preferred Provider Organizations) strive for cost containment to deal with the skyrocketing national health care expenditure in the United States, which in 1991 amounted to more than \$738 billion, or more than \$2,000 per capita, and accounted for over 12% of the GNP of our country. Yet skyrocketing costs have only met with diminishing health returns, as the country's infant mortality rate of 11 per 1,000 live births is not even among the top fifteen internationally. Similarly disappointing are data on life expectancy, which is lower than that of many other countries. The United States is also lacking in prenatal care and immunizations, not to mention the thirty-seven million people who have no health insurance coverage. Infectious diseases once thought to be eradicated are now steadily increasing in the inner cities.

Cost containment takes the form of prospective payment financing manifested by capitation plans of managed care in the private sector and DRGs (Diagnosis Related Groups) under Medicare in the public sector. The underlying impetus for cost containment or the shift from retrospective reimbursement and maximization of services to prospective payment and the tendency to skimp on services represents the clash



between different sectors of big business (Himmelstein and Woolhandler 1988). Managed care and prospective payment is the response of employers (who are finding it increasingly difficult to pay for health care coverage for their employees) to the expansion over the past decade of corporate investments in for-profit health care and medical technology—the medical-industrial complex (MI) (Relman 1980; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1970, 29–40). The rise of the medical-industrial complex constitutes the corporatization of health care, consisting of producers of medical equipment, chain hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry, and insurance companies. The medical-industrial complex has played an enormous role in driving up health care costs (Waitzkin 1983) through: (1) control of pricing leading to inflation; (2) overpromotion and subsequent superfluous use of high-technology medical instrumentation, devices, and drugs, some of which have undergone inadequate testing by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), not to mention unnecessary laboratory tests and diagnostic procedures; (3) retrospective reimbursement, which attempts to maximize services for those who can afford insurance while denying it to those who cannot; (4) profiteering on the expansion of public programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, the excess funds of which serve to subsidize the profitability and capital expenditures of private practice and private hospitals—this subsidization has particularly exacerbated the problem of the rising cost of medical care; (5) the multipayer system from both public and private “third party” insurers and fiscal intermediaries, which has resulted in an enormous bureaucracy and excessive billing and other overhead costs, leading to an administrative waste of \$77.7 billion annually for health care expenditures in the United States (Himmelstein and Woolhandler 1986).

A health care system which bases service on ability of the individual to pay leads to polypharmacy for the affluent and no drugs for the indigent, duplicative drugs for high-incidence diseases, and orphan drugs for rare diseases. Waitzkin has outlined other contradictions of the U.S. health care system, including “plentiful resources and medical maldistribution, the inverse relation between profit and safety in the workplace, rising costs with diminishing returns, technological progress, and humanistic decline” (1983). Perhaps the most notorious contradiction that Waitzkin points out is the exploitation of illness itself for private profit (Waitzkin and Waterman 1974).

Certainly both the medical-industrial complex, particularly drug companies and managed care, exert major impact on pharmacy economics and, in turn, delivery of services. Retail pharmacists,

particularly those working in independent outlets, depend for their livelihood on a dispensing fee for each prescription on top of the acquisition cost of the drug from the drug manufacturer. Two ways to maximize profits are to maximize the dispensing fee or minimize the acquisition cost. The latter has proved difficult to achieve since drug manufacturers monopolize the pricing of those drugs for which they are entitled to a seventeen-year patent. The Drug Price Competition and Patent Term Restoration Act of 1984 accelerates the approval of generic drugs after patents expire and restores up to five years of patent life for those drugs for which regulatory approval by the FDA delayed introduction into the market. This apparent trade-off is not likely to affect adversely brand-name manufacturers since they have bought out or own many generic companies. Another explanation is, according to Arkansas Senator David Pryor:

In the high-priced market, once the patent on a brand-name drug product expires and generic drug competition is introduced, the price of the brand-name product does not fall; it generally remains high and even increases. This is often explained by drug manufacturers as an attempt to maximize profits per unit sold, in response to losing market share to generic versions of the original product. More fundamentally, of course, any manufacturer would choose this strategy in the face of increased competition—if its customers would stand for it. (1990)

A large part of pharmacists' lack of control over their profession stems from the fact that, unlike clinical medicine, nursing, and dentistry, where much research funding derives from the federal government through such agencies as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, research and development in pharmacy are mostly paid out of the profits of drug manufacturers, and less than three percent of the research and development costs come from tax sources (*Pharmacists for the Future* [Millis Commission] 1975, 41–48). As the Millis Commission reports, “it is fair to say that pharmacy research and development is at this time not a public business, but rather a private business dependent almost exclusively upon private promotion and sale of a product.” And drug prices continue to escalate. Between 1982 and 1988, prescription drugs were the most inflationary commodity of the health care sector, with prices increasing at a rate two-and-one-half times that of overall consumer prices (Schondelmeyer and Thomas 1990).

On the other hand, pharmacists are increasingly losing control over setting the dispensing fee for a prescription as HMOs, PPOs, and other managed-care plans choose to contract with the pharmacy offering the

lowest dispensing fee (Curtiss 1989). Since the reimbursement for prescription drugs of managed care is predetermined prospectively by the plan, pharmacy revenues from prescription drugs are limited. Pharmacies have more work to do for managed health care plan prescriptions and are reimbursed less than that for private-pay prescriptions. In addition, administrative costs of filling prescriptions may increase since the pharmacist must fill out reimbursement claim forms, submit the claim to the managed health care plan, and wait for payment.

Another way in which pharmacies receive pay from managed-care enterprises is through capitation (Curtiss 1989). Pharmacies may prospectively receive monthly or annual lump sums that are used to pay for the drugs for a large volume of enrollees. In this way pharmacists share in the financial risk in that if they spend beyond the lump sum they lose money, while any amount less than the lump sum is profit. Unfortunately, drug utilization is controlled to a large extent by the frequency with which physicians prescribe. Pharmacists do have an incentive, however, to substitute generic drugs for brand-name drugs provided they are on the formulary which the managed-care plan stipulates.

As managed care grows, the percentage of private out-of-pocket pay prescriptions continues to decline, from 88.1% in 1969 to 69% in 1986 to 58.5% in 1989 (Schondelmeyer and Thomas 1990). The chain-store response to these new economic conditions is the development of pharmacy PPOs, where patients, instead of being channelled into one contracted pharmacy, can choose among stores within the chain. In addition, chains, because of their large volume buying, can undersell independents for a managed-care contract. Independent pharmacists responded to chain stores by forming their own PPOs called PSAOs (Pharmacy Service Administrative Organizations). Despite this, the decline in independent pharmacy continues. The net profit before taxes for the average independent pharmacy declined from 5.8% in 1965 to 2.7% in 1986 (Schondelmeyer and Thomas 1990). Contrast this with drug manufacturers, whose average profits as a percentage of sales after taxes have consistently been greater than 12.5% since 1974 (Smith and Knapp 1987, 9–10), while the average for all other manufacturing corporations since that time has hovered at around 5%. Prescription drug prices in the United States are higher than in most countries of the world including Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan (Smith and Knapp 1987).

Such problems threaten the very viability of retail pharmacy or at least its ability to deliver quality care to patients for whom 1.7 billion prescriptions are filled annually. But what has been termed the corpo-

rate compromise, that is, the clash between the health care producers (medical-industrial complex) and the health care purchasers (largely employers), resulting in cost containment in the form of managed care, has led to still further problems for retail pharmacy. Some employers and such groups as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) have, for purposes of cost containment, turned to mail-order pharmacy to fill their prescriptions, in 1989 numbering 90 million or 6% of the total 1.7 billion prescription orders (Fuerst 1991). While Delbert Konner, the executive vice-president of the American Managed Care Pharmacy Association, which represents mail-order pharmacy services, expects an increase to 15% by 1995, others are less optimistic, estimating a plateau at 8%. Although mail-order pharmacy employs pharmacists, this method of delivery cannot be said to be a professionally controlled service. In addition, an estimated 5% of physicians are dispensing prescription drugs (Relman 1987), accounting for 1% to 2% of total prescription orders. This constitutes their response to the managed-care threat to their income, which, in turn, impinges upon the income of pharmacists.

Thus, expansion of chains; contraction of independents; growth of managed care; automation; greater use of technicians, mail-order, and physician dispensing under the prevailing conditions of the current health care system, which places the bottom line first, patient care last, greed over need, and the vicissitudes of the marketplace over planning, may be a prescription for loss of professional control and the demise of pharmacy.

***Historical development of health care industry: from small-scale individual activity to large-scale social process***

In contrast to the early stages of capitalism with its widespread small-scale shopkeeper free enterprise, in advanced capitalist societies the means of production and distribution of commodities become social processes as industrialization, science, and technology advance. The health care industry in the United States is no different from other industries in that health care is increasingly viewed as a commodity earmarked for exchange in the marketplace on the basis of supply and demand. Evidence for the socialization of the means of production is clear if one looks back to precapitalist feudal society, where production was not mechanized and people worked primarily as serfs on individual plots of land. As the merchant class developed and the factory system emerged, masses of people migrated to the cities to form the proletariat. Although production emerged as a social process under capitalism, the product of production continued to be appropriated under private own-

ership. The same social process has occurred in the health care industry, where hospitals and group practices such as HMOs have formed, hospital and pharmacy chains have developed, and pharmacy PPOs and PSAOs have emerged on a background of class struggle.

In fact, much of the history of modern medicine in the last fifty years is characterized by the efforts of labor unions with the support of some doctors to form group cooperatives or group practice for their health care (Mayer and Mayer 1985). This effort met with stiff opposition by the American Medical Association (AMA) and in fact served as the stimulus for the AMA to organize politically in this bitter rivalry. In 1948, when President Truman pressed Congress to pass the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill for compulsory national health insurance, this too met with major resistance from the AMA (Werble 1949; Lewis 1949). In all other industrialized countries, the unions were able to negotiate for a national health insurance policy, but in the United States, due to the strong private sector, health-insurance coverage has been won only on a contract-by-contract basis (Himmelstein and Woolhandler 1988). The unions have been at the forefront of all the struggles for decent health care coverage including Medicare and Medicaid. To this day health care coverage tops the list of union concerns and accounts for most of their strike activity in the past two years. It was the United Automobile Workers of America (UAW) which negotiated the first drug insurance benefits in the United States in the late 1960s, serving as the model for all other drug insurance plans since (Gardner 1986, 27).

Under socialized medicine, the means of production in the health care industry are publicly owned. All health care personnel are employees of a single payer, the government, which controls the organization, planning, and financing. A socialist country like Cuba has this type of system. National health insurance (NHI) in the United States may involve multiple payers, with different segments of the industry represented by private owners. Here, NHI would most likely be financed through taxation (mostly by fixed payroll deductions), a regressive payment structure since poor people would pay disproportionately for NHI. Little attention has been paid in proposed legislation to a scheme of taxation that would favor low-income people. Most NHI plans include some form of out-of-pocket payment, usually as coinsurance, where the individual pays a fixed percentage of costs before NHI begins to pay. Private insurance companies may or may not continue to serve as fiscal intermediaries in distributing payments from the government to health providers. Under NHI, the organizational structure of hospitals and private practice would remain the same. Hospitals would be reimbursed

for services and private practitioners would be paid through a fee schedule determined by professional associations. Thus, a NHI program would alter the financing, but not many organizational aspects. For example, increased access to care would occur only for poor people who happen to live near health care practitioners or a hospital, but the geographic maldistribution of physicians and hospitals would not be changed.

***Why U.S. pharmacists should support  
a Canadian-type health care system***

A single-payer system that phased out fiscal intermediaries, reduced administrative waste, and disallowed public subsidization of private capital expenditures would improve the current U.S. system. This essentially describes the Canadian health care system (Iglehart 1986), which retains private practice for physicians and pharmacists but is funded by a single payer, namely, the federal and provincial governments.

A fundamental difference between the two systems is that Canada utilizes a single payer and universal health insurance in contrast to the United States multipayer system with wide gaps in coverage. Canadian pharmacists are reimbursed by and negotiate fees with the provincial government for drugs dispensed to patients (Silverman, Lee, and Lydecker 1981, 145–48). Individually owned pharmacies and chains also exist in Canada (Wertheimer 1989, 373). As noted above, the average base salary for full time U.S. pharmacists is roughly \$41,000. In Canada in 1986 it was \$41,059 (\$19.74 per hour) (Ontario Pharmacists Association 1986). Canada has a national formulary of drugs based on the British Pharmacopeia. Canadian physicians are urged or required to prescribe generically, and pharmacists in many of the provinces are obliged to substitute a low-cost generic product in place of a more expensive brand-name product. The Canadian government also provides information to physicians and pharmacists on the quality of both brand-name and generic drugs and whether the latter are suitable for substitution. Whereas in Canada prescription drugs represent about five percent of overall health care expenditures (Silverman, Lee, and Lydecker 1981), in the United States they represented 7.8% in 1988 (Schondelmeyer and Thomas 1990).

The nonprofit drug insurance benefit plans vary in each province,

most providing prescription drug coverage for all residents and varying degrees of patient cost sharing. In Saskatchewan all residents are covered by the Drug Plan (Silvermen, Lee, and Lydecker 1981). Pharmacists have negotiated a maximum dispensing fee of \$3.25 with the provincial government. For each prescription, the patient pays \$2.45 of the dispensing fee and the remainder of the dispensing fee plus the acquisition cost is paid by the province. For some formulary drugs the government requests bids for the supply of a product at a fixed price for a six-month period. Wholesalers under government direction then supply these drugs to pharmacies.

Since 1988 at least ten national health program proposals have been put forward in the United States (APHA 1990). One proposal would require employer-based insurance for employees, with continuation of Medicaid and Medicare and states offering subsidized voluntary insurance for all others. Such a proposal hardly seems equitable since it siphons off the added funds from public deductibles, coinsurance, and taxes without touching the medical-industrial-complex profits. Two national health program proposals are based on the Canadian model.

One of these, the Universal Health Care for All Americans Act (H.R. 4253, 101st Congress), was introduced in March 1990 by Representative Mary Rose Oakar (D-Ohio). Under this plan, states would administer a system that provided coverage for all citizens. States would accept bids from providers for specified services, would decide which providers to approve, and would pay them as service was delivered.

The second plan is the Physicians For a National Health Program: A Physicians Proposal (Himmelstein et al. 1989). This initiative is also based on the Canadian model. Its basic features include the following:

A national health program for the U.S. to cover everyone under a public insurance program:

1. Universal coverage: a single program covering everyone.
2. Comprehensive benefits: all medically necessary services: acute, rehabilitative, long-term care, home care, mental health services, dental care, occupational health services, prescription drugs, mental supplies, prevention.
3. Elimination of financial barriers: no copayments, no deductibles, no limits, extra charges only for "uncovered services."
4. Equitable financing: financing not based on ability to pay.
5. Organization and administration: no private role in

administration. Administration by public agencies. Administrative role of health agencies not addressed.

6. Quality and efficiency assurance: boards to evaluate necessity of services; no institutional mechanisms specified (other than overall system structure).

7. Payment mechanisms: global budgeting for provider institutions; physicians and other individual practitioners opt for either salary or fee-for-service; negotiated fee schedule.

8. Ongoing planning and evaluation with consumer and provider participation: board composed of "experts and community representatives" would evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of services, would approve capital projects, and distribute funds.

9. Disease prevention and health promotion: preventive and public health measures are covered benefits.

Although Canada and the United States are culturally similar, the United States has well over 250 million people compared to Canada's twenty-six million and fifty states compared to Canada's ten provinces. These disparities would make it administratively infeasible to implement a Canadian-style plan for each state in the United States. Yet in Canada individual provincial programs were first tested before they evolved into a national system. The same pattern seems to be emerging in the United States. In the absence of a national system at least fifteen states are considering plans for expanding health care access (Wolfe 1990).

The two basic approaches are: (1) Expansion of the current multipayer system through "pay or play" (this is also recommended as a national proposal by the Pepper Commission (Pepper 1990). The employer either pays for an employee's health insurance or may choose to pay a tax to the state into a separate health insurance coverage fund. (2) The other is the Canadian-type single-payer method, which seven of the fifteen states are considering: Michigan, California, Indiana, Florida, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Ohio.

The Ohio bill, called Universal Health Insurance of Ohio (UHIO), is furthest advanced after recently being introduced in the Ohio state legislature. The principal features of the bill include the following (House Bill 175):

1. The Ohio Universal Health Insurance Plan is hereby created for the purpose of providing a single, publicly financed statewide insurance program to provide comprehensive health care services for all residents of this state.



2. Evaluate possible appointees to represent licensed physician and nonphysician health care professionals on the Board of Governors of the plan.

3. The Ohio Universal Health Insurance Plan shall pay the expenses of each institutional provider of services, including providers of inpatient care and ambulatory facilities for diagnosis, treatment, and surgery on the basis of a single, comprehensive, annual budget that is approved by the Board of Governors of the plan.

4. Moneys in the fund shall be used solely to establish and maintain primary community prevention programs, to pay participating providers, and to support construction, renovation, and equipping of health care institutions.

5. Prescription drugs, at no cost, that are approved by the Federal Drug Administration and that are included in a formulary established by the Board of Governors [of UHIO]. Plan members may purchase a brand-name prescription drug that is not included in the formulary for an amount representing the difference between the cost of the brand-name prescription drug and the average cost of comparable drugs in that class that are included in the formulary.

6. Insurers, HMOs, employers, and other plans and third-party payers may offer benefits that do not duplicate coverage that is offered by the plan, but may not offer benefits that duplicate coverage that is offered by the plan.

7. A plan member may choose any participating provider, including any physician whether practicing on an independent basis, in a small group, or in a capitated practice.

8. The plan shall reimburse independent providers of health care services on a fee-for-service basis. The plan shall annually negotiate the fee schedule with the appropriate professional group. The fee schedule shall be applied to health care services rendered by independent providers throughout the state. An HMO or any other multispecialty organization of providers may elect to be reimbursed on a capitation basis, in lieu of the fee-for-service basis.

9. For the purpose of providing revenue for [UHIO], and to pay the expenses of administering the taxes, the following taxes are hereby levied:

- (a) on each employer, a tax equal to nine percent of the employer's payroll;
- (b) on each employee who is a resident, a tax equal to one and one-quarter percent of the employee's gross salary or wage;
- (c) on each self-employed individual, a tax equal to ten percent of the individual's self-employment income;

- (d) a tax on the sale at retail of tobacco products and of alcoholic beverages each equal to ten percent of the price.

The United States and the Republic of South Africa are the only two industrialized nations in the world without a national health program. In addition to socialist countries operating under socialized medicine a variety of capitalist countries such as Sweden, Italy, and Great Britain have essentially adopted a similar model. Although the Canadian-model national health program seems most feasible for the United States at this time, many believe the eventual implementation of a national health service would offer a far better solution to the health care crisis in the United States. With respect to pharmacy, such a system could change the following conditions.

Apart from the United States, only Canada and the United Kingdom allow the existence of chains to any significant degree. In the vast majority of countries pharmacies are either owned by the government or by an individual. In the latter case, the individual cannot own or be responsible for any other pharmacy. The geographic location and distribution of pharmacies is planned to ensure public accessibility. There is greater standardization of facilities and in some cases, as in Sweden, uniform pricing for drugs in the pharmacies. Where location of pharmacies is not regulated, as in the United States or Canada, there is a tendency for chains to cluster within blocks of one another, in large, heavily populated cities. The domination of central downtown Chicago by Walgreen outlets, except for an occasional pharmacy in a high-rise hotel or office building, exemplifies this scenario.

In nearly every country of the world, except the United States, the sale of medicinal drugs is restricted to licensed pharmacies, in which the sale of merchandise unrelated to health care (cigarettes, unnutritious snack food, garden supplies) is prohibited. In many countries the advertising of nearly all types of nonprescription drugs, particularly cough, cold, and allergy medicine, is prohibited under strict legislation. In our country, television and print-media advertising is often misleading and prone to unsubstantiated claims.

The United States is one of the few countries which offer only two legal classifications of medicinal drugs: prescription and over-the-counter (the latter not requiring a written or oral prescription, primarily by a licensed physician or dentist). Many countries typically have available a third classification of drugs sold only over-the-counter (not self-service) under the authority of the pharmacist. The drug may be sold to the customer or patient only if judged appropriate for the particular condition and if adequate instructions for its use are given. A national health service in the United States would facilitate enactment

of these laws and regulations and thereby enhance the professional activity of pharmacists. The misuse and abuse of medicinal drugs in our society would then decrease. When and whether the United States adopts some form of national health program remain to be seen. The momentum, however, seems to be building in the direction of a Canadian-type system.

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COMMENTARY

**On Albers's "Pharmacists and the National Health Insurance Debate"**

Joel Albers has written an article that is quite interesting, yet at the same time very curious. It is interesting because it demonstrates in a factual manner proletarianization of the pharmacy profession. Further, his paper illustrates the simultaneous processes under capitalism of concentration of ownership and monopolization of market in drug manufacturing and distribution. He correctly compares proletarianization of pharmacists with a similar process affecting physicians that is also related to the development of monopoly capitalism in the health care industry nationally and internationally.

The curious aspect of Albers's work, however, is that the solution he advocates, state-based or national health insurance, will in all likelihood have little impact in the health care industry on the continuing processes of concentration of ownership and monopolization of market. As a result, state-based health insurance or national health insurance will have little impact on the proletarianization of pharmacists.

The health care edifice in the United States today stands on two huge but increasingly unstable legs. The first is the financing of health care dominated by the private for-profit health insurance industry. The second is the provision of health care services and commodities dominated by for-profit multinationals. A public single-payer system, like that in Canada or like that sometimes proposed in various states or for the United States as a whole, knocks out only one of the two for-profit legs supporting the health care industry. Depending on which proposal is being considered, private health insurance will have either no role in the public single-payer system, or an administrative role (as it does currently in Medicare and Medicaid).

The important point is this: Under typical state or national health insurance proposals, at best only one of the two profit-making legs of the health care industry would be dismantled. For-profit health insur-

ance would be replaced by a single public payer, but for-profit health care services and commodities would remain essentially untouched. Their very substantial, even dominant, role in the proletarianization of pharmacists and other health care workers would continue, now financed predominantly by the public sector.

There is growing evidence in Canada, particularly considering the recent Free Trade Agreement with the United States, that the dominant health-care-for-profit system in Canada will increasingly tend toward monopolization and concentration of capital, will increasingly undergo distortion from profit maximization, and consequently will increasingly proletarianize health care workers.

In terms of improved access there is absolutely no question that a Canadian-type public single-payer national health insurance program would be a tremendous advance for the working people of the United States. A national health service knocking out *both* for-profit legs of the health industry would be far superior. All facilities would be public property and all health care workers would be in the public sector. The entire system would be funded by progressive taxes and controlled by community-elected boards predominantly composed of health care consumers. For details see, for example, Representative Ron Dellums's (D-Calif.) H. R. 3220, U.S. Health Service Act.

The process of proletarianization would find its endpoint in meaningful public service to the community rather than private drudgery for the corporation. Alienation at the workplace would give way to new, fulfilling relationships with both the health care system and health care consumers. Under a national health service these relationships would evolve on the basis of social need rather than the current basis of private greed.

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### **On the Issues of the Albers–Weiss Exchange**

The article by Joel Albers presents a compelling case for a national health care system, and in posing the Canadian model, i.e., a single-payer system with the government as the payer, he presents what is politically possible in this country. The commentary by Larry Weiss counterposes the idea of a national health system that in effect national-

izes the entire system, hospitals, doctors, the drug industry, etc. While this may be the more “politically correct” concept, it is unfortunately not on the agenda of any mass organization or even in the realm of public debate.

National health care is on the political agenda in this country. The debate is over what kind of national health care, one that is dominated and run by insurance companies or one that eliminates this section of private profit from health care. In the labor movement, unions that represent the majority of the membership have endorsed the single-payer concept. The right wing under Lane Kirkland is desperately trying to maintain the status quo, the center forces promote a national health care system run by the insurance companies, while the left is promoting a Canadian-based model.

What is needed in this country is a breakthrough in the reactionary politics that have dominated the country since the election of Reagan. What is needed is a breakthrough that is not defensive (like the defeat of Bork) but one that is offensive in nature. By concentrating the left and progressive forces on one main issue with the intent and the ability to win, the log jam of Republican/Democratic politics could be broken.

A single-payer national health care system can be this issue.

The socialist left is needed to make this campaign for a single-payer system an issue in every organization in the country. The socialist left can provide the unifying force to bring together the disparate forces that have already endorsed the concept of a single-payer system: national and local unions, organizations in the African-American and other minority communities, senior citizens’ organizations, women’s organizations, gay and lesbian organizations, activists in the struggle against AIDS, peace activists working for conversion and cutting back of the military budget, and progressive medical groups such as Physicians for National Health Care. The possibilities are endless because so many sectors already see national health care as an absolute necessity.

The people can be won over to the idea of a single-payer system. There are many small businesses that can and have been won over to the idea as health insurance costs continue to soar out of sight. The monopoly capitalists are not unified in their position, with some in the industrial sector, such as the auto industry, wavering because of the high costs.

This presents a classic situation where change can occur—the working class can be unified around an issue, large sectors of the petty bourgeoisie can be won over, while monopoly capital is divided in its position.



Why should the socialist movement see national health care as important? Most reasons are self-evident, the most basic being that we are dedicated to improving the standard of living of the working class, and as I stated in the opening, this has the most obvious chance of being a breakthrough issue, one that can be won and not only open the door for other progressive opportunities but change the political atmosphere, which is in itself vitally important. It would also be a blow against an important sector of monopoly capitalism.

In the realm of ideas a campaign for a single-payer system would create the situation where basic socialist ideals, operating a social system for people, not profit, would once again be openly debatable and discussable and eventually implementable. This is a necessary criterion for any development of a mass socialist movement.

There are defects in the Canadian system, and we must confront these head on and talk about how such a system would be adapted to the United States. The most obvious need is for mandating the reopening and improvement of hospitals in African-American and other minority communities.

We must fight for the most advanced position that is winnable and then begin the struggle to improve that system. The Russo Bill (H.R. 1300) and its companion, the Wellstone Bill (S. 2320), which would establish a Canadian-style system, will be coming up for votes this year. There are seventy cosponsors of the Russo bill, more than any other major piece of health care reform legislation.

Larry Weiss writes about eliminating both “profit-making legs” of health care in this country. Strategically it is possible to eliminate the insurance-company leg, which will set the stage for eliminating the other, but the time is now and we should not let it pass by.

David Cohen

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### **Response by Lawrence Weiss to David Cohen**

A few words about David Cohen’s response to my comments.

As Marxists, it seems to me that our position on the health care industry as a whole must reflect our understanding both of class and of class conflict, and the awareness that capitalist ownership, investment, and speculation in the health care industry is entirely incompatible with

the right to adequate health care for all working people. Those who uncritically support a national health insurance system like Canada's despite its preservation of capitalist relations of production either do not understand class relations or are opportunists. I believe Marxists must support a fully public National Health Service such as outlined by Dellums, but in the course of political struggle may make tactical compromises in the name of coalition building, for example, that in their collective judgment bring us closer to a national health service.

Lawrence David Weiss

# Indigenous Americans and the U.S. Constitution

David A. Muga

ABSTRACT: The Columbus quincentenary offers an opportunity to revisit the Constitution of the United States and explore the enormous impact this document has had on the contemporary conditions in which indigenous communities find themselves. Taking into account the precursors and precipitating events of the Constitution, the paper identifies the role played by primitive capitalist accumulation as a model for the document and describes a series of “silences”—citizenship, land, political representation, and self-determination—reflecting the basic contradiction between indigenous communities viewed as semi-autonomous nations and as agents of domestic policy.

## *Introduction*

The upcoming quincentenary of Columbus’s incursion into Indian country provides the opportunity once again to review the question of the relation of Indigenous Americans to the U.S. Constitution, especially insofar as this document remains a cogent, concrete manifestation of Columbus’s legacy in this country. Of course this relation was the subject of some discussion during the bicentennial celebrations of the U.S. Constitution in 1987, but the issues surrounding this relation were never clearly articulated, or definitively resolved during that period of dialogue.

It is particularly important to note that what education did take place around this issue dealt almost exclusively with what was *said* in Constitution, its language and interpretations with respect to indigenous peoples. But the other half of the problematic—what was *not said*, what remained silent and suppressed—remained largely unanalyzed.

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992)

These constitutional silences are not surprising, since what was being celebrated at that time was the *conception* of the document, not its adoption, ratification, or implementation. But it was precisely this conceptualization that reveals to us the problems that confronted the newly independent bourgeois state, the visions of political unity held forth by its proponents, and the democratic “openings” offered up by its leading spokespersons within the real limits set by the ideological framework of those times. This is also true of the various state constitutions that were formulated over the two centuries following the ratification of the national document. At the same time, these documents reveal the historical flow of contradictions and tensions that existed between the local or regional problematic of economic unity and national accord. That the constitutional mandates in the United States, both state and national, were themselves terrains of fierce class struggle between progressive and reactionary or conservative forces is self-evident. But their roots go far deeper than is usually conceded and their deleterious impacts on Indigenous Americans go largely unrecognized.

The following discussion will examine specific aspects of the Constitution in relation to Indigenous Americans.<sup>1</sup> The main focus will therefore be on the application of constitutional mandates to “small nationalities” with special recognition of the silences that were concomitantly woven into that document and which have had enormous impact on the contemporary conditions in which indigenous peoples find themselves.

### ***Precursors of the Constitution***

The 1787 conception of the U.S. Constitution was preceded by two other governing mechanisms, an earlier “constitution” called the Articles of Confederation, which was originally proposed in 1776 and effectively placed in operation in 1781 (after Maryland became the last of the thirteen colonies needed to ratify the document), and, even earlier, the two Continental Congresses of 1774 and 1775, which directed the revolutionary war for independence.

The Articles of Confederation provided a governmental system during the years 1781–87 for the group of thirteen sparsely populated states (about three million persons total) strung out along the Atlantic Ocean from Massachusetts to Georgia. Its functions were vested in a single Congress whose authority lay not with the people, but with the various state legislatures (representing the propertied classes).

The Articles of Confederation, therefore, as Herbert Aptheker’s third volume of *History of the American People* clearly demonstrates, was itself the result of the balance of political forces of the time (1976,

chap. 1). On the one hand, the big commercial landowners, allied with the incipient industrial and financial bourgeoisie of the period, wanted a centralized government in order to carry forth a policy of nationalizing a common market. On the other hand, small farmers and yeomanry, who constituted a majority of the white population at that time, rejected the need for an expansion of market outlets since they tended to work within a more localized and regional economy. These latter tended to view concentrated political power with great suspicion and were not willing to concede an aggrandizement of power to the Congress as envisioned by the Articles.

Compounded with this tension was another which was to have enormous consequences for the indigenous communities of the old Northwest Territory (areas north and west of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi). This involved a tension between “landless” states and those like Massachusetts, Connecticut, Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas, which had enormous land claims to western land. The “landless” states wanted all land claims to western lands yielded up to a common title under the new government proposed by the Articles with the idea that common ownership (rather than ownership by the individual states) would be a unifying force for the new confederation.

These two types of tensions and foci for conflict—one revolving around the question of centralization of political power and the other dealing with a western land policy—were temporarily resolved by the Articles of Confederation and reflected the real balance of forces of the era. On the one hand, the Articles posited a weak central government, where real sovereignty remained with the individual states, while, on the other, they were ratified only after the land-title states had yielded their claims to the proposed Union.

However, this resolution of the issues in turn produced the two key events under the Articles’ governing system that set the immediate stage for the birth of the U.S. Constitution; to wit, Shays’ Rebellion and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. It is in these events that one can perhaps best see the enormous meaning the Articles of Confederation had in the formulation of the U.S. Constitution and, consequently, for the indigenous populations which were to fall under its sway.

### ***Events precipitating the Constitution***

Without a strong central government and denied essential powers to levy taxes, the Articles of Confederation (1781–87) provided no mechanism for dealing with the growing economic inflation resulting from the Revolutionary War and regional economic development. As a result, the full pressure of the debtor and indigent classes fell directly on the states, some of which refused to authorize programs for alleviat-

ing widespread poverty and despair falling especially hard on small farmers and rural households.

A movement arose among poor and indebted farmers, led by Daniel Shays in Massachusetts, of breaking up court sessions trying debt cases, resisting the demands of merciless creditors, and attempting to seize arms from government arsenals for the defense of those in debt. Indeed, this movement, which had extensive popular support and went on for more than a year, has been characterized by Aptheker as indicative of class war, pitting debtors against creditors and poor against rich (1976, 146).

In regard to the U.S. Constitution and its conception in 1787, this class-based movement was most effective in convincing the conservative and the propertied that the governing apparatus of the Articles was too weak and only a strengthening of the central government could overcome radicalism of this magnitude and work to cool the revolutionary fervor of the rural masses.

Shays' Rebellion, therefore, in reflecting the inherent limitations of the Articles of Confederation to resolve the question of centralization of political power under the changing economic conditions of the new bourgeois state, laid the basis for reinforcing the conservative view of the Articles as basically flawed. Conservatives sought to gain political ascendancy over the democratically minded masses, and their hopes lay in a new conception of constitutional union that would more or less explicitly embody their political and economic interests.

More directly impacting the affairs of indigenous nations, however, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was in fact a very conscious land policy brought on by the pressures of frontiersmen and land speculators who were pouring into the new territory and who, at least potentially, posed secessionist threats to the new Union. At the same time that these settlers were disrupting the aboriginal social formations, the unifying activities of Northwest aboriginal communities, increasingly indignant over treaty violations and unilateral seizures of land by the new confederated government, posed immediate threats of possible armed resistance.

To resolve the real dangers inherent in the conflict between these forces, the Northwest Ordinance attempted to resolve the issue in such a way as to benefit the long-range political and economic interests of the young, confederated Union. It provided for a political and economic organization of the region in the form of "territories," from which not less than three nor more than five states were to be created as population grew. The upshot of this policy was that the new state power imposed geopolitical boundaries intersecting the various tributary and communal social formations, the results of which laid the basis for the

destruction of traditional modes of production and associated regional and local development of the many precapitalist indigenous groups.

Shorn of its apparent innocuousness in addressing such problems as surveys and town sectioning,<sup>2</sup> the Northwest Ordinance was nothing less than a formal expression of the primitive accumulation of capital directed toward aboriginal land. Its effect was to subordinate precapitalist economies to mercantile and commercial capital and to incorporate these systems into the new capitalist relations of production taking root at this time. This was done primarily in two ways. First, the ordinance effectively assigned specialized production and export of resources—especially of furs and beaver pelts—to this peripheral area, which, in turn, would lead over time to distorted economies and unequal relations of production and exchange between this region and the advancing centers of commercial and mercantile capital of the Atlantic seacoast.<sup>3</sup> Second, and more importantly, a series of all-out military campaigns against indigenous people of the region was mounted in order to subordinate any resistance to envelopment.

Herbert Aptheker's important chapter, "The New Government and the American Indian Peoples" (1976), highlights the key part played by the Ordinance of 1787 as a blueprint for empire, not democratic self-determination. Although many constitutionalists would view Aptheker's argument as narrow and harsh, in my view his descriptions here concerning the perfidious nature of the anti-Indian campaigns of 1793–94 clearly fit Marx's conception of the historical experience of capitalist primitive accumulation:

The so-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production.####[T]he history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.####[T]he robbery of the common lands####[and [their] transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism, were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. (1978, 668–69, 685)

In opening the path for primitive accumulation, the Northwest Ordinance provided a first successful model for aggressive military conquests with potentially wider applicability not only to clear out or subordinate indigenous nations, but also to maneuver around the central issues of slavery.<sup>4</sup> And this real application of the Ordinance stood in stark contrast to its formal rhetoric, which stated: "The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their land and property shall never be taken from them" (cited in Talbot 1981, 38).

In the last instance, the failure of indigenous nations of the Northwest Territory to achieve solid unity contributed fatally to their formal surrender of ancestral lands in the old Northwest (Treaty of Greenville). But the fact that the Northwest Ordinance sparked off “reckless terrorism” in that peripheral area in the form of the usurpation of lands and the destruction of the aboriginal economy additionally provided incipient capitalists (especially in the Atlantic Northeast) with a model for the political and economic conquest of other peripheral indigenous territories, most notably in the West and Southeast.

These two events in the era of the Articles of Confederation—Shays’ Rebellion and the Northwest Ordinance—consolidated approaches that would help bourgeois property flourish as never before: on the one hand, a conservatism born of a dread of democratically-inclined masses and, on the other, the flush of a proven and successful model for the primitive accumulation of capital. This search culminated in the 1787 conception of the Constitution.

***The constitutional framework and its significance for Indigenous Americans***

One must recognize at the very start that the original U.S. Constitution by oblique reference affirmed the enslavement of African Americans, gave no rights to women, and upheld the economic power of large landholders, and that even today does not contain trade-union rights or basic guarantees to the fulfillment of such fundamental needs as housing, medical care, work, or education. The Constitution was, and remains, a quintessential ideological portrait of its times.

For Indigenous Americans, moreover, these built-in discriminations in fundamental law ran parallel to successive policies of salvation, paternalism, aggressive confrontation, assimilation, removal from ancestral lands, termination of treaty contracts, and genocide. What were the constitutional wellsprings for this state of affairs?

From a strictly mechanical point of view, the United States Constitution mentions Indigenous Americans in three places:

- (a) article 1, section 2, clause 3, where the Constitution discusses the methodology of electing Representatives and the apportionment of direct taxes. “Indians not taxed” are excluded as part of that representational determination;



(b) article 1, section 18, clause 3, where the Constitution, in discussing the powers of Congress, specifically empowers the latter to regulate commerce with “Indian Tribes”; and

(c) amendment 14, section 2, where “Indians not taxed” are again excluded from being counted in the determination of representatives to Congress from the states.

Thus, in two instances Indigenous Americans were originally and explicitly excluded from participation within the framework of the incipient commercial capitalist and slave-based state while, in the third instance, “Indian Tribes” were implicitly held to be within the pale of constitutional organization in that Congress was authorized to regulate commerce and trade with indigenous communities in effect as “foreign entities.”

This codification of indigenous communities as foreign entities flowed naturally from a view that saw aboriginal peoples as hostile nations surrounding the newly formed thirteen states. Thus, Alexander Hamilton, writing in the *Federalist Papers*, viewed indigenous nations as not only “natural enemies” of the new Republic but also “natural allies” of the European powers who might seek to harm the new nation by fomenting warfare on the frontiers (1981, 64). Hamilton and the framers of the Constitution whose views he reflected saw indigenous nations as simply a matter of foreign policy and therefore only incidental to its fundamental law.

In addition, Indigenous American policies have also been affected by the so-called “treaty clauses” of the Constitution:

(a) article 2, section 2, clause 2, which grants exclusive authority to the president, in concurrence with 2/3 of the Senate, to enter into treaties;

(b) article 1, section 10, clause 1, which limits the powers of the separate states to enter into treaties on their own; and

(c) article 6, section 2, clause 2, which states that all treaties entered into by the U.S. government “shall be the Supreme Law of the Land.”

The principal contradiction that has emerged as a result of these cryptic formulations in the U.S. Constitution is the constant tension between the implicit recognition of the sovereignty of indigenous nations (and therefore the land and water base and cultural prerogatives) and the need of capitalist economic forces to assert control over all resources within their political domain, including expansion of the political domain itself. As a product of this contradiction—the contra-

diction between the logic of capitalist accumulation versus the sovereignty of the indigenous nations—the principle of self-determination for indigenous communities has been subject to a constitutional interpretation upholding the constantly expanding accumulative logic of capitalist economic forces and concomitantly narrowing the locus of Indigenous American sovereignty.

This contradiction is particularly evident in the process for amending the Constitution, where one would expect some sort of redress or balance to have been made over the years in regard to fundamental rights of indigenous nations in federal-Indian relations. As Deloria has noted in his discussion of Indigenous Americans and the Constitution, “Over two hundred different amendments to the Constitution have been proposed since it was adopted and twenty-five have been ratified, but not one has dealt with American Indians” (1988, 250).

### ***What the Constitution does not say***

Important “silences” in the U.S. document have therefore contributed to this major contradiction.

#### *Citizenship*

First, in no place does the Constitution provide United States citizenship to Indigenous Americans. While early treaties sometimes granted citizenship to indigenous people, a choice between relocation and dismemberment of tribal lands into individual allotments was generally required. Thus, the Dawes Act of 1887 (also known as the General Allotment Act) equated citizenship with individualized land allotments. At other times, citizenship was granted by statute or by political fiat, as in November 1919 when citizenship was unilaterally extended to those Indians who served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I.

In 1924, the United States Congress passed the Citizenship Act, which conferred citizenship upon all other Indians who had not already become citizens under other acts and statutes. Not all Indigenous Americans welcomed this act, however, since citizenship had been historically tied to land loss, taxation, and assimilationist policies. Most indigenous people today see themselves as dual citizens (of their own Indian nations and of the United States), but many clearly view themselves exclusively as citizens of their Indian nations.

In any case, the U.S. document never originally guaranteed lawful protection to indigenous people as U.S. citizens and, as a legal cornerstone of minority rights, it remains profoundly faulty in spelling out the rights of indigenous people and the government responsibilities to them.

*Land*

Second, in no place does the Constitution recognize ancestral rights to land. Treaty-making with indigenous nations ended with the Indian Appropriations Act (1871); between 1778 and 1868, the U.S. government had already made 374 treaties with indigenous nations, most of which recognized indigenous (tribal) domains, indigenous sovereignty, or both. After 1871, however, executive orders, administrative rulings, and congressional statutes began to erode the status of these treaties in international law, and court decisions undermined the role of aboriginal and collective possessory rights in favor of the capitalist notion of private property.

In this process, the contradiction expressed in the opposition between the unique federal-Indian relationship (as posed in the complexity of treaty litigation, constitutional interpretation, and reduction to “dependent domestic status”) and conflicts over what came to be considered as “special” indigenous rights held by no other sector of the U.S. population, rose to the surface.

Hence, the conflict between the ideals of the Constitution, where no “special interests” or “unilateral rights” were to hold sway, and the reality that indigenous nations were in fact accorded a unique relationship to the U.S. government by virtue of the innumerable statutes, executive orders, and court decisions enacted throughout the history of federal relations with indigenous nations.

Today, this contradiction vividly continues in the disputes over indigenous fishing rights (e.g., Boldt decision), hunting quotas (e.g., indigenous Alaskan seal fur and caribou disputes), access to water basins (e.g., Chemehevi and Colorado River Basin), and land-use (e.g., Western Shoshone vs. U.S. Air Force).

Moreover, while constitutional interpretations have acknowledged that the present aboriginal populations are descendants of the original owners of land, no recognition has ever been made of Indigenous Americans as heirs of those original owners. Land rights and sovereignty are only acknowledged through extant treaties with indigenous nations (pre-1871) and government statutes and court decisions (post-1871), not through any kind of constitutional mandate. It is for this reason, perhaps, that attempts are made to obscure treaty issues and to hinder the full implementation of congressional statutes related to treaties. These attempts, of course, stand in complete opposition to the already cited article 6, section 2, clause 2 of the Constitution, which states quite clearly that all treaties entered into by the U.S. government shall be “the Supreme Law of the Land.”

Indigenous land-tenure systems, long analyzed by scholars with the aid of a bourgeois sociological conceptual apparatus, have been anachronistically labeled “socialist” or “communist.” In reality, land and land bases are generally conceived by Indigenous Americans as something inalienable and as a superposition of different rights. Thus, customary local land rights (for grazing and pastoralist use) and individual possessory land-use rights (for hunting, fishing, gathering, and planting) were enveloped within tracts that were commonly held by an indigenous community in ensemble.

It was this community, probably derived from kinship, which controlled land holdings. And this is the case even today in spite of the enormous erosion of this system by allotment policies and the application of the bourgeois notion of private property.

It should also be kept in mind that possession and use of land by aboriginal people included a strong religious element, which is part of an extensive metaphysical system of beliefs having no counterpart among nonaboriginal people.

Yet, in virtually every case of land conflict, attempts are made to extinguish aboriginal land claims. These attempts have intensified under monopoly capitalism because of the discovery of subsurface oil and mineral wealth under aboriginal lands. It should be said that the success of these attempts, e.g., the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, continues to amount to nothing less than a modern version of primitive accumulation at the expense of indigenous communities (cf. Weiss and Liston, 1989).

Because the U.S. Constitution does not reflect the complexity of the real state of affairs, does not resolve in any straightforward manner the heirship of aboriginal possessory rights to land, and fails to make explicit the issue of economic sovereignty as it relates to indigenous tribes and nations, it has been a singular failure in regard to the protection of aboriginal rights to ancestral lands.

#### *Political representation*

Third, in no place does the Constitution guarantee political representation to Indigenous Americans. The United States is one of thirty-seven nations worldwide that has been determined by the United Nations to have aboriginal peoples; it is home for members of 315 different indigenous nationalities residing in twenty-six states and occupying a land base of fifty-two million acres.

Yet, Indigenous Americans experience the lowest life expectancy (forty-four years), the highest infant mortality rates (2 1/2 times the population at-large), the highest unemployment (approaching eighty percent on some reservations), the lowest wages, the highest incidence

of diseases related to malnutrition and alcoholism, and traumatic conditions of housing, education, and labor (Schaefer 1990, 182–87; American Indian Policy Review Commission 1976; Talbot 1981, 6–8; Honigfeld and Kaplan 1987). These indices are shockingly analogous to what is found in less developed countries and confirm the colonial-like status of Indigenous Americans under the auspices of the U.S. Constitution.

It is precisely through lack of political protective measures that these social conditions remain endemic to indigenous communities. The government aggression can contravene treaties still in effect to wrest land away from aboriginal communities, intervene at will in processes of indigenous self-government, and make a mockery of trusteeship by its support of giant corporate interests (industrial and agricultural) in accelerating reckless exploitation and unplanned extraction of natural resources. As a result, indigenous communities are subject to federal and state governmental powers, particularly police power, which enforce an acquiescence to the “vacuuming out” of indigenous wealth by a vast system of profit-motivated enterprises (Talbot 1981, 143–73).

Moreover, powerful capitalist interests in areas of aerospace, atomic and hydroelectric energy, timber exploitation, and mineral extraction place enormous pressures on governmental agencies, with indigenous communities often caught in the middle of feuding bureaucracies. The outcome is that momentary policies and legislation often contradict longstanding, defined federal-Indian treaty relationships and work to erode indigenous self-determination.

It is no wonder, then, that much of what government and corporate interests have taken is disputed by Indigenous Americans as having been taken illegally. As Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz has noted in her study of Indigenous Americans and human rights issues, the call for self-determination by Indigenous Americans in the United States is an immediate, practical emergency measure, not an abstract principle (1984, 131).

#### *Self-determination*

Another area of historical interest is the erosion of treaty rights in relation to self-government that was seriously accelerated by the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). This act strengthened the government’s control over Indigenous Americans, albeit in a more subtle and indirect manner. Through implementation of the IRA, indigenous nations were vested with the power to organize at the local level and to write constitutions, thereby providing the illusion of autonomy and political self-determination.

On the surface, this appeared to be a “democratization” of prevailing traditions. But electoral activity for local organization was subject to outside influence by government agencies. Interference in the right to vote, the use of federal funds to influence local elections, direct intervention in election arrangements, and infringements upon traditional indigenous powers were just some of the avenues taken by the government (through the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA]) to foster the exploitation of reservations and indigenous communities by big business under the guise of IRA “democratization.”

On the other hand, the formulation of “model constitutions” and the fact that under the IRA it was the BIA which approved or disapproved the new constitutions for indigenous nationalities only gave credence to the notion held by most indigenous activists that the IRA was simply a ruse to further indigenous acquiescence in their own political dependence and forced assimilation into nonindigenous society.

Far from recognizing inherent rights to self-government and political self-determination, the IRA of 1934 was a response to a festering contradiction in federal-Indian relationships which required a shift from a colonial to a neocolonial policy. Its very implementation revealed that a clearly formulated mechanism for indigenous political self-determination was totally absent within the constitutional framework. In that vacuum, self-determination was conveniently reduced to its very opposite: the liberal notion of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, wherein majority (rather than consensual) decisions rule and economic clout quickly determines the prevailing political relationships.

### ***Beyond the pale or democratic struggle?***

Thus, in these four key areas of constitutional mandate—citizenship, ancestral rights to land, guarantees to political representation, and self-determination—the U.S. fundamental law remains, at best, ambiguous and, at worst, completely empty in relation to Indigenous Americans.

In his important contribution to the discussion of Indigenous Americans and the structure of the Constitution recently published in a volume dealing with alternative perspectives on the U.S. Constitution, Vine Deloria, Jr. (1988) explores the conflict between indigenous peoples viewed as semi-autonomous nations and indigenous peoples viewed as agents of domestic policy. He argues that the constant back-and-forth conception of indigenous nations as “quasi-independent nations” or “domestic dependent nations” has, in effect, left indigenous people in a “no-man’s land of political existence.” According to Deloria, while there is no question in practice that Indigenous Americans are part of the body politic, they remain “beyond the pale” of any

legal substance by virtue of a lack of any real status within the constitutional framework.

As a result of this less-than-wholly embracing reach of the Constitution in regard to Indigenous Americans, Deloria argues that the bulk of U.S. government Indian law has come down to extraconstitutional powers which make litigation of indigenous claims completely arbitrary. In particular, he demonstrates that the *Kagama* and *Lone Wolf* rulings<sup>5</sup> have had the effect of protecting aboriginal rights only in the case of federal prerogatives against jurisdictional claims of individual states, but not in the case of aboriginal rights that are in conflict with federal statutes (1988, 264). The result is that indigenous people have no real protection against the direct actions of the federal government and benefit only in part when the juridical apparatus attempts to maintain the delicate balance between federal and state governments.

It is primarily for this reason that the protection of treaty rights and obligations is only posed in relation to the problematic of federal/state rights and not in terms of the problematic of nationhood and self-determination of indigenous nations.

This studied silence in regard to the dynamics of nationhood allows constitutional exclusion to operate as a device for transforming the constitutional document into an instrument for primitive accumulation. For, in the absence of any clear constitutional status for Indigenous Americans, corporate colonization of indigenous lands and labor has continued and, indeed, even intensified; acceptance of responsibilities and lawful protection of its indigenous citizenry has been turned upside down to mean repression and persecution of the most progressive indigenous leadership; and real economic self-determination has been rudely sidelined with the most absurd restrictions on development and assignment to specialized and marginal forms of commercial activities such as bingo, firework sales, and cigarette trade. In this function, the U.S. Constitution has continued the "reckless terrorism" of the Articles' Northwest Ordinance model and has failed to fulfill its promise for democratic process.

As a result of the Constitution serving as an instrumentality for primitive accumulation, it has recently become fashionable to view Indigenous Americans merely as ethnic minorities in a pluralist framework. This view, however, is profoundly erroneous, since aboriginal rights to land provide an incontestable sovereignty which no other ethnic minority can claim.<sup>6</sup> This sovereignty must be interpreted to include the power of indigenous communities to determine their own membership and concept of "citizenship" as well as sovereignty over politico-administrative affairs.

In spite of the fact there appears to be no linkage of congressional or court actions to a constitutional source specifically delegated to the federal government, or perhaps better said, because of it, democratic struggle in alliance with all progressive forces is the only viable road for indigenous people to take in order to limit the naked exercise of raw power directed against them by the U.S. government acting as an agent for the capitalist accumulative enterprise. Indeed, extraconstitutional status requires extrajudicial methods, namely that of popular struggle in coalition with all progressive forces.

What is clear to Indigenous Americans is that the initiation and expansion of democratic rights stem from concerted struggle; they are not simply legislative gifts from an indulgent ruling class. Apart from matter of constitutional exclusion, even those rights “guaranteed” by the Constitution can be suspended by the government for minority groups in the name of national security. The experience of Japanese Americans incarcerated in concentration camps during World War II validates this knowledge, and there are some who point out that the BIA-controlled reservation system is already serving this same purpose for Indigenous Americans.

Being “beyond the pale” cannot be used to justify hopelessness or complacency for a people with little or no constitutional status and historically excluded from the processes of justice and redress of grievances. The solution lies in the direction of militant, uncompromising, popular struggle for mobilizing the body politic in recognizing that the current predicament of Indigenous Americans is a threat to the democratic and just aspirations of all citizens.

### ***Conclusion***

In the case of the national Constitution, the Bill of Rights and additional constitutional amendments represent attempts by bourgeois society to solve the wrenching historical contradictions that have become apparent over time. The U.S. Constitution has thus demonstrated that it has the inherent ability to meet new historical challenges, and that it remains open to vast mobilization of political forces seeking redress of grievances. This capacity for change should not be underestimated.

At the same time, the capacity of the U.S. Constitution to resolve the issues taken up here in a favorable way to Indigenous Americans has yet to be demonstrated. It has remained a document for legitimating larceny on a grand scale. Marx expressed it best when he pithily stated “that the law itself becomes now the instrument of the theft of the people’s land” (1978, 677–78).



As we move from the bicentennial celebrations toward the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's invasion of the Americas (1992) and the UN Year of Indigenous People (1993), it is important to remember the corrosive effects of the national constitutional document on Indigenous Americans. After all, these effects are not merely academic, since Indigenous Americans have been the historical victims of government policies and continue as victims today in the face of the now world-wide capitalist accumulation processes. Not to reflect on the consequences of two hundred years of capitalist constitutional development on aboriginal economy is to doom Indigenous Americans to still another five hundred years of resistance to patent injustice and human indignities.

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## NOTES

1. Progressive writers increasingly recognize that terms such as "native," "half-breed," "tribe," and even the post-Columbian word "Indian," are unacceptable. Because such appellations have their roots in the colonization process ("native"), racial categorizations as the result of miscegenation ("half-breed"), anthropological impositions ("tribe"), or in Eurocentrism ("Indian"), their use is considered by many to be condescending, patronizing, or derogatory. In contrast, the expressions "aboriginal" or "indigenous" used to refer to the descendants of the original populations of North America are now taken to be more acceptable as noncolonial, nonracial, and nonderogatory terms. Accordingly, I will use the terms "indigenous" and "aboriginal" interchangeably in this article to denote the now existing descendants of original populations in their relation to the U.S. Constitution. I am obligated to note in self-critique, however, that in this article I have not been able to eliminate all of the offensive terms due to their embeddedness in the language and/or field of contextual meanings. Also, in an earlier paper (Muga 1987), I used the term "Native American" rather than "Indigenous American" to refer to the emerging pan-Indian consciousness and identity of the Indian diaspora in the context of the logic of accumulation of monopoly capitalism. I believe it is important to remain acutely sensitive to the names of self-reference people use in any given historical conjuncture.

2. It may be recalled that the Land Ordinance of 1785 provided for the division of land in this region into rectilinear blocks and township sections as well as surveys before settlement—all this without any concern for those who already lived there and the traditional patterns of land use.

3. John Moore (1989, 198–201) gives a good descriptive account of the Northern and Plains fur trade and the distended terms of exchange, markups, and rates of profit imposed on aboriginal economy and indigenous labor by mercantile and industrial capital.

4. Lawrence Kaplan (1988, 85–87) has forcefully argued the central significance of the slave issue in the formulation of the U.S. Constitution. Kaplan notes, following the testimony of James Madison, that slave property was the central area of discord and that northern interests “were willing to carry out the dirtiest deals” to accomplish the goal of a national union. This should be interpreted not only in terms of compromises to slaveholders but also to land-hungry small farmers and frontiersmen who wanted to clear out indigenous people.

5. According to Vine Deloria, Jr., the *Kagama versus United States* (1886) and *Lone Wolf versus Hitchcock* (1903) rulings “abandoned the requirement that congressional acts bear some detectable relationship to a phrase in the Constitution” and substituted instead the criterion of “care and protection of Indians” for congressional proprietary powers and judicial application (1988, 260–63). Hence, for Deloria, these rulings established a juridical base for the rise of congressional extraconstitutional powers in dealing with Indigenous Americans.

6. The Hispanos of the Southwest are the lone exception; their land claims against the federal government are based on language contained in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) regarding property rights and cultural integrity.

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# **“Who’s There?”: Deconstructed Selves in Hamlet and Ophelia**

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ABSTRACT: The relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, directly and indirectly presented in *Hamlet*, reveals much about the status of women and men in Renaissance England. While Ophelia seems to exist only in relation to the men of the play, her “madness” protests her condition and is a sane response to an insane world, not unlike Hamlet’s “antic disposition.” Taking as a cue Shakespeare’s opening line of *Hamlet*, “Who’s there?” and Hamlet’s enigmatic “the rest is silence,” I ask of the characters Hamlet and Ophelia, “Who’s there?” Through examination of technique, juxtaposition, irony, and historical circumstance, I find they answer with silence, loss of place, and discontinuous selves. Ophelia’s “madness” and Hamlet’s “antic disposition” create spaces of ambiguity for free play regarding their selfhoods. Shakespeare’s handling of these characters anticipates the deconstruction of self discussed in postmodern criticism. Hamlet and Ophelia give voice to marginalized figures, providing a strong subversive subtext which undermines the prevailing conditions of Shakespeare’s day. Listening to what is voiced as well as being attentive to the voices which are silenced can offer alternatives for empowering voices and enlarging the scope of what is generally regarded as the discourse of Western tradition.

*Hamlet* is a play of great richness and complex ideas.<sup>1</sup> In making a reading of the drama, an interpreter should resist being reductive and instead aim at a reading which will allow for ambiguities and play. Such a reading should do the least damage to the complexity of the drama and still be comprehensible. It should raise fundamental

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questions regarding the drama, just as the drama poses fundamental questions to us. Hamlet asks, "What is a man?" and questions himself, as the play asks us to examine how we define ourselves and what we mean by selfhood. Taking as a cue Shakespeare's opening line, "Who's there?" and Hamlet's enigmatic "the rest is silence," I ask of the characters Hamlet and Ophelia, "Who's there?" Through examination of technique, juxtaposition, irony, and historical circumstance, I find they answer with silence, loss of place, and discontinuous selves.

My ultimate purpose in this study is to explore interstices of the drama which, given the conditions of the theater in Shakespeare's England, provide a strong subtext that undermines the prevailing conventions of the day. Shakespeare's subversion of conventional elements chiefly depends upon his portrayals of Hamlet and Ophelia. Interstices develop between these characters and the world they inhabit through nondramatic, offstage action, absences of their characters from scenes and events, and moments of silence, which contribute to their loss of place and identity. Hamlet's "antic disposition" and Ophelia's "madness" create spaces of ambiguity for free play regarding their selfhoods. The title character, the most verbal of all of Shakespeare's characters and one of the most written about in all literature, Hamlet still leaves us with many unanswered questions, particularly concerning his sense of who he is. Subserving to Hamlet's characterization, Ophelia seems to exist only in relation to the men of the play—primarily Hamlet, Polonius, and Laertes. Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia, directly and indirectly presented in the play, reveals the status of men and women in Elizabethan times as well as reflecting upon our own.

Nondramatic actions fall between the cracks of actual stage action and contribute to the development of Hamlet's and Ophelia's characterizations. These are the reportings of offstage action and include Hamlet's behavior reported by Ophelia to Polonius, Fortinbras's activities, Ophelia's behavior, the death of Ophelia, Hamlet's adventure with the pirates and his escape, and the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In each instance, these absences revolve around the characterization and identity of Hamlet or Ophelia. Several concern Hamlet's "madness," taint, or maturity. The reminders of Fortinbras provide a foil for Hamlet's action or inaction. Others concern Ophelia's "madness" and "suicide."

These instances indicate a missing element in both characters, their "identities." What is often referred to as a complicated and contradictory nature in the character, I see as a presence signaling absence, with Hamlet and Ophelia as discontinuous selves where the creation of self is determined by contingency.<sup>2</sup> In order to examine Hamlet and

Ophelia in such fashion, remember the “self” consciousness of the Renaissance, where “self” was preferenced. That great individuals (Leonardo, Michelangelo, Shakespeare) could emerge was regarded as the highest sign of civilization. It followed that progress translated into the creation of the modern, self-conscious individual, a unified self. This sense of “self” is currently being questioned in intellectual and philosophical circles. It is also questioned through the characters of Hamlet and Ophelia.

Concurrent with the rise of the individual in Renaissance Europe was a questioning of the whole notion of individuality. A pessimistic undercurrent runs through the entire period and is apparent not only in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* but in the works of writers and thinkers of the time. Several examples will illustrate how the developing Renaissance notion of individuality or selfhood is deconstructed.

Joe Slavin and others point out that Castiglione’s courtier is represented as a figure who does not assert a self, but becomes an expert in drama.<sup>3</sup> Man, therefore, becomes a fiction. Men are actors, putting on an entertainment for God, and, according to the hierarchical chain of being, men mime God. Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt describes the “fashioning” of self in sixteenth-century England, noting several connotations of the word:

The action or process of making, for particular features or appearance [or] for a distinct style or pattern; the imposition upon a person of physical form; #### the achievement of#### a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving. (1980, 2)

Greenblatt’s definitions furthermore suggest the appearances or roles put on for an audience in the presentation of “self.”

Pico’s “Oration on the Dignity of Man” is often cited as the epitome of humanist ideals, particularly regarding the “dignity” of man. However, a close look at some details of Pico’s discourse suggests another interpretation. Pico describes man as an addition added after the completion of the creation of the universe. After all the gifts were given, God added man. Man then is a being for whom nothing is left. Pico also describes man as having no fixed place since “all space was already filled” and having aspects which may or may not be developed—“pregnant with all possibilities####whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature####man is a living creature of varied, multiform and ever-changing nature.” Man makes (fashions) of himself what he chooses to be (within the God hierarchy). In Pico’s account, man is defined by absence, and self becomes a decentered

subject (1956, 6–11). (What can be said about woman, who is not even denominated?)<sup>4</sup>

Montaigne's essays (1971) also subvert the establishment of a sense of place for the individual in Renaissance Europe. In "On the Inconsistency of Our Actions" Montaigne says man's behavior is inconsistent, and cites many examples of such, describing inconsistencies in character and action. In "On the Education of Children" he describes the shaping of a gentleman, a formula for fashioning selves. In "It is Folly to Measure the True and the False by Our Own Capacity," he says that man's knowledge is extremely limited, and that man judges by familiarity. And in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" he asks "What do I know?" and answers, not much. Instead of restoring stability to a sense of self, Montaigne views selfhood as a series of slides or slippages without a permanent character or place.

These representative writers suggest a destabilization of self in the Renaissance and the ultimate indeterminacy of self. Man as outside the hierarchy established by Pico suggests Derrida's notion of man as excess of, and supplement to, a deconstructed notion of the individual. Hamlet and Ophelia, I think, also anticipate this deconstruction.

It is ironic that Hamlet's characterization, for all its richness and "presence," is still a problem for actors, directors, critics, and interpreters. Why he says some of his lines, how and when he acts or does not act remain unanswered, although there have been many partial and possible answers. Hamlet says much and reveals little. He exists as an excess, what Derrida refers to as "supplement," which adds itself, a plenitude (Derrida 1976). His "self" reflects the fullest measure of presence by accumulating selves, adding one fullness to another. However, the addition is only to replace, as one "self" intervenes in place of another, filling an emptiness. As substitutes, Hamlet's selves produce no relief. Temporary place is a sign of emptiness, and we are left with a veneer over a void.

Consider Hamlet's questioning of self early in the play, when he responds to Ophelia's attempt to return remembrances in 3.1.93: "No, not I, I never gave you ought." Three negatives suggest his negation of a former self and bring into question the notion of selfhood, implying its destruction and collapse. Later, in the graveyard scene, there appears to be a recuperation of self with Hamlet's "This is I, Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.271–72). However, rather than signifying a strong statement of selfhood, the line asserts Hamlet as playing one of many parts, in this case, his father's son. Hamlet here accepts the role of enacting a given identity at a particular moment. Self as a privileged concept collapses and exists simply as a construct. The drama's close further undermines



the unity of selfhood and a world of rational order, when corpses are piled onstage and characters such as Horatio and Fortinbras speak lines which remain ambiguous. Chaos, anarchy, and disorder characterize the drama's conclusion.

In a psychoanalytic/feminist reading of *Hamlet*, Coppelia Kahn explains Hamlet's problems with identity by using the following model:

Identity has two sides. One faces inward, to the core of the individual, to his own confidence in being uniquely himself, and in the consistency and stability of his self-image through time and space. The other looks outward, to his society; it rests on his confidence in being recognized by others *as* himself, and on his ability to unify his self-image with a social role. (1981,3)

This is a far too simplistic concept of identity, which cannot simply be determined by a binary opposition of inner/outer, and ignores the condition that what is deemed "inner" actually consists of internalization of outer voices. Hamlet's determination of selves is formulated in relation to other characters and he has open to him various strategies and choices. Each constructed "self" is nonautonomous and differentiated from others, serving as a guide to "denote him" to others and provide him with a context for determining future selves.

The philosophies of Nietzsche (1967) and Bakhtin (1984, 1986), as well as scholarly discussions, contribute to an understanding of the absence of selfhood in Hamlet. As Slavin indicates, Nietzsche's *Will to Power* describes multiplicity of selves:

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and consciousness in general?###We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word "I," the word "do," the word "suffer": these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not "truths." (Nietzsche 1967, 270, 266)

There is no single truth of self, but transitory selves determined by interaction and struggle. Identity, action, and suffering are three concepts which denote our parameters, as they do for Hamlet, but provide no ultimate or stable truths.

Hamlet's selves are determined by the context of Denmark's inhabitants and his experiences. There is no consistent, direct line of character development, but a series of starts and stops, a zigzag negotiated by the conditions of his reception. Hamlet negates a concept of privileged

selfhood and with it the Elizabethan world picture as ordered by reason, the same rational development which elevates the individual; he positively reinforces the free play that the fashioning of selves can entail.

From a Marxist perspective, Stephen Greenblatt insists upon downplaying the role of human autonomy in the construct of identity and emphasizes the importance of the play of forces. Says Greenblatt:

The human subject itself began to seem remarkably illusive and unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact. If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force. (1980, 256)

While Greenblatt traces the forces shaping the decentralized self by an analysis of an ideological system, a perusal of the historical forces at work between 1450 and 1650 reveals the simultaneous privileging and questioning of selfhood. Individualism emerged in Luther's determination that each individual could read and interpret the Bible for oneself. Also, the impact of the printing press furthered the shift from an aural and oral culture to a visual one, leading to a movement from voice to silence, from a sense of community and group identity to individual and private study. These factors contributed to a privileging of "self." On the other hand, the discovery of new worlds and the displacement of geocentrism by the Copernican system led to new skepticism and loss of place. European ways were not necessarily perceived as better or natural, and if the earth was no longer the center of the universe, then perhaps humanity was no longer the center of God's interest. Coupled with the leveling impact of gunpowder and cannon on social rank and society and the rise of the capitalist middleman, sense of place was lost. These are the conditions which affected Shakespeare's world view and in turn reflect the world of Hamlet.

In fact, Jonathan Dollimore asserts that the commonly accepted concept of Renaissance individualism only really emerges during the Enlightenment, and that in Elizabethan England no unifying, autonomous subject existed, but that subjectivity was socially identified. His research shows that the word "individual" was not used in reference to autonomy and unity until 1690 in Locke's "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," and appeared as an adjective, not a noun at that (Dollimore 1984, 155-56).

The relation of the individual not only to ideological institutions and cultural legitimations of the time but to social interactions is most readily perceived in the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin insists that social relations determine identity, and a sense of “self” is developed through contexts and is constructed in relation to others.

Everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others (my mother, and so forth), with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality. I realize myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself. (1986, 138)

Like every literary character, Hamlet literally exists through words, but for Hamlet language is his preoccupation. Hamlet’s “I#. #. #. # must like a whore unpack my heart with words,” “words, words, words” and the like serve to illustrate his awareness of the power, playfulness, and ambiguity of language. Some critics describe him as thinking and talking too much, the intellectual and philosophical Hamlet. Others describe him as using words to postpone or motivate action. Overlooked is his special sensitivity to the words of others; he often uses their words to reflect upon them. Bakhtin would describe Hamlet’s voice as “dialogic,” listening to the voices of others and responding to their presence (Claudius’s voice would be “monologic,” deaf to the voices of others and asserting its power) (Bakhtin 1984).<sup>5</sup> Consider Hamlet’s interchange with Ophelia before staging the Mousetrap versus Claudius’s response to her mad songs, for example. Furthermore, Hamlet’s responsive voice, reflecting the voices of others, could also be described as “polyphonic.” The richness and variety of linguistic patternings of Shakespeare generally and Hamlet particularly reflect dialogical relationships—Shakespeare’s cultural recognition of social realities and Hamlet’s awareness of the other in his interaction with other characters and within his character. Both are influenced by the voice of the other.

Hamlet’s sense of selfhood, therefore, far from being autonomous or unified, is intimately connected to various selves created through dialogue with the other. Hamlet’s subsequent role of playing the fool with an “antic disposition” can be interpreted as a social response to the others with whom he interacts. Hamlet’s “antic disposition” subverts the superficial rational order of Denmark (and Elizabethan England) as a “madness of discourse” through dissemblance and play, especially playing with words.<sup>6</sup>

Hamlet serves as a sign of the simultaneous privileging and questioning of self. His literal absences from significant scenes create a noticeable gap which results in a disjointed rhythm for the drama. ("The Time is out of joint. O cursed Spight/That ever I was born to set it Right!") He is absent in the opening scene on the battlements in which the Ghost first appears (1.1). His offstage actions are reported in the first two scenes of the second act, first Hamlet's dishevelled appearance and intense perusal of Ophelia's face, which she reports to her father; and, second, his love letter once written to Ophelia, read and censored by Polonius as he reports to Claudius and Gertrude. Hamlet also absents the stage for most of act 4. These gaps reinforce the disunity of Hamlet's "self" in a play marked by the name "Hamlet." Most significant of these absences is the last. Maynard Mack reminds us, "We must recall that at this point Hamlet has been absent from the stage during several scenes, and that such absences in Shakespearean tragedy usually warn us to be on the watch for a new phase in the development of the character" (1952, 56). Likewise, Dennis Huston notes Hamlet's disappearance in act 4 and comments that in his absence Ophelia and Laertes take on Hamlet's problems and emotions.<sup>7</sup> Most Shakespearean commentators notice that Hamlet returns in act 5 a changed character—in both his physical dress and state of mind. Interpretations include Hamlet's acceptance of death, his belief in divine providence, and his agreement to participate in a play where death is the playwright.<sup>8</sup>

Hamlet's change, I would like to suggest, occurs because he has come to terms with the nonautonomous self and discovered that acceptance of a multiplicity of selves, although frightening, can be a liberating and exhilarating experience. It is this message that he tries to convey to the court of Denmark; communication, however, is a problem, particularly since the world of the court, despite its manipulation of appearances, is based on certainty and solidity (even if the solidity is putrefied). For Polonius, "matter," as in subject matter, is crucial to the scheme of things; this also holds for Claudius, Gertrude, and Fortinbras (2.2.199). Hamlet's undermining of a given content and certainty of self and place anticipates postmodern indeterminacy.

To develop this interpretation, I will metaphorically describe

Hamlet as a director of a play.<sup>9</sup> Already discussed as a player of a series of parts, Hamlet, besides playing, also attempts to control the playing of others, but through the context of the action of the play becomes a collaborator rather than a controller. According to G. Wilson Knight's measurement of him, Hamlet is a poor director:

His [Hamlet's] acts, like Macbeth's, are a commentary on his negative consciousness: he murders all the wrong people, exults in cruelty, grows more and more dangerous. At the end, fate steps in, forces him to perform the act of creative assassination he has been, by reason of his inner disintegration, unable to perform. (1949, 45)

I would argue that in the course of the play, Hamlet learns how to be a good director. Although Knight uses "creative assassination" to refer to Claudius's murder, I would insist that Hamlet's creative assassination is mounted upon the notion of privileged selfhood. In directing his play he, finally, in a creative and positive action, not a negative or forced one, releases a self suppressed (unvoiced and unheard) in Denmark (and certainly in Renaissance England), that self being what is called man's "female side."<sup>10</sup> Hamlet's good directing is distinguished by a trait generally regarded as female—taking in, incorporating the other (whether it be another's play or improvisation based on the actions and speech of others) rather than superimposing an unalterable script on others.

Other directors also compete with Hamlet in the action of the drama, these being Claudius and the Ghost. It is my contention that Hamlet's play is dialogical while the other two male plays are monological. I will call Hamlet's play "The Mousetrap" (of course, he names it himself), the Ghost's play "The Revenge," and Claudius's play "The Duel." The purpose of Hamlet's play is not only "to catch the conscience of the King" and "speak daggers" to his mother, but to communicate to Denmark the multiplicity of selves and free play, intimately connected to his notion of identity. The purpose of the Ghost's play is the revenge of his murder and the consequent restoration of order untainted. Claudius's play also purposes to maintain order, but through further destruction. Notice that the latter two play titles are assertive and reflect generally ascribed male values of honor, physical prowess, and name (enlarged scope, big pictures). Hamlet's play title is retentive and suggests generally associated female traits of intricacy, delicacy, and smallness. All three plays present multiple power sites involving family, state, and society, and reflect on varying concepts of identity.

Hamlet's play is first brought to the audience's attention when Hamlet comments on the opening sequence of events from which he has been absent. He tells Horatio that he has seen his father "in my mind's eye" (1.2.184). Has Hamlet been directing the Ghost from the wings? Has he orchestrated 1.1 for Horatio, the guards, and the audience?

Hamlet's realization as director can also be seen in his assigning of parts to the other characters. Polonius he assigns the part of fishmonger (or pimp) shortly before Polonius uses Ophelia to sound out Hamlet, thus benefitting from the good graces of Claudius (2.2.178). Next he assigns Claudius the role of Julius Caesar, stabbed through his toga by the conspirators, just as Polonius is shortly stabbed behind the arras (3.2.110–14). His mother he names as "pernicious woman" and "frailty, thy name is woman" (1.5.104, and 1.2.146–47, respectively). He assigns a further role to his mother in the closet scene similar to the part designated for Ophelia in the nunnery scene. Claudius is given the part of "smiling damned villain" and "satyr" (1.5.105, and 1.2.140, respectively). Hamlet not only assigns parts but inserts some lines and gives acting directions to the players (3.2.1–52). For himself he assigns the part of putting on an "antic disposition" (1.5. 163). And Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are assigned the roles of pipe players (Hamlet being the pipe they attempt to play), fanged adders, and engineers hoisted by their own petard (3.2.371–403 and 3.4.198–206, respectively).

Hamlet extends theatrical metaphors to refer to his awareness of playing the roles of both director and actor (of life in Denmark). His awareness of self involves the putting on and casting off of parts. His part in the play is indicated by two striking comments which otherwise make little sense. He tells Ophelia that "my Father died within's two Hours," this being the approximate length of time that the actual play *Hamlet* has run at this point in the action (3.2.133–34). There is also an interesting exchange with Claudius which suggests Hamlet's awareness of his play:

*Hamlet:* They are coming to the Play. I must be idle. Get you a place.

*King:* How fares our Cousin Hamlet?

*Hamlet:* Excellent i' faith, of the Chameleon's Dish: I eat the Air, Promise-cramm'd. You cannot feed Capons so.

*King:* I have nothing with this Aunswer, Hamlet: these words are not mine.

*Hamlet:* No, nor mine now, my Lord. (3.2.96–105)

In this moment Hamlet begins by making reference not only to the play-within-the-play, but also the play of which he is a part. He also describes this play, in which Claudius's assurances of Hamlet's succession are as thin air, and Claudius is the capon. When Claudius pleads ignorance, Hamlet responds that the words are no longer his because they are the lines of his "self" at that moment and are already gone.<sup>11</sup>

As the play progresses, Hamlet's awareness of playing and its implications deepens as his understanding of "self" becomes critical and the role of the director changes. Most interpreters respond to Hamlet's change between the end of the third act and his reappearance in the graveyard scene, as noted earlier. For example, Robert Hall pinpoints Hamlet's change with his stabbing of Polonius, which, according to Hall, ends Hamlet's dissemblance and begins his direct action, thus serving as a turning point.<sup>12</sup> I would suggest that Hamlet's turning point actually takes place offstage (and would be difficult for the most exceptional actors to carry off onstage). Indeed, the change is foreshadowed by remarks Hamlet makes to Gertrude concerning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the close of the closet scene. Hamlet tells Gertrude:

There's Letters seal'd, and my two Schoolfellows,  
Whom I will trust as I will Adders fang'd,  
They bear the Mandate; they must sweep my Way  
And marshal me to Knavery. Let it work,  
For 'tis the Sport to have the Enginer  
Hoist with his own Petar; an't shall go hard  
But I will delve one Yard below their Mines  
And blow them at the Moon. O 'tis most sweet  
When in one Line two Crafts directly meet. (3.4.198–206)

In Hall's terms, I would suggest that, as Hamlet confides his concerns to Gertrude, we see him begin to bring together action and dissemblance, a process which occurs offstage on the boat to England. In changing the mandate, Hamlet not only acts but dissembles. More importantly, the action he directs becomes almost improvisational. He enters an opening created by another director, Claudius, whose script requires Hamlet's death at England's hands. This results in the directors and actors meeting head on, and the resulting action is collaborative. That the action occurs offstage introduces ambiguity. To what degree is Hamlet's intervention planned? To what degree is it spontaneous or determined by chance? This nondramatic event is alluded to in the closet scene and the account Hamlet delivers to Horatio (alluded to in the letter delivered by the sailor, but not for the audience's ears). This interstice in the drama prefigures Hamlet's behavior at his return in act 5.

Hamlet's change is triggered by his understanding of his role as a director, as he moves from a position of male authoritarian to female collaborator. Rather than perceiving the role of director as raised above the actors, he begins to see himself as the equal of other actors. As he begins to understand the mechanisms of power, he rejects the imposition of order by an authoritarian figure, thus rejecting not only a patriarchal role (like his father's and Claudius's) but the Elizabethan world order (which, despite Elizabeth herself, was still based on male power politics).<sup>13</sup> While resisting order may also run the danger of inviting chaos (remember the heaped corpses at play's end), it also incorporates chance and encourages spontaneity. This allows Hamlet not only to participate in the other directors' plays and bring them into his playing, but also to express the female side of himself and ultimately subvert the status quo. Furthermore, it reinforces the notion of selfhood as a series of selves responsive to voices of others and social forces.

Consider Hamlet's behavior upon his return to Denmark in act 5 and the events in which spontaneity and chance play a part. Chancing upon Yorick's skull allows Hamlet the opportunity to soliloquize upon the genuine affection shared by himself and Yorick. Chancing upon Ophelia's burial permits him at last to express his love for Ophelia. The duel itself incorporates chance and reflects Hamlet's spontaneity, certainly his spontaneous acceptance of a duel, which Horatio cautions him about. Hamlet readily accepts the challenge, saying "Let be," anticipated earlier by "Let it work" in regard to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (5.2.236 and 3.4.201, respectively). Perhaps Laertes exchanges glances with Claudius as foils are chosen (although there is a chance that Hamlet will choose the envenomed and unbated foil). By chance, the foils are exchanged and Laertes is mortally wounded as well as Hamlet. When Hamlet stabs the King, he spontaneously and almost instinctually reacts to Laertes's lines, "The Treach'rous Instrument is in thy Hand,/Unbated and envenom'd:/.#.#.#The King, the King's to blame" (5.2.329–33). After this spontaneous action, he carries on by picking up the goblet of poisoned wine and pouring the liquid down the King's throat, reacting to the King's earlier, "Gertrard, do not drink" (5.2.304). Thus, Hamlet improvises on the Ghost's play as well, carrying out the revenge and insuring "order" by casting the election lights on Fortinbras with his dying vote. Hamlet, in these penultimate moments, creates three "selves" spontaneously and dialogically.

Already mortally wounded, Hamlet is able to improvise when things go sour, because he realizes several discontinuous selves in the space of a few moments and has become a collaborative figure.



Claudius, on the other hand, responds monologically, orchestrating a play with parts assigned to Polonius, Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Osric, and now Laertes. Still stuck in an authoritarian “male” perception of director, Claudius watches helplessly as his play ranges out of control. His fitting end, besides death, is impotence, as he loses his secular power (and figuratively, his male potency). He finally becomes the “capon” Hamlet called him earlier.

The messiness of the stage at the drama’s conclusion serves as a clear visual sign of the disorder which Hamlet has made of Denmark, undermining from within the world order established by his father and maintained to a degree by Claudius (and as suggested in their respective plays, “The Revenge” and “The Duel”). Four corpses are physically present onstage, three of them bloody. For the audience, two, possibly three, others are there “in the mind’s eye”—those of Ophelia, Polonius, and Hamlet, Sr. The ambassadors from England bring to the audience’s attention two more deaths—those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The space that was once Denmark has been figuratively invaded by Hamlet’s perceptions. The autonomous and unified self has been shown not to be a natural imperative and Hamlet rejects a patriarchal world order.

Horatio also contributes to the ambiguous close of the drama. Look at his summary to Fortinbras and the audience:

And let me speak to th’ yet unknowing World  
How these things came about. So shall you hear  
Of carnal, bloody, and unnat’ral Acts,  
Of accidental Judgments, casual Slaughters,  
Of Deaths put on by Cunning and forc’d Cause,  
And in this Upshot, Purposes mistook  
Fall ’n on th’ Inventors’ Heads. All this can I  
Truly deliver. (5.2.391–97)

What is an audience to make of these remarks, having just heard Hamlet, the most talkative of characters, deliver a very brief (by conventional standards) death speech concluding with “The rest is silence”? Horatio’s outline gives us a superficial plot summary and indicates that his impending narrative will do little more. Is this what *Hamlet* has been about? The ambiguity of Hamlet’s soul brother’s perceptions raises more questions, one suggesting that Horatio is not as close to Hamlet’s “selves” as is generally thought. Is there another character who understands Hamlet’s message of the discontinuous self? I would suggest there is a likely candidate, no longer physically present, but whose absence is strongly felt—Ophelia. Her absence serves as another sign which questions the themes of the play from within.

Questioning from within refutes Tillyard's classic concept of the "Elizabethan world picture," which asserts that the Elizabethans readily accepted and even took for granted the cosmic setting of the Great Chain of Being and their place within it. When Tillyard looks at *Hamlet* he cites the "what a piece of work is a man" speech as not only often quoted as the English version of Renaissance humanism, but as having ties in medieval tradition of a theocentric universe, indicative of Elizabethan thinking (1944, 3–4, 53, 76–77).

The refutation of Tillyard is largely based on his concept of a "collective mind of the people." Dollimore, a cultural materialist, best expresses the refutation and suggests, as I am attempting, a more subversive reading of the "text":

Such a perspective [cultural materialist] would construe the "didactic passages" referred to by Tillyard in quite different terms: didacticism was not the occasional surfacing, the occasional articulation, of the collective mind but a strategy of ideological struggle. In other words, the didactic stress on order was in part an anxious reaction to emergent and (in)-subordinate social forces which were perceived as threatening. (1985, 5)

Despite the subversions at drama's close, order is reasserted (as one would expect from a playwright writing under conditions of censorship by the state and questions arising concerning the morality and legitimacy of the theater). The figures of Horatio and Fortinbras both contribute to order, but keep in mind that the corpses remain and Fortinbras's entrance is a literal invasion of Denmark and the stage space. Fortinbras assuredly represents the figure of autonomous individuality and has been used as a foil for Hamlet throughout the drama. Most critics perceive him as a figure restorative of order. I would agree and emphasize that he does represent the order of a Claudius figure, and restores a male patriarchal order to Denmark (new world order—same old lies). Consider Fortinbras's comment regarding Hamlet:

Let four Captains  
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the Stage,  
For he was likely, had he been put on,  
To have prov'd most Royal; and for his Passage,  
The Soldier's Music and the Rite of War  
Speak loudly for him. (5.2.407–12)

Fortinbras pauses before he speaks, regards Hamlet's corpse, and makes a judgment upon him. He "misreads" Hamlet. While his "had he been put on" refers literally to "put on the throne," for the audience it

means something more. The audience knows Hamlet *has* been put on, that is, put to the test. He has also been “put on” (betrayed, taken in, subsumed) by the patriarchal order of his time—even in death he is misrepresented as a sign of male values, as Fortinbras equates him with an authoritarian and warrior. While Hamlet has many male qualities, we had not yet seen him depicted as a soldier.

The drama’s close, then, remains ambiguous. On the one hand, it represents a crisis, in which Hamlet’s play subverts the status quo of the Elizabethan world order and undermines the sacrosanct autonomy of self and place. On the other hand, there is a repetitive reassertion of the male patriarchal order in the figures of Horatio and Fortinbras. Hamlet’s self-imposed “antic disposition” rebels against this patriarchal order and is destroyed by it. Notice no major female characters survive.

The unspoken “self” of Hamlet, one of many selves, is his “female” side. David Leverenz (1978, 292) and Coppelia Kahn (1981, 3) turn to psychoanalytic study to discuss Hamlet’s character and behavior, discovering Hamlet’s double bind (“filial duty vs. sensitivity to his own heart”), dysfunctional family, and his not having a good enough mother. What is useful to me from their interpretations is that both indicate Hamlet has a “female” side which cannot flower in the “unweeded garden” which is Denmark .

While many scholars explore the relationships between male characters in the play, and sometimes female characters, I would like to pursue the special connection between male and female characters, those being Hamlet and Ophelia and the treatment of “female” in the drama, more often than not registered as an absence.<sup>14</sup> Much of the establishment of the link between Hamlet and Ophelia is marked by absence, implied by present action based on the past and several curious moments in the drama. While Horatio serves as Hamlet’s confidant, it is my contention that Ophelia is not only his true soul mate but his equal. Unfortunately, the equality of their relationship cannot be realized in the world called Denmark, much less in Elizabethan England. Furthermore, the difficulties Hamlet has in expressing his female side are surmounted by Ophelia serving as a surrogate figure for him in act 4. Like Hamlet, Ophelia deconstructs the Renaissance privileged conception of self.<sup>15</sup>

The “female” sign in *Hamlet* can be discussed in the context of status of women in Elizabethan England as provided by the Folger Shakespeare Library’s exhibit “Women in the Renaissance”:

(1) Contemporary authorities agreed that formal education for women was not only of little use but a threat to their virtue, although daughters of the nobility were sometimes allowed to be educated with

their brothers, to be instructed in virtuous behavior, chastity, modesty, and obedience to fathers and husbands. Silence was considered a woman's chief virtue.

(2) Simply, hard work characterized women's domestic lives. Women were burdened with a wide range of domestic duties (besides serving husbands and bearing and raising children), including clothing and feeding of family, doctoring, and serving as spiritual and secular educator of their children and servants (this latter as more and more women learned to read following the distribution of printed books).

(3) Relationships between husbands and wives were defined by reliance on biblically ordained precepts acknowledging women's inferiority to men. Furthermore, regarded as the weaker sex and more susceptible to the devil than men, countless women were persecuted and killed as witches, these murders sanctioned by ecclesiastical authorities.

(4) Upper-class women who hired servants spent their leisure time learning to play a musical instrument, singing, and dancing.

(5) Childbirth was the greatest health risk to women other than the plague.

(6) Women were not regarded as autonomous legal entities in Renaissance England. Women were legally categorized according to their affiliations with husbands or fathers, and the legal description of the husband-wife relationship was one of master-slave. Women had no protection against physical abuse and a husband had the legal right to strike his wife.

(7) Between 1615 and 1620 the literary exchange known as the Pamphlet War registered in print two prevalent and opposing concepts of women. The first, promulgated by male authors, viewed all women as lazy, contrary, and fickle. The second, reflecting unified women's responses (published under male pseudonyms) attacked the misogynist view, defending and educating women as well as providing important role models. Ironically, those books which praised women often perpetuated myths and stereotypes and set ideals difficult for real women to achieve.

I cite these conditions at length to demonstrate how narrowly defined the place of women was in Shakespeare's time, and to show how Ophelia, despite a narrow space, enlarges the cracks of Denmark's world. Although it would seem Gertrude has more power, Ophelia plays this part. For both Ophelia and Gertrude, their place is defined only through men, Ophelia chiefly by her father and brother, Gertrude through her husbands and her son. For each there are scenes in which the women are commanded and exploited by men. Recall Gertrude's

situations: Gertrude commanded by Claudius to depart when Polonius and the King devise their plan to sound Hamlet's madness (3.1); Gertrude commanded by Claudius not to drink (5.2); Gertrude commanded by Hamlet not to sleep with Claudius (3.5). Unlike the younger Ophelia, Gertrude's responses in the first two instances contrast with Ophelia's submission to her father. We know she "disobeys" Claudius when she drinks from the poisoned wine goblet. And earlier, at the King's "Sweet Gertrard, leave us two," she hesitates before speaking "I shall obey you" (3.1.27, 34). Gertrude acquiesces to Claudius's command, but not immediately and with reluctance. And before leaving, she turns and addresses Ophelia, suggesting the closeness of the women. In fact, Gertrude seems to be the only character capable of realizing Hamlet's great love for Ophelia:

Sweets to the Sweet, farewell.

*She strews Flowers on Ophelia's Corpse.*

—I hop'd thou should'st have been my Hamlet's Wife;  
I thought thy Bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet Maid  
And not t' have strew'd thy Grave. (5.1.259–61)

The tenderness of these lines suggests the intense emotion felt by one woman for another, and especially the sorrow and wisdom of an older and more experienced woman toward a younger. (Its counterpoint is Hamlet's tenderness expressed for Yorick.) Unlike Ophelia, Gertrude has been given a new place as wife to Claudius, while Ophelia's two clearly defined places—daughter to Polonius and sister to Laertes—are removed from her. Male figures work to prevent her from making her own place, and when present not only do her thinking for her but provide her with the image of self they want her to portray. When these figures disappear, her "madness" results, not, as most critics imply, because she has lost her support, but as an act of liberation from authoritarianism and subversion of the status quo.

Contemplate what short shrift is given Ophelia by her brother and father, both of whom assert male superiority to validate their authority over her. Laertes advises her to protect her virginity as her only attribute, as does Polonius, who furthermore instructs and commands her (1.3). Both have genuine affection for her, but both are blinded by an attitude towards women which prevents them from seeing Ophelia as she is at that moment—intelligent, aware of circumstances, and probably far more experienced sexually than they believe. Ophelia, as loving sister and dutiful daughter, plays her part well and does not directly challenge their authority, but does not accept it. She plays out her submission—avoiding Hamlet (we, therefore, see little of her), reporting

his behavior to her father (2.1), and providing Polonius and the King an opportunity to watch Hamlet's behavior and interaction with her (3.1). Underlying her "play" are other selves which later emerge.

Ophelia is not helpless. Note the number of her appearances and what she says. Her lines suggest a knowledge of her predicament and her comment upon it. Recall Ophelia's statement to Polonius, "I do not know, /My Lord, what I should think" (1.3.102-3). She does not ask him to tell her what to think, but recognizes that he does not expect her to be able to think clearly or intelligently. During the dumb show she also remarks to Hamlet, "I think nothing, my Lord," fulfilling the court expectation but also calling attention to the fact that she knows this is expected of her.<sup>16</sup>

What I would like to suggest is that Ophelia is not only well educated, but can meet Hamlet on his own terms, albeit in different fashion, and that she, rather than Horatio, is not only the closest figure to him but his soul mate. Several references are made to letters sent to Ophelia by Hamlet, as well as the exchange of love tokens and remembrances. Hamlet's vacillation between tenderness and violence in the nunnery scene suggests the depth of feeling he has for Ophelia.

What evidence do we have to support her intellectual development? The audience sees Ophelia reading (perhaps Gertrude does as well; in the fourth act, Hamlet's letters are reported as sent to his mother and the King, but we do not see the visual register of Gertrude reading). Laertes's association with Paris suggests his education has been a practical and worldly one, and Ophelia would hardly receive the worldly education of her brother. Beyond basic instruction in reading, writing, and indoctrination alongside her brother, much of her intellectual development has probably been individual and private. What does she do with her time? Motherless and friendless, she spends much of her time alone in her room, not just singing, lute playing, dancing, and sewing, but reading. The intellectual sophistication to her thought and language, evidenced especially in her madness scene, further supports this interpretation.

Ophelia's madness scene (4.5) is marked by two entrances and exits which disrupt the semblance of order represented by the "sane" world of Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes (lines 21-77 and 155-202), and her lines are usually delivered with all the mannerisms and emoting generally associated with "madness." Barbara Freedman, using Lacan's terminology, is quick to point out that these portrayals affect a "discourse on madness" (1991).<sup>17</sup> As a "discourse on madness" Ophelia's mad scene represents a textbook case of madness narrowly defined by reason. According to this definition, the cruelties inflicted upon her

through the rejection of her beloved, the murder of her father (by her beloved, no less), and the abandonment by her brother have driven her to madness. Freedman goes on to contrast this madness with Hamlet's "madness of discourse," an appropriate nomination, I think, for the way in which Hamlet has deconstructed notions of "selfhood" (although Freedman's emphasis is on the deconstruction of reason, reason as distorted, incomplete, and inadequate).

The contrast Freedman observes between the discourses of Ophelia and Hamlet leads her to describe Ophelia's madness as the "spectacle of madness," appropriating Debord's notion of "spectacle" and applying it to madness (Debord 1977, 24). Debord describes spectacle as "the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence." In other words, Ophelia's madness portrays stereotypical madness. According to Freedman's appropriation of Debord, Ophelia's madness remains "monological," presenting a single "self" unresponsive to the conditions surrounding her. Her madness is not to be distinguished from the plays of Claudius and the Ghost, a reinforcement of patriarchal order and submission of women. Its message simply is that without the men in her life, Ophelia goes mad.

I would like to suggest an alternative reading of Ophelia's madness, not as a "spectacle of madness," but as the "simulacrum of madness," to appropriate Baudrillard's concept of "simulacrum" and apply it to madness. Baudrillard tells us:

To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. . . . simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false," between "real" and "imaginary" . . . . simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a "simulacrum." (1988. 176-70)

Rather than madness, emoting classical stage madness, Ophelia's madness as the "simulacrum of madness" is sane because it portrays a madness of no place. As a woman in the world of Denmark, as an other, she has no place or voice of her own and her "madness" is a protest of this condition. Her imitation of madness, then, is more real than the contrast of madness/reason set up between Ophelia and the court. While her "madness routine" satisfies the Danish court, for the audience it becomes a sign of representation, not unlike Hamlet's "antic disposition." In other words, as Polonius notes of Hamlet's "antic disposition," there is "method" in his/her madness.

Baudrillard continues his discussion of simulacra, describing the "orders of simulation":

- (1) It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- (2) It masks and perverts a basic reality.
- (3) It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.
- (4) It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum. (170)

Each of the conditions above is fulfilled in both Hamlet's "antic disposition" and Ophelia's "madness." While there are some clear differences between the two, both reflect a basic reality—each responds to the external conditions of Denmark (Elizabethan England): Hamlet to the requirements of manhood and Ophelia to the inferior status of women. Both mask and pervert a basic reality—"madness" is a sane reaction to an "insane" world. Both mask the absence of a basic reality—Hamlet cannot realize the female side of himself and Ophelia cannot develop her "selves" in Denmark (England). Both bear no relation to reality—both are parts put on in a drama which is put on.

Ophelia's madness role parallels Hamlet's antic disposition and confrontation of his mother in the closet scene; both are parts he plays and aspects of "The Mousetrap." In fact, Ophelia's madness scene serves as "supplement" for Hamlet in the fourth act, in which his character is little present. Her death also serves as substitute for Hamlet's impending death in the fifth act. Neither character can survive as "other" in the world of Denmark. Both "antic disposition" and "madness" undermine the structure of order in Denmark (in this way Ophelia's "discourse on madness" would become a "madness of discourse" as well). Both allow for free and familiar contact with the other characters and the expression (albeit temporary) of the equality and multiplicity of selves. Consider Hamlet's insults to Claudius and Polonius, and his harshness to his mother. And remember Ophelia's crudeness and sexual advances through language towards Claudius and her brother, as well as her advice to the Queen. Both parts give voice and free play to the other, the female side of Hamlet and Ophelia as woman and human in her own right, both dispossessed selves. Under the patriarchal order of Denmark, Ophelia's characterization remains partial. It is only through her madness that another of her many "selves" is revealed.

The similar sensitivity to language of Hamlet throughout the drama and Ophelia in her "madness" is evidenced by her linguistic sophistication and the relevance to the onstage characters of Ophelia's speech and songs. Like Hamlet, Ophelia runs the gamut of rhetorical figures. She uses allegory, symbolism, figurative language, aphorism, synecdoche, and punning. Her "by Cock, they [men] are to blame" identifies the perpetrators of a patriarchal society which marginalizes



and subordinates women (4.5.64). (“Cock,” of course, serves not only as a corruption of God, who insures the sacrosanct order of Denmark, but also the male sex organ.) In fact, the audience is signalled by a gentleman of the court to listen carefully to Ophelia’s words:

the unshaped Use of it [her speech] doth move  
The Hearers to Collection: they yawn at it,  
And botch the Words up fit to their own Thoughts,  
Which, as her Winks and Nods and Gestures yield them,  
Indeed would make one think there might be Thought,  
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.6–12)

The gentleman’s opening comments for this scene prepare the audience for Ophelia’s words and report the reaction of the implied stage audience of Denmark’s world. Their reported reaction as well as the response of the “audience” present on stage (Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes) suggest that Ophelia’s madness is dialogical. She makes available the opportunities for “dialogical” responses from her listeners.

Like Hamlet’s “antic disposition,” Ophelia’s “madness” encourages an exchange between speaker and audience. Like Hamlet, Ophelia is open to the voices of others. She incorporates fragments of songs, homilies, and their words into her language. The others present come close to a dialogic response to Ophelia, as evidenced by the gentleman’s report and by Gertrude’s sympathies, but their world of “otherness” (that is, the “other” to whom Ophelia and Hamlet respond) is demarcated by the court of Denmark, with the King as Denmark. The voices of Hamlet and Ophelia are not only unheard but silenced by a monological authoritarianism, personified by Claudius, who is himself eventually replaced by another male authority figure, Fortinbras. However, it is in her moments of madness that Ophelia emerges as another “self” far different from the Ophelia earlier in the play.

I do not suggest that Ophelia’s and Hamlet’s “selves” and voices are unheard; the theater audience listens and participates dialogically. Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s voices, which undermine the patriarchal order of Denmark (and hence, the Elizabethan world picture), continue to speak, even in the death of their characters. At play’s close, ghosts of “selves” continue to whisper. Ophelia’s “madness” and suicide become elements of her play, which, like “The Mousetrap,” is an alternative to “The Revenge” and “The Duel.” When Ophelia rejects the part dictated to her by the world of Denmark, she creates her own play, “The Unheard,” of madness and suicide. In the context of *Hamlet* her play becomes a threat and challenge to a patriarchal order in which women are kept obedient and to its presentation as God-given and unchange-

able. Hamlet begins developing his “female side” away from Denmark at Wittenberg; upon his return, it is simply a matter of time before he will die. Allan Megill notes Foucault’s description of artistic madness, which describes the madneses of Ophelia and Hamlet:

At the end of *History of Madness*, in what is perhaps the book’s most apocalyptic passage, Foucault speaks of the relationship between “madness” and “the work”####[which] “opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.” (1985, 220)

Hamlet and Ophelia give voice to otherness in different ways, but each contributes various “selves” to communicate the condition of otherness, in this case the otherness called “female.” As described earlier, the closing moments of *Hamlet* leave a disordered stage. Otherness has become a literal absence, without Ophelia and with Hamlet possibly carried offstage. Still, the condition of other has slipped between the cracks of *Hamlet* and resonates at its close. The ultimate sign of otherness is signified by its absence—the other than what (one) is from one moment to the next.

Otherness has ramifications for the drama known as *Hamlet* as well. Consider the close of two productions of *Hamlet*. Grigory Kozintsev’s 1964 Soviet film of *Hamlet* reinforces the authoritarian state and the citizen’s allegiance to it. In this film, the closing scene reveals no bodies other than Hamlet’s. In a soldier’s cortege, he becomes the heroic male warrior. A British production, Tony Richardson’s/Nichol Williamson’s 1969 film, closes with close-ups of Hamlet’s (Williamson’s) head in profile with a voice-over which cites the play’s closing lines and credits. There is no carnage. Hamlet is the thinking man, the head. Both Kozintsev’s and Richardson’s endings suggest male-dominated orders, yet each is greatly different from the other.

As alternatives I note a current Polish production with a female *Hamlet* or Glenda Jackson’s portrayal of Ophelia with an electric guitar or Jonathan Miller’s 1982 production in which Kathryn Pogson portrays Ophelia in her madness as an anorexic. Each production is *Hamlet*. Each production, however, differs from the others, greatly or slightly.<sup>18</sup> Only by omitting the differences between the productions can we develop the concept of *Hamlet*. That concept is developed only through the omission of otherness. The uniqueness of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is brought into question just as *Hamlet* brings into question the orthodoxy of the “Elizabethan world picture.” Certainly *Hamlet* follows the theatrical conventions of its day, but within those parameters it

finds spaces in which it resists the limitations of orthodoxy. Productions of *Hamlet* as well reread the drama to strategically position the voices they hear loudest. Relationships through difference can provide new ways of thinking and perceiving. As interpreters intervene in the “text,” they transform it by providing their own contexts. As Derrida writes:

The text is not the book, it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference—to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other, since to say of history, of the world, or reality, that they always appear in an experience, hence in a moment of interpretation which contextualizes them according to a network of differences and hence of referral to the other, is surely to recall that alterity (difference) is irreducible. (cited by Leavy 1991)<sup>19</sup>

In this study I have suggested that a postmodern feminist reading of *Hamlet* can offer many possibilities regarding tensions and relations which existed during the Renaissance and have developed one of a multiplicity of readings. I am not suggesting that the character “Hamlet” is postmodern, nor that “Ophelia” is a radical feminist, but that they give voice to marginalized figures and their perspectives anticipate the decentered individual. Their portrayals provide spaces for intervention and play, through the interaction of character, text, and audience. Their various absences bring into question the world of Denmark (and Elizabethan England) and also decenter those privileged concepts of identity and reality we take for granted in our own. Listening to the voices of *Hamlet* and being attentive not only to what is voiced but what is not can offer alternatives by empowering voices and can enlarge the scope of what is generally regarded as the discourse of the Western tradition.

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## NOTES

1. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in a 1991 Summer Seminar funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and entitled “*Hamlet: Exploring the Renaissance Mind.*” Conducted at the University of Central Flor-

ida in Orlando, Florida, 24 June-22 July 1991, by Professors Sidney Homan (University of Florida) and Stuart Omans (University of Central Florida), the seminar included visiting Shakespearean scholars, directors, and actors, as well as playwright Janusz Glowacki, as consultants. The seminar provided in-depth discussion of *Hamlet* and related modern and contemporary theater and participation in interpreting and acting *Hamlet*. I am especially indebted and grateful to Professor Homan for his perceptions of theatrical metaphors, audience, and performance. Professor John F. Andrews, long associated with the Folger Shakespeare Library, served as a consultant and I will be using his edition of *Hamlet* (Andrews, 1989, 4–329) for references to the play.

2. In “Structure, Sign, and Play,” Jacques Derrida questions Plato’s ideal world (a centered universe of which our own is an imitation) and describes a decentered universe in which a “central presence###has never been itself###[has] no natural site, [and is]###not a fixed locus but a function” (1976, 280). Just as Derrida deconstructs a center of truth by decentering it, selfhood can be decentered by one’s thinking of it as function rather than present and fixed site. From this perspective, the notion of a single “self” deconstructs into many selves to denote character and identity. Tied to historical moment, social conditions, and power relations, “selfhood” is ultimately indeterminate and may be described as deconstructed, decentered, or discontinuous. According to Derrida, decentering fosters free play and “the alternative of presence and absence” (280). Resulting free play makes possible the fashioning of multiple selves and allows for the “presence” of absent selves and the “absence” of present selves (see Derrida, 1978).

3. See Castiglione (1967). Professor Joe Slavin (University of Louisville), another seminar consultant, introduced Hamlet as an expert player not unlike Castiglione’s courtier. In the course of the seminar, Professor Slavin addressed “The Self,” “The Sense of Self,” “What Does it Mean to be Great?” and “Playing and Role-Playing.”

4. Other studies of “selfhood” and identity can be useful, such as psychoanalytic studies by Coppelia Kahn (on good mothering) (1981) or David Leverenz (on dysfunctional families) (1978). However, I would comment that these studies neglect the social context and ideology involved in the formation of selves, both in interaction with others and various voices within. I find incorporating a postmodern perspective on “selfhood” is most productive because it opens up a larger can of worms—not only “who am I?” but “how and where and why do I fit?” Self is regarded as other because there is always another self, as “self” changes depending upon social interaction, experience, and power. The larger issue, defining and undermining centers of power, is at the heart of my investigation. If the concept of “selfhood” can be exposed as created by a traditional male authoritarian power “center” and that concept deconstructed, then the center itself can be questioned. Female as other then becomes an alternative function to the male site. Postmodernism gives voice to otherness.

5. For discussions of the dialogic see pp. 67, 75, 91, 182, 292; for monologic, see pp. 79–85, 292–93.

6. Professor Barbara Freedman (St. John’s University) served as seminar consultant on the subject “What Does It Mean To Be Normal?” and discussed the concepts “Discourse on Madness” and “Madness of Discourse.”

7. Professor Dennis Huston (Rice University) was a seminar consultant who discussed “The Self Confronted By Death” and Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

8. See especially Mack 1952, Knight 1949, and Abel 1963 for representatives of these views. Abel’s is an early metadramatic reading of *Hamlet* and he likens Hamlet to a playwright.

9. I am especially indebted to Sidney Homan’s interpretation of *Hamlet* introduced to me as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Florida in 1980. See his discussion of *Hamlet* in *When the Theater Turns to Itself: The Aesthetic Metaphor in Shakespeare* (1981, 152–76). Homan suggests “Hamlet’s consciousness of the theater, of life as a play” and “the possibility that Hamlet suspects he is in a play” (152, 154).

10. I use the term “female side” reluctantly and with qualification. I do not mean to argue for biological determinism, but what I am suggesting is that there are traits which have been traditionally described as “female,” such as sensitivity, intricate creativity, receptivity; and “male,” such as assertiveness and physical prowess. These traits, contributing to a characterization, depend upon social conditioning, power relations, and the set of circumstances and experiences specific to the life of the character. As I argue, those qualities most prominent in Hamlet are traditionally ascribed “female.” And it is these traits which should be celebrated in light of their difference from those privileged by the male power structure which is Denmark and Elizabethan England.

11. Homan notes these exchanges but provides a different interpretation (1981, 163).

12. Professor Robert Hall (University of Nebraska) participated as a *Hamlet* seminar consultant and discussed “Playing and Role-Playing.”

13. In the *Hamlet* seminar, Professor Slavin alluded to Elizabeth I’s subjugation in her youth to the King’s Council, which, under Edward VI, once had her examined to ascertain that her virginity was intact. See also Dusinger 1975, 273–75, on Elizabeth’s pre-eminence and the ambiguity of women’s position in politics.

14. Again, I use the term “female” as a sign which serves to reveal the subjugation and marginalization of women and to protest against it. (See note 10 above.)

15. Again, the conception of self which Ophelia deconstructs is one of assertive individuality which has been privileged by a male-dominated order.

16. Jonathan Miller alludes to these lines in another context: “All her [Ophelia’s] actions are responses to what other people think for, and of, her before they disappear and all her support is removed.” See Miller 1986, 117.

17. In her use of Lacan’s *Écrits* (1966), Professor Freedman contrasted Hamlet’s “madness of discourse” with Ophelia’s “discourse on madness.” Her focus was upon how reason turns against itself from the inside. She developed Lacan’s idea that what we call universal human nature is historically constituted. *Hamlet*, then, denies the objectivity of reason in several ways: 1) Renaissance concepts of madness differ from modern ones. “Folly” suggests the madness inside reason; 2) the observer is always part of the “experiment,” hence, objectivity is questionable; and, 3) the Renaissance notion of representa-

tion differs from ours. Character types were still prevalent, and “individualism” as we regard it and its portrayal had not yet been developed. See also her discussion of the comedies in Freedman 1991.

18. I am unable to supply more accurate descriptions of the *Hamlets* of Jackson and Pogson, having only read about them, and have only heard about the Polish *Hamlet* from Janusz and Eva Glowacki. The variety of these productions, including the Kozintsev and Richardson/Williamson, and, more recently, Derek Jacobi and Franco Zeffirelli/Mel Gibson, serves to illustrate my point.

19. I am indebted to Professor John Leavey of the University of Florida, who, in his seminar lecture “Derrida and Postmodernism” (1991), cited Derrida’s “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion” in *Limited Inc* (Derrida 1988, 136–37).

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# **Socialism: An Idea Whose Time Has Not Yet Come?**

**William Pencak**

ABSTRACT: Socialists need not be on the defensive against capitalists despite recent events in Eastern Europe. Marx advanced a long-term philosophy of historical change which argued socialism could only succeed after a fully extended worldwide capitalism had created superabundant wealth as well as massive unemployment, poverty, and maldistribution through technology and competition. Too often, socialists have jumped the gun by identifying with societies pretending to be socialist which were nothing of the sort. In long-run historical terms, the systems of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may perhaps be classified as effecting the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The creation of a worldwide proletariat through Third World industrialization dominated by multinational corporations is finally setting the stage for a socialist future, but wage differentials (paying off first-world proletarians) and intelligent capitalists may postpone things for some time. Socialists should try to keep the faith alive and show the value of socialist solutions to specific problems (health care, for example) caused and yet unsolvable by capitalism.

Since the monumental changes which occurred in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, much scholarly ink has been used in debating “the collapse” or “reversibility” of socialism and “the triumph of capitalism.” Less important than how the Right answers such questions is the fact that they are being asked so frequently these days. That the Left feels obliged to defend socialism or Marxism as something that is not yet dead indicates that it feels compelled to fight defensively on a battleground defined by the Right. I therefore propose to

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992)

shift the terms of the debate and suggest that socialism is an idea whose time has not yet come. Let us begin with one way of understanding Karl Marx. For all his virtues, Marx was trying to do two things at once, which frequently worked at cross purposes. First, as a scholar—I will not call him an economist, sociologist, historian, or philosopher, for that would put him in an anachronistic academic box—Marx analyzed the way in which economic systems developed and changed. In particular, he discussed how the material contradictions of capitalism would lead to its destruction and replacement by socialism. In this paper, I hope to show that Marx the scholar was right. Socialism can only come into existence on a world-wide scale when the conditions for its appearance are ripe. I do not deny societies with socialist features may exist, but it is unlikely they will be successful in the long run for reasons discussed below.

Marx, however, was also a political activist and a prophet. In the excitement of working with people trying to realize his ideals prematurely, Marx the activist fell prey to the same utopian socialism for which he so astutely criticized his contemporaries. He became the most prominent victim of what I call the “socialism is just around the corner” syndrome, which has made Marxists look ridiculous over the past hundred and fifty years in their support of various totalitarian regimes as incarnations of “the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

So let us put Marx the wishful thinker to one side and return to Marx the scholar. What does he have to say about when capitalism will end and socialism come into existence? In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he insisted that “no social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society” (1987, 263).

Now if we examine the world of 1840 to 1880 in which Marx wrote his great works, it is not only obvious that capitalism had yet to develop to the full all its productive forces, but that capitalism was still in its infancy. As late as 1890, only 30 percent of Britain’s population lived in urban areas, where industrial production was concentrated. The figures for the United States, Germany, and France were 15, 11, and 12 percent, respectively. In absolute terms of GNP per capita in 1960 United States dollars, England led the world with \$458 dollars in 1850, \$785 in 1890. By 1980, the industrial economies of the great powers were supporting several times their nineteenth-century populations with GNPs averaging \$7900 for Great Britain and over \$11,000 for the United States (Kennedy 1987, 201–2, 436).

In short, far from signalling the collapse of a capitalism in its death throes, the economic crises seized on by Marx and his fellow mid-nineteenth-century socialists are probably best regarded as birth pangs of the infant economic order. As Franz Mehring remarked during World War I, “When they drew up the *Communist Manifesto*, they regarded capitalism as having reached a level which it has hardly reached in our day” (Harrington, 1972, 53).

Now, if the United States, Britain, and Germany had yet to develop a fraction of their full capitalist potential in the late nineteenth or even the early twentieth century, most societies then were still in the feudal stage, which I will define for argument’s sake as predominantly agricultural societies where farmers are exploited by landowners. In the late nineteenth century, transitions from communal/peasant to tenant farming and “capitalist agriculture” were becoming more common in Russia and eastern Europe, but the essential feature of exploitation of an agricultural labor force had not changed. Contrast this situation, if you will, with the developing state of affairs in the Third World today, where countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Taiwan, and South Korea, to name only the most obvious examples, are predominantly urban nations, which derive most of their wealth from manufacturing.

Since World War II, not only the developed nations, but underdeveloped countries throughout the world, have been undergoing tremendous capitalist development. In short, we are finally beginning to approach the full development of capitalism which Marx originally insisted was necessary as a precondition of socialism. I will not be foolish enough to attempt to predict how long this development will go on, or how fully extended capitalist industrial production must be, before the economic crises Marx predicted will come to pass. They may be several hundred years in the future: after all, the feudal, oriental, and ancient modes of production described by Marx endured for centuries, even millennia. It would be fatuous to expect capitalism, which Marx admits far exceeds them in creativity and energy, to collapse while it is still in the process of expanding.

Marx retreated from his fundamental theory that a fully developed capitalism was required before its destruction could be near when developments in late-nineteenth century Europe showed that Armageddon was not in the immediate cards. Hence, he began grasping at straws: that an educated proletariat, working through bourgeois democracies, could vote in socialism through sheer weight of numbers. Or the famous remark of 1882 that Russia might be able to skip the capitalist phase of production and move on to socialism because its peasants had already achieved a form of communal living on the farms.

Historically as well as economically, this turned out to be nonsense, and the reason it is nonsense can be found again in Marx's theory that describes when and how capitalism will begin to crumble. As he had said earlier: "Schoolboy asininity! Radical social revolution is bound up with historical conditions, the latter are its preconditions. It is thus only possible where there is capitalist production and the proletariat has at least an important role" (Harrington 1972, 172–73).

Marx's 1853 essay on "The British Rule in India" is his most important statement of the idea that premature socialism is impossible. That England was "activated only by the vilest interests" and acted in a manner "sickening to human feeling" in bringing capitalism to Asia, "is not the question." It was necessary to destroy an "Oriental despotism" productive of "unspeakable cruelties" which "restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass" by enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies." One does not have to be a reactionary to attribute such epithets to states claiming to be socialist built upon precapitalist foundations; primary blame may be placed on capitalist opposition to nascent socialist states. Marx concludes his essay by asking rhetorically: "Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?" Worldwide capitalism must precede socialism (1979, 132).

At least two major signs indicate the full development of capitalism and the possibility of its replacement. First, it would have to become world-wide. The *Manifesto* emphasizes the European discovery of America and the creation of the world market as key elements in the rise of bourgeois society: "It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In a word, it creates a world after its own image" (Marx and Engels 1976, 488). Fair enough, although an additional century and a half of world history has given us the hindsight to realize that the process is still incomplete.

Second, for capitalism to be fully developed and socialism to be a real possibility, Marx insisted that the capitalist means of production had to be realistically capable of achieving an economy of abundance for everyone and that this capability be visible to the workers. This was an "absolutely necessary practical precondition [of socialism], for without it one can only generalize *want*, and with such pressing needs the struggle for necessities would begin again and all the old crap would come back again" (Harrington, 1972, 33–34). Put another way, as Engels did in his introduction to Marx's *Wage Labour and Capital*:

On the one hand are immeasurable riches and a superfluity of products which the purchasers cannot cope with; on the other hand, the great mass of society proletarianised, turned into wage-workers, and precisely for that reason made incapable of appropriating for themselves this superfluity of products. The division of society into a small, excessively rich class and a large, propertyless class of wage-workers results in a society suffocating from its own superfluity, while the great majority of its members is scarcely, or even not at all, protected from extreme want. This state of affairs becomes daily more absurd and—more unnecessary. It *must* be abolished. It *can* be abolished. A new social order is possible### through the planned utilization and extension of the already existing enormous productive forces of all members of the society, and with uniform obligation to work, the means for existence, for enjoying life, for the development and employment of all bodily and mental faculties will be available in an equal measure and in ever-increasing fullness. (Engels 1990, 201)

That we have not yet combined these two conditions—worldwide capitalism with world-wide abundance—is again obvious. In fact, Lenin’s greatest contribution to Marxist theory, in my opinion, was his demonstration that the world-wide extension of capitalism enabled capitalists to buy off workers in advanced countries with higher standards of living made possible through profits acquired from harsher exploitation in less developed lands: “Out of such enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their ‘own’ country) it is possible to bribe the labor leaders and the upper stratum of the labor aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the “advanced” countries are doing; they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert, this stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, who are quite Philistine in their mode of life” (Connor 1968, 115). That they are still being exploited is beside the point. Revolution usually occurs when people are suffering to a tremendous extent, and for much of capitalism’s recent history things have improved for workers in advanced nations.

The question for the late twentieth century is whether the funds for bribery can be found indefinitely, or whether economic crises such as Marx predicted are in the cards. Lenin despaired of the corrupted industrialized workers in advanced countries and insisted that a vanguard of intellectuals and professional revolutionaries had to make the people’s revolution for them (Connor 1968, 71). But by maintaining that one could “force” history apart from the material conditions underlying it,

he paved the way for a dictatorship over rather than of the proletariat, and the widespread discrediting of socialism through its identification with totalitarian states.

Again, let me stress I blame international capitalism's determination to crush its foes more than the follies and foibles of revolutionary leaders. The relative strengths of capitalism and socialism, however, demonstrated the time for the latter was not ripe. In the long run, I think Marxists would do well to argue that the Russian and Eastern European "socialist" revolutions were nothing of the kind: they were chance occurrences resulting from the two world wars. In Marxist terms their primary function was to accelerate the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Their achievement should not be sneered at: by 1980, a devastated Eastern Europe under Soviet-enforced collectivization achieved a far higher standard of living than the capitalist nations of Latin America, untouched by war and dominated by the United States. They also had the most equal income distribution of any countries on the globe (Facts on File 1984, nos. 65, 67). Nevertheless, the entanglement of socialist ideology with Soviet and indigenous communist-party repression probably precludes an advance toward socialism in eastern Europe until capitalism has, in turn, worn out its welcome.

While it would be idiotic to see any imminent triumph of socialism at the present time, I think we are finally beginning to approach a worldwide capitalist order. Also, the collapse of socialism tied to political repression in Eastern Europe frees Western social democrats from two enormous burdens. First, we can no longer be dismissed as tools of Moscow, and we no longer have to go over and over the same ground that we do not want to collectivize Western society forcibly. Second, as of 1992 several of the more advanced capitalist nations are suffering from an increasing gap between rich and poor and declining standards of living due to new developments in the international economy. This should provide socialists with the opportunity to put forth their ideas as reasonable solutions to problems capitalism has created but cannot solve (Phillips 1991, esp. 146–53). Let me stress that economic problems as of 1992 are by no means even an ordinary crisis by the standards of history, let alone the gigantic one predicted by Marx which will bring capitalism tumbling down. When and if that occurs is speculation. But combined with the collapse of pseudosocialism, a socialist approach to current problems may be effectively advanced—if socialists are up to it and are not repressed—to enable socially created wealth and resources to be redirected away from private and military-imperialistic goals.

I will not, however, end with a pep talk simply urging everyone to participate as best they can in contemporary democratic social and socialist movements dedicated to reducing misery and lessening injustice. Instead, I will focus on three factors which Marx could not have foreseen but which nevertheless might at some future time cause the collapse of international capitalism.

First, we now have a worldwide economic order with a degree of interdependence unimaginable not only in the midnineteenth century, but even as late as the end of World War II. One of its major trends is Third World industrialization, which creates two sources of revolutionary potential.

First, unlike Lenin and like Marx, I do not believe peasants or agricultural workers led by a vanguard can overthrow capitalism. It is necessary for workers to be concentrated in cities, and to be able to bring to a halt and seize the machinery of production. And (again as Marx argued) unless there is an industrial society with plenty of production for its workers, they will simply revert to struggling over scarce goods which will become even scarcer as conservative societies try to stifle the revolution through war and economic sanctions. The fate of the Soviet Union and China has been recapitulated by Cuba and Nicaragua: beautiful possibilities crushed by the need to fend off capitalist encirclement, economic decline, and the ensuing domestic dissent.

On this count, Trotsky's two main propositions on the "permanent revolution" seem to me essentially correct. First, the vanguard, or party, must educate and organize industrial workers and peasants. Simply because of its geographic dispersion and educational backwardness, the agricultural proletariat can only acquire consciousness from its urban counterpart. Second, "the completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable" as "the world division of labor, the dependence of Soviet industry upon foreign technique, the dependence of the productive forces of the advanced countries of Europe upon Asiatic materials, etc. make the construction of a socialist society in any single country impossible." A permanent revolution is necessary if socialism is not to degenerate into a series of premature births drowning in a capitalist sea (Mills 1962, 272–75). Unfortunately, this will recur until capitalism is sufficiently weakened by crisis.

Second, First World capitalists are showing less inclination to pay off their own workers with a higher standard of living to ensure social stability at home. It seems they, as well as the workers, have so accepted the correctness of capitalist ideology that it seems inconceivable not to ship jobs from Michigan to South Carolina and thence to Haiti, closing factories, destroying towns, and lowering wages as best

suits the profit margin. Or perhaps this is a necessity for U.S. industry to stay even minimally competitive with Europe and Japan, since nations compete as do firms. But at any rate, there are signs that in the United States wage rates are moving downward toward subsistence, that a reserve army of the unemployed exists not only in Mexico City but on the sidewalks of New York, and that capitalist distribution cannot handle capitalist production. Whether these are long-term or short-term trends, and whether they have socialist potential, it is, let me stress once more, too soon to tell.

There are, however, two other possible causes of catastrophe: ecological and military. One can speculate about what would happen if the world ran out of oil before the next form of energy was technologically ready to replace it, if pollution literally choked people to death in Los Angeles, or if the ice caps started to melt. Moreover, the nuclear weapons are still there; now that the Soviet Union has disintegrated there is no telling who will get hold of them and use them with what effect. A major global catastrophe, in which capitalism's squandering of the planet's resources is brought home to everyone in an overwhelming way, may be the crisis which compels a more rational use of industrial productivity to save the environment.

However, I see nothing inevitable here. The ruling class's ability to persuade the masses that they are suffering for a good cause, or at least that the elite is doing a reasonable job of handling the problem, seemingly knows no limits. And there is no guarantee that what replaces capitalism will be socialism: religious fanaticism and fascism are still with us, and seem to be long-term historical possibilities. However, by rushing the crisis and forcing the issue, ecological or military catastrophe will probably greatly increase scarcity, thereby requiring massive global reindustrialization before socialism gets another chance—that is, if Marx's requirement of abundance is a correct postulate. If socialists can redirect productive potential before some other alternative is implemented, and if they and the working class are adequately prepared, they can seize the moment.

If this paper's message may be interpreted as depressing—that capitalism is still expanding, that the conditions which will make socialism possible are still in the (probably distant) future—this is not the only way it may be interpreted. History is a long haul, as Marx realized. To use an analogy employed by Engels, Marxists are to some extent recapitulating the history of Christianity (Harrington 1972, 115). We had our proclamation of the Gospel, our prophets predicting the millennium, and our heretics who identified the millennium with a particular society which then went sour. What we now need is a Saint Augustine,



a *City of God*. Socialists will have to be pilgrims in a capitalist world for quite some time, like it or not. We must recognize of capitalism, as Augustine did of Rome, that it had a purpose: to bring together diverse parts of the world and create the conditions under which the truth might be spread. Unlike Augustine and Marx, I am skeptical enough to believe that the millennium is not inevitable but only possible. And it is only possible if there are people out there keeping the socialist vision alive.

In this paper, I have tried to present a framework which permits continued effort toward a socialist future that will not require identification with regimes pretending, sincerely or otherwise, to be socialist without being anything of the sort. My framework also permits us to avoid the despair that results when radical and reform movements do not achieve their goals or lead to revolutionary social change. By showing how socialist programs and ideas can aid in solving particular problems within capitalist society (e.g., health care, transportation, income distribution, poverty, and quality of work) we can provide a track record that will instill public confidence when a serious crisis arrives.

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## COMMENTARY

### **On Pencak's "Socialism: An Idea Whose Time Has Not Yet Come?"**

Pencak's two principal reasons for asserting that it is premature to enter into the construction of a socialist society are Marx's condition that a transition to socialism is impossible until capitalism has exhausted its potential for expanded reproduction (that is, it cannot profitably invest its profits) and his argument that capitalism will use all means at its disposal to destroy socialism.

Pencak bases his first reason on Marx's preface to his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. Marx writes:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. No social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. (Marx 1987, 262)

Pencak's starting point is Marx's sentence, "No social formation is ever destroyed###." In Pencak's view, the relations of production do not turn into "fetters" if the forces of production can continue to develop. Marx's criteria for assessing when a system has matured for replacement by a higher stage are more complex than this. He expands on this point in volume 3 of *Capital*:

To the extent that the labour-process is solely a process between man and Nature, its simple elements remain common to all social forms of development. But each specific historical form of this process further develops its material foundations and social forms. Whenever a certain stage of maturity has been reached, the specific historical form is discarded and displaced by a higher one. The moment of arrival of such a crisis is disclosed by the depth and breadth attained by the contradictions and antagonisms between the distribution relations, and thus specific of their corresponding production relations, on the one hand, and the productive forces, the productive powers and the development of their agencies, on the other hand. A conflict then ensues between the material development of production and its social form. (1967, 884)

This is why Marxists have argued that the relations of production became fetters on the development of the productive forces with the onset of the cyclical crises of capitalism, when for the first time in history the social relations of production of material goods prevented the distribution, and therefore the consumption, of these very same goods. The recognition of this contradiction had already given birth to the communist movement toward the end of the eighteenth century, more than half a century before Marx's discovery of its source. Marx and Engels's contribution to this movement was to put it on a scientific basis.

A new element in the development of the productive forces under capitalism requires placing socialism on the current political agenda. This new element is the qualitative change in the level of environmental destruction that threatens the very survival of the human species on the planet. The only path to survival is through international agreements to limit industrial and agricultural activities that threaten us with extinction. The quest for profits by individual capitalist corporate entities and their collective control over the various capitalist states has prevented any international agreements being reached on most of these activities. Capitalism cannot exist under conditions of zero or even controlled growth, since this would prevent investment of accumulated profits. Only a socialist economy is capable of resolving the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the preser-

vation of our environment. The fact that socialist countries with bureaucratic-autocratic administrations did not give the needed attention to environmental needs does not mean a socialism established on democratic foundations is not capable of doing so.

I shall not attempt here to give a full reply to Pencak's second reason and shall limit myself to a few brief remarks on the question. From 1917 on, imperialism worked to destroy socialism, militarily and economically. Nevertheless, the socialist economies were able to maintain an adequate defense capability while forming a socialist market capable of shielding themselves from economic warfare waged against them by imperialism. Slovo (1990), Steigerwald (1990), Bloice et al. (1991), and others have argued that the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern European socialist countries was not primarily due to the actions of imperialism, but largely the result of the paternalistic, authoritarian, bureaucratic pattern of leadership that emerged from the Stalin period. The bureaucratization of the political and economic structures prevented the extension of democratic control by the working people over the means of production and the distribution of the products of production. The scope of activity of the mass organizations, in particular the trade unions, was reduced to implementation of the decisions of the ruling elite. In this way the products of people's labor were alienated from those who performed the work. This material alienation was necessarily reflected in the consciousness of the people. This alienation, when combined with the bureaucratization of economic management, not only obstructed the technological development that was necessary to close the gap between the capitalist and socialist economies, but also gave rise to economic disorganization and political crisis.

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### **Response by Pencak**

Marquit and I seem to differ primarily over when socialism became, or has become, a historical possibility. While I would not like to argue that what happened had to happen in a particular historical situation, the durability of capitalism after world wars and economic crises through repression and cajolery at home and abroad is mighty impressive. And while democratic socialist nations have perhaps existed, there are two problems: (a) the threat of reversal in an election with a return to power of conservative forces; (b) the fact that if these are relatively well-off nations, they are intertwined with, and to some extent dependent upon, an international economy in which workers in less developed countries finance the benefits. Guest workers in Europe and "illegal aliens" in the United States are prime examples. In short, it is possible to identify features in almost any government in which some decisions and programs are based on communal grounds, to a greater or lesser extent. What I question is whether this is, or will lead permanently to, the socialism or communism predicted by Marx.

Marquit and I place different emphasis on whether nations such as the Soviet Union, which claimed to be socialist, failed because of internal authoritarianism or external pressure. But if Marquit is right, does it follow that without such authoritarianism real socialism would have developed, endured, and served as a free and prosperous example for the exploited of the world? I doubt if this would have been possible, given the fact that such nations would have had to navigate somehow in a capitalist-dominated international economy.

Socialists can only hope that Marquit is right and I am wrong, and that the "certain stage of maturity" required for socialism is, in fact, at hand. Environmental destruction and waste stand as a blatant refutation of the system that allowed them. But history teaches us that horrible, even murderous, conditions can continue unsolved for long periods. My feeling is that what democratic socialists (and I do not think there can honestly be any other kind) need now is not so much a vision or a program of what must be done. We have that. What is needed is an explanation of why a dysfunctional, unjust, and murderous economic and political system has continued to exist, and why socialists should

not despair in the long run even if their hopes are disappointed, as they have been many times before, in a particular setting. Meanwhile, I salute Erwin Marquit for his effort to keep serious thought concerning the human future before the public, and hope that humanity will see a brighter future sooner than I envision. At any rate, it is vital to keep thinking, acting (up), and organizing to keep the flame alive, regardless of the probable outcome in the immediate future. For history also teaches us that the improbable is a good bet, and that even if we do not live to see socialism, we can make life more bearable for many people desperately in need of help through the enactment of particular measures.

William Pencak

## Communications

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### On the Colonial Status of Puerto Rico

I think Ronald S. Edari's article "'Underclass': An Inquiry into Its Theoretical Status and Ideological Dimensions" (*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 4, no. 1/2 [1991]: 31–56) does an outstanding job of debunking the "underclass" myth and putting it in its proper perspective. Edari correctly uses Marxist analysis to flush out the racist nature of this term used by bourgeois social scientists to define the Black poor of the large urban centers. I have no problem whatsoever with the thrust of the article and consider it an outstanding contribution to Marxist class analysis.

Unfortunately, the author makes a classical mistake when he refers to the status of Puerto Rico in his article: "d) the conquest and *annexation* of Puerto Rico and the subsequent installation of a *semicolonial* system in Puerto Rico" (34—emphasis mine).

Even though some sectors of the U.S. ruling class would like to annex Puerto Rico by converting it into the fifty-first state, this process has not occurred.

Puerto Rico is an archipelago composed of seven islands: Puerto Rico, San Juan, Vieques, Culebra, Mona, Minito, and Desecheo. Although most official documents describe Puerto Rico as a "commonwealth associated to the United States, with a governor, advisory council, and bicameral congress," it is in fact the oldest colony in the world.

Since 1898, Puerto Rico has been an island territory surrounded by and operating within the limits of U.S. power and control. The United States governs Puerto Rico within and through a specific set of political structures. These structures encompass and affect all social, economic, and political aspects of life on the islands and control and restrict external relations between Puerto Rico and other countries.

The U.S. presence is most clearly expressed through (a) U.S. military presence, (b) judicial control by the U.S. Congress, presidents, and

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992)

courts, and (c) economic control by U.S. corporate and financial institutions. The United States directly controls the following areas of Puerto Rico's national powers: communications, currency, trade (national and international), citizenship/naturalization, immigration and emigration, customs laws and tariffs, labor relations, wage laws, census (population, agriculture, commerce, industry), defense/military service/internal security (FBI, CIA), international relations, banking systems, health standards (slaughterhouse, food products, medicine), social security/unemployment and disability benefits, environmental laws, prices, penal system, and court system.

If this description of the reality of Puerto Rico does not clearly point out the classical colonial nature of the U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship, one can point to the numerous resolutions declaring the right to self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico by the Nonaligned Movement and the Decolonization Committee of the United Nations (since 1972) petitioning the United States to implement UN Resolution 1514, which calls for the right to self-determination and independence of territories and colonies.

To further drive this point home, one can look at the recent attempt by the U.S. government to effect a so-called plebiscite on the islands. When the United States was pushing this measure, it recognized, contrary to what it has affirmed for many years, that the creation of the Commonwealth in 1952 did not constitute a final solution of the colonial problem of Puerto Rico. Some forty years after the creation of the so-called Commonwealth, the United States implicitly recognized that Puerto Rico continued to be a colony and that the fundamental powers of the people to decide their destiny are in the hands of the Congress and the White House, as they invariably have been since the military invasion of 1898.

Without a doubt Puerto Rico is not a semicolony or a neocolony of the United States, but an outright colony. It is important for one to listen to the forces struggling for the national liberation of a country before accepting official definitions propagated by an intervening nation. In the case of Puerto Rico, the independence forces are the ones that are defending the best interests of the people of Puerto Rico.

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## Book Reviews

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### **The Transition from Feudalism: A Review Essay**

*Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History.* By Rodney H. Hilton. London and New York: Verso/Routledge, revised edition, 1990, 272 pages, paper £12.95, \$18.95.

Rodney Hilton is a highly distinguished British Marxist historian. This book is a revised edition of a collection of previously published articles on feudal society and the transition to capitalism, updated to include Hilton's latest writings. This is an impressive, wide-ranging collection, touching on a whole set of issues, from English tax returns and peasant risings, to urban real property and women traders. Nonetheless a common theme runs throughout these essays. That is that the "prime mover" of feudal society was the "internal" class contradiction between landlords and peasants over the appropriation of the peasants' surplus product. This theme is treated by Hilton as a working hypothesis, rather than as explanatory. Indeed one of the most attractive qualities of this collection is Hilton's ability to transform Marxist abstractions into concrete statements by means of detail and systematic use of primary sources. As he writes in one of the essays, he is less interested in theorizing historical materialism, than in "reclaiming it for the historian." His empirical knowledge of feudalism is outstanding. Perhaps no other Marxist has provided so much primary historical data to substantiate this concept of a "prime mover." Although the concept itself is not unique to Hilton—it is a view widely shared by many other Marxists—his contribution is novel.

Before I deal with Hilton's own approach, however, let me elaborate on the basic assumptions of this view of a "prime mover," best known as the "class-struggle view of the transition." This view holds that the

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992)

main source of material change and of social conflict in feudalism was the lord-peasant relation at the point of production. Of material change, because production was directly implicated in this relation and production was the necessary economic support of the whole social and political power of the lords. Of social conflict, because each class in this relation had an inherent interest to retain for itself (peasant) or extract from others (lords) as much of the surplus as was possible.

This view therefore minimizes the merchant/lord relation, which was an exchange relation, involving the simple redistribution of an already-produced surplus. Merchants were not in contradiction with feudalism, since the role of the merchant was to buy cheap and sell dear the existing surplus. It was, rather, the peasant who was in contradiction with feudalism, as the interest of this class was to lessen, if not end, feudal exploitation; and this constituted a direct challenge to the material basis of lordly power. Indeed, according to the class-struggle view, it was precisely out of this "internal" struggle between peasants and lords that a class of capitalists emerged. Insofar as peasants were able to free themselves from feudal obligations, and were able to devote more time to their own holdings and market their own produce, they managed to amass savings, to increase production, and accumulate.

Clearly this is a view which radically departs from the traditional "market view" of Adam Smith and Henri Pirenne, according to which the growth of trade, the division of labor, and productivity were the main factors in the development of capitalism. The class-struggle view holds against this "market view" that many precapitalist societies had highly developed networks of trade and substantial accumulations of money capital, yet they all failed to make any sort of transition to capitalism.

Notice, however, that the class-struggle view faces a similar theoretical problem, since class conflict was a general characteristic of all precapitalist societies (excluding primitive communism), yet only feudal Europe was characterized by a process of transition to capitalism. Moreover, large-scale agrarian property owned by an elite in which surplus was extracted out of small peasant producers was common in most class societies. The class-struggle view must, therefore, construct some sort of argument with respect to the specificity of feudal class relations and struggles resulting in capitalism.

I shall argue below that in Hilton we find a possible solution to this problem. I say "possible," since he does not at any point make the design of his argument explicit. The task of this review essay is to make that design explicit, by reconstructing his arguments into a more concise theoretical structure. This will require, however, a revision of Hilton's assessment of the role of exchange relations in the transition. I shall

conclude that just as the market view by itself is unable to explain the transition to capitalist relations, so is Hilton's class-struggle view by itself unable to explain peasant accumulation and differentiation.

One of the distinguishing traits of Hilton's approach is that he is as well aware of the dangers of a "crude class determinism" (which he detects in R. Brenner) as of a crude market-economic determinism (ix,12). This is immediately apparent in the manner in which he constructs the concept of "feudalism." Thus, he never hesitates to analyze the economic content of the production process of peasant agriculture in its own right, independently of class relations. For Hilton, feudalism was not just a simple exploitative relation between a land-owning class and a mass of peasant producers, but also a specific articulation of the elements constituting the peasants' "productive forces." He thus lays great stress on the concrete forms of cooperation and coordination of the peasants' labor and their land.<sup>1</sup> He observes that the peasants' labor process (or work relations) was quite different from that of other precapitalist societies. First, he points out that feudal peasants had "effective possession of their means of subsistence," their tools, farm buildings, and lands. Unlike slaves, who were chattels to their masters and had no rights in land and goods, peasants had certain rights of use and disposition of their property. They also had customary rights to use the communal lands, including woodlands, pasture, and meadows. In fact, medieval peasants organized not only in relationship to their lord but also independently among themselves as members of a village "community." The very nature of medieval agriculture required a high degree of cooperation under a field of open lands in which peasants agreed on the common use of animals for plowing and on other aspects of work (5, 14, 42-44, 50, 156).

According to Hilton, it was this relatively autonomous peasant economy which conditioned the precise character of feudal lordship. Because the peasantry had access to its means of subsistence, and had no economic compulsion to work for the lords, the lords had to use their military and political power to establish control over the peasants' persons in order to extract a surplus. The peasants had to be politically subordinated to the lords by force (209). Thus, although medieval peasants had de facto economic "possession" of their land and tools, they had no juridical control over their own land and labor power to sell them to others, but were forced by lords into providing certain services and surpluses.

It is only by understanding this double combination of economic "independence" and political "dependence" that we make sense of the specific dynamic of feudal class struggles. Of course, it would be wrong to assume that, for Hilton, peasants had complete and effective control

over the use of their means of production, since this use was ultimately circumscribed by lordly power. Nonetheless, just as peasants were not completely free in the economic sense, neither were they completely unfree juridically. Peasants—including serfs—had certain rights and capacities, through the solidarity of village communities, to limit seigniorial power and exploitation. The feudal lord was not an absentee landlord or a mere tax collector, as in many ancient societies. In a sense the lord was a “protector” of the peasant, a patron. Lords did not have uncontested powers over their peasants. The village manorial court regulated the conflicting class interests of lord and peasant.

Indeed, it was because of this contestable juridical relationship of “rights” and “obligations” that feudal class struggles, as Hilton writes, tended to take on “the form of disputes about status.” It was common for peasants to refuse to obey a summons to the ploughing services or to thresh the lord’s wheat on the grounds that their families were “free,” not villeins. The political-juridical status of the peasantry was crucial to the specific form of appropriation of the surplus. As free men, peasants had more freedom of movement—freedom to buy and sell goods, and freedom from arbitrary exactions such as tallage, marriage fines, and death duties. Accordingly, lords would seek to show that their tenants were of villein status in order to deny them any legal protection against arbitrary methods of rent-payment (49–55). Hilton cites a case which came up in court at Oxford in 1224 between an abbot who claimed that his tenant should perform extra labor services and a tenant who claimed that he was a free man, “so that his services should be fixed and that the abbot had no right to increase them arbitrarily.” “The case went against the tenant because the abbot showed that he had a second cousin who was a villein” (55). Feudalism, in this sense, was not simply a system of simple military and political coercion over peasants, but was a relationship of juridical rights and obligations, founded on a relatively independent, self-managed peasant household and village community.

But there is another crucial relation in Hilton’s analysis of the specificity of feudal struggles. Many peasants, he says, were petty commodity producers, interested in exchanging their products with one another. He thus locates the rise of markets in the medieval period within the peasant household economy, rather than outside of it (7, 14). He also draws a contrast between markets in ancient societies as being generally legitimized by their states, and markets in medieval Europe as being independent and widespread among rural peasants, specially after the twelfth century (106–7, 212–13). Hilton does not mean that peasants had an inner compulsion to maximize returns on exchange, in the manner of M-C-M’ (money-commodity-money plus added value). On the contrary, as late as the fourteenth century, peasant commodity produc-

tion, he tells us, was still characterized by a subsistence logic, in which the aim of exchange was the acquisition of use-value, not the maximization of profit. Hilton is always careful to emphasize the collective mentality of the medieval peasant, and the villages' collective property and economic practices, against its portrayal as self-assertive and individualist. Capitalism, for him, did not arise spontaneously out of simple commodity exchange.<sup>2</sup>

Rather the point to note about Hilton's concept of petty commodity exchange is the connection he sees between the dynamic of feudal class struggle and the dynamic of peasant markets. And this is, I think, a critical point, for had peasant commodity circulation been absent from peasant production, class struggles over rent would have attained only the dimension of a political struggle. The outcome could only have been over the distribution of the existing surplus. But what imparted to feudal class struggle its unique dynamic was the possibility of the feudal surplus to be used by "independent" commodity producers. This possibility is at the core of what Marx meant by a "flourishing petty mode of production" within feudalism.

As Hilton says, peasants reacted differently to the market depending on their individual economic position, i.e., size of holdings and proximity to markets. Those peasants who enjoyed greater access to the market looked upon feudal dues as an interference with their ability to benefit from the market. Different forms of rent imply different market opportunities. For example, rents which included labor services, in-kind payments or payments for use of the lord's ovens, mills, woods, etc., tended to constrain peasants' abilities to control their own labor process and to participate in the market (52). On the other hand, rents which were in fixed money payments tended to give peasants greater control over their own labor time and ability to distinguish their economic interests from those of their lords.

In this sense, the historical role of peasant markets varied with the specific form of rent. In fact, according to Hilton, the expansion of peasant markets was inextricably connected with the class struggle over rent.<sup>3</sup> This is how he interprets the series of peasant revolts which occurred between 1380 and 1480, as struggles by peasant traders to end servile dues and villein status in order to control their land and freely dispose of their goods in the market. He does not assume any pre-existent peasant capitalist rationality. In the first instance, he says, peasants were striving to attain freedom from servile status through class struggle. Peasants gained free tenures because of their successful resistance to feudal exactions, not because of the immanent emergence of some "rational economic man" (205–21).

The economic significance of freehold status (or copyhold tenure), however, was the expansion of money relations. Indeed, according to Hilton, it was precisely the creation of freehold tenures that set the initial conditions for the rise of capitalism. Copyhold was a whole new form of rent, giving peasants rights of inheritance, fixed fines, and freedom to sublet, which amounted to almost complete juridical control by peasants over their property. The consequences of this were manifold. For one, it served as a real incentive for peasants to increase their productivity and to further specialize in production for the market. For another, it led towards purely economic relations among peasants through subletting, with rents being adjusted according to competitive market conditions and not according to juridical status (Hilton 1969, 143–53). Land was increasingly withdrawn from customary tenure and turned into leasehold. The result was increased differentiation within the economy of small peasant producers. Already by the fifteenth century Hilton observes the rise of an upper stratum of rich peasants, converting their extra surplus into new plots of land and enclosing them against the poorer peasants. This came at the expense of the old structure of communal regulation, so that by the sixteenth century there was a definite division between a class of big tenant farmers, or yeomen, farming on a large scale, and a class of landless peasants (165, 198–99). The stage had clearly been set for “two very different kinds of commodity possessors,” to use Marx’s words, to “come face to face and into contact; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence,###on the other hand, free laborers” (1967, chap. 26, 714).

The above analysis, really a mere logical exposition of Hilton’s rich historical narrative, overcomes, I think, some of the problems of the class-struggle view of the transition. It does so essentially by considering the active role of peasant markets in the transition. A problem remains: to explain how peasants were able to accumulate capital through simple commodity exchange in the absence of any form of labor exploitation at the point of production. Certainly accumulation and differentiation could not have taken place simply because peasants were able, through class struggle, to market a greater portion of the surplus.

I see no other way to explain the process of peasant differentiation “from a simple producer to a capitalist” other than by supposing some form of unequal exchange relation between petty producers at the point of circulation. Using John Roemer’s theory of exploitation, we can conceive the logical form of this process. As Roemer shows, exploitation is possible in a simple commodity economy in which there is no market in labor. The only requirement is an unequal distribution of resources among the simple producers of land and farming skills, such

that some producers are able to produce more goods in less time than others (Roemer 1986). When these producers trade their goods with one another, the less-endowed producers will then receive in exchange for the labor time they sell to the wealthier producers an equivalent produced in a shorter length of time. The wealthier producer will then be exploiting the poorer one. I believe that Roemer's theory (despite its ahistorical presentation) can be fruitfully applied to resolving the issue of what sort of transitional economy filled the gap between the decline of feudalism and the period of petty accumulation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the decisive formation of agrarian capitalism in the seventeenth century. Class struggles over the existing surplus, peasant markets, and unequal exchange were all, in their own specific ways, fundamental to the transition.

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## NOTES

1. In this sense, Hilton's concept of the productive forces is close to that of Étienne Balibar, who defined them as "relations of real appropriation of nature" and as relations of work between producers themselves, not as mere technical "things." See "On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism" in Althusser and Balibar (1979).

2. Of course the peasantry was not the only class interested in exchange. Hilton in fact sometimes says that it was the increasing demand by lords themselves for money that was "the root cause of technical progress and of the growth of simple commodity production." Yet, as Hilton adds, the more the lords were interested in cash, the more the peasants were compelled to enter the market, so that the more the market was implicated in the logic of class struggle. Later, landlords themselves began to convert arable land to pasture when they realized how profitable it was.

3. Hilton also places the dynamic of class struggles and of market expansion within a wider context of "secondary effects" such as population growth, fertility of land, towns, and other superstructural factors. But here my concern is with the "prime mover."

Actually the analysis I am presenting here on the class struggle is focused only on the efforts of the peasants to retain for themselves as much of their produce as was possible, and not on the effort of the lords themselves to maximize the extraction of surplus. I am taking this approach because what is original to Hilton is his emphasis on peasant struggles to free themselves from feudal obligations. The historian Georges Duby, as Hilton recognizes, has studied specifically the side of the lords (219).

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*When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. By Trinh T. Minh-ha. New York and London: Routledge, 1991, 251 pages, cloth \$45.00, paper \$14.95.

This book collects filmmaker/theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha's previously uncollected essays, lectures, and conference talks, and presents them in three formally separated but thematically overlapping sections. The first, "No Master Narratives," comprises four essays revolving obliquely around the idea of experimental "Other" (or "Third") cinema as potentially reproducing and/or subverting the oppressive narratives that structure Western thought, itself inseparably intertwined and historically cofoundational with Western violence. The second section, awkwardly punctuated "She, of the Interval," is slightly more autobiographical, as the title suggests. Drawing attention by its titular pronoun to the "gendered" aspect of the author's project, this section addresses many of the same concerns as does the first but subtly adopts a more anecdotal style recounting hostile questions she has received at lectures, overheard conversations between fellow "marginal" or subaltern academics in the United States, and so on. As befits the book's subtitle, it focuses more explicitly on issues of gender, just as the first emphasizes



“representation” and the final (third, of course) section, “The Third Scenario,” “cultural politics” with an emphasis on “thirdness”—the Third Cinema of the Third World; and also hinting toward an optimistic “third term” that may break the conceptual impasses erected by the Western (and hence dominant) predilection for binarisms in philosophical, aesthetic, and political life.

Rather than offering a conventional book-report-cum-critique, I shall focus on the possibilities and problems suggested by the title of the book as synecdoche for Trinh’s style/method.

The collection’s metaphoric title, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, announces the poeticity as well as the polemical positioning of Trinh’s writing. Although she is careful to specify the Chinese, Dogon, or Indian derivations of the terms as she uses them, the figures of the moon as feminine, sub- or unconscious, unstable, mysterious, or secondary; and the color red as an indicator of happiness, life, violence, blood, passion, anger, sexual arousal, and revolution are not unfamiliar to Western readers. Thus we can read the title in multiple and fruitfully contradictory ways: “when women get angry / get happy / get aroused,” “when the Other refuses to simply be a reflection/projection of the primary (Western, male, Aryan) subject,” “when the aesthetic/ antidiscursive/ nonlinear refuses subordinate status to the institutional/ discursive/ linear.” The reddening/waxing of the moon, whose pale, secondary light is traditionally understood as embodying and gathering up the projections (reflected light) of the life-giving, primary, golden sun, generates (at least) a third term (Third World, Third Cinema, Third Scenario)—a dislocating and charged image of multiple meanings that indicates possibilities of heretofore unrealized social thought. Nonetheless, the conceit’s naturalistic derivation (though it describes an “unnatural” natural event, like an eclipse or a tidal wave) risks remystifying the very discourse the author would free from the mystique that has burdened it with labels of the exotic, the impenetrable, the primitive, or the ultrasophisticated.

This title serves to encapsulate both the power and the vulnerabilities of Trinh’s method, which is spiralic and diffuse—“festively vertiginous” (14)—rather than argumentative; she proceeds by what Hart Crane has termed the “logic of metaphor” rather than the logic of argumentation. It announces the book as possibly the “interval”—the moment of unmeaning—that permits “difference” without “Otherness” (152), that permits nondominant subjects to constitute their own meanings, unmeanings and countermeanings. And meaning should not be confused with or imposed as “truth” (163).

As an interval offering relief from conventional meaning-making,

the book is an adventure in style. Brilliant paragraph-long aphorisms are linked together in what Patricia Williams has termed a “necklace of thoughts.” Text is generously ornamented with citations from poets and philosophers such as Joy Harjo, Georges Bataille, Gloria Anzaldua, Marie Cardenal, A. Hampaté Ba, and Arthur Rimbaud, whose juxtapositions to Trinh’s prose and to each other create a nonlinear layered and rich texture. Provocative thought-bites (my favorite pair of which are the notions of “the commodification of humanism” and the “humanism of the commodity” [87]) leap out of circular sentences and fall back like glistening fish leaping out of the water and rejoining their elusively apprehensible, constantly moving schools.

As you can see, it is hard not to get embarrassingly pretty and naturalistic (reinscribing an already overdetermined femininity) when describing the book, and the reviewer’s task engenders a respect for the difficulty of Trinh’s undertaking. Hers is a frankly aestheticist enterprise, though not in the conventional and pejorative sense the adjective has acquired in contemporary cultural critique (the aesthetic is a politics which hides/mystifies its politics). While the work is open to criticisms of self-allegorization, self-exoticization, and sentimentality (“too beautiful,” an Asian feminist friend describes it), it is to be acknowledged for its experimentalism at the stylistic as well as theoretical registers, the risks it takes in breaking with conventional prose, its refusal to separate the voice of the artist from the voice of the theorist. As such, the text contributes to the increasingly complex and dynamic body comprising contemporary postcolonial feminist cultural politics. While Trinh may be too artsy for the theorists and too cerebral for the artists, her work is a challenging redeployment of dialectical thinking and writing from a position that is not one.

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*Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action of the Unemployed, 1808–1942.* By Franklin Folsom. Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1991, 558 pages, cloth \$35.00.

A kind fate must have first designated and then preserved Franklin Folsom to be the historian of the unemployed in the United States. He is the recorder of their long struggle for day-to-day relief and for ultimate legislation providing at least a modicum of relief as the legal entitlement of some of them.

If you don't believe in such mystical speculation, turn to the cluster of pictures which enhance the back pages of his comprehensive volume and note the news shot of pickets in front of the public welfare office in New York City on 26 May 1934. Conspicuous among them is author Folsom—moments later on the ground with a bloody scalp that required nine stitches to mend. With such credentials plus the gifts expected of a former Rhodes Scholar and a life-long teacher and writer, the eighty-three-year old author is evidently qualified to write the present volume, which illuminates a rough corner of the labor movement that has not previously been globally treated.

*Impatient Armies of the Poor* is a title borrowed from a verse by the clergyman-writer-soldier Thomas Wentworth Higginson, although Higginson wrote of "*Patient Armies of the Poor.*" Actually this book is not about "the poor" in general, which might be an even bigger and certainly a different book. Folsom's is about the unemployed, most of whom are indeed poor and many of whom were "impatient" enough to march and resist and struggle to win a pittance to keep them and their dependents alive.

Folsom's book covers the collective action of the unemployed from 1808 through 1942. We all know that unemployment remains a serious problem in our current society—especially visible to those of us who live in the major urban centers in the masses of homeless who seek to sustain a life on our streets. But our author suggests that the temporary end of mass unemployment brought about by the beginning of World War II, and his own advanced age, justify his breaking off his story where he does in the hope that it will be continued "by a younger person."

If *Impatient Armies* seems to start too early, before there was a large enough number of industrially employed to generate an army of the unemployed, Franklin Folsom finds his justification in the plight of the sailors, sailmakers, and shipwrights from some seven hundred vessels that had been idled, not by economic circumstance but by an embargo imposed by the government in the desire to stay out of the war between France and England. Those made jobless by this political circumstance were driven by hardship to organize and demand relief from the newly fledged republican government they had already been taught to think of as their own.

In 1819 and again in 1829 the country, though still a land of hardly more than ten million persons including its voteless slaves, went through depressions or economic crises closer to the classic types Karl Marx some twenty years later was to find typical of the capitalist business cycle and likely to occur with greater or lesser severity every ten years or so. Such was also the case in 1837, when the cry went up in New York, "Go for the flour stores!" and the Washington Market of Eli

Hart was raided and hundreds of barrels of flour seized and wasted by hungry crowds.

In pithy chapter after pithy chapter the “armies” march on as we learn of the successive hard times and the varying fightbacks: 1857, 1874 (and Tompkins Square), 1883, 1893 (and the anarchists), 1894 (and Coxe’s Army), 1907 and 1914 (and the Wobblies), and 1921 to 1929 (the formative years of the Communist Party). We are given not only the slogans of each movement but the words of the songs they sang.

With the beginning of the Great Depression we are at the main section of the book, which deals with the demonstration on 6 March 1930; the Hunger Marches; the Bonus March; and the great organizations of the unemployed (the Unemployed Council, Unemployed League, Workers Alliance, Workers Alliance of America), with their notable leaders Herbert Benjamin, A.J. Muste, and David Lasser, and the political movements that sought to guide them.

Folsom has enriched his book by including as appendices a dozen or so documents that will save future researchers many painful hours. These include such items as the Petition of Unemployed Sailors (1808) and the complete Constitution and Regulations of the National Unemployment Council of the U.S.A. (1934). A liberal listing of sources (although somewhat meager notes) and three generous batches of illustrations that really help to make *Impatient Armies of the Poor* a first-rate work.

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*Securing the Right to Employment: Social Welfare Policy and the Unemployed in the United States.* By Philip Harvey. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, 160 pages, cloth \$27.00.

The central thesis of Harvey’s important book is that the “right of all persons to a freely chosen job paying wages sufficient to support a dignified existence,” defined as a family income “at least equal to the official poverty line,” is economically feasible in the United States. The vehicle would be “a statutory right to employment in a public sector job paying market wages.” He calls his proposal an Employment Assurance Policy (EAP).

To make the case for his proposal, Harvey uses 1977–1986, a period of “unusually high unemployment,” with an average unemployment rate of 7.5%. The goal of the EAP program is to reduce unemployment to 2% “frictional unemployment,” the temporary downtime of workers seeking new jobs. For the period in question this would have required the creation of an annual average of 10.2 million full- and part-time jobs (or 8.6 million full-time equivalent jobs)—about a 50% increase in the public-sector labor force.

Harvey estimates the total direct cost of the EAP program for 1977–1986 at almost \$1.2 trillion. Financing would come from three sources: (1) Taxes paid by EAP workers on wages earned in the program, accounting for about 18% percent of the total cost and yielding a net cost for the EAP program of about half the nation’s core Social Security programs. (2) Monies now expended on other social welfare programs which aid able-bodied people and which an EAP program would wholly or partially replace. The major programs affected would be Unemployment Insurance, Aid to Families With Dependent Children, Medicaid, Food Stamps, housing and energy aid, and jobs and training programs. These cutbacks would have accounted for about 61% of the program’s total cost. (3) Increased taxes to cover any deficit. The estimated deficit for 1977–1986 was about \$218 billion, or about 21% of the total program cost, and could have been covered through an increase of about 12% in the Social Security tax rates.

These estimates make the expense of instituting the EAP proposal look rather modest. Moreover, Harvey has for the most part been conservative in his computations, so as if anything to overstate the program’s direct costs and thus the size of the deficit. The one area in which this is not entirely true is the wages to be paid EAP workers. The calculation is based on wage rates program employees could reasonably expect to earn in the regular labor market if jobs matching their existing or developable skills were available. In many cases, however, particularly for workers with dependents, this would result in income below the poverty line. Thus meeting the EAP’s stated goal of a “dignified existence” would entail a somewhat greater, though difficult to calculate, wage cost than Harvey’s estimate.

Harvey is confident that his otherwise conservative computations—for example, his assumption of high rates of participation in the program, and his neglect of the potential multiplier effect of EAP spending in creating additional private-sector jobs—more than counterbalance any underestimate of the program’s direct costs. In addition, Harvey assumes that the services furnished by the EAP program would be free, whereas the public might well be willing to pay for some of them, such as childcare, through user fees or local taxes. If so, he speculates that an

EAP program might be run without any deficit at all or even at a surplus.

As Harvey notes, however, a surplus or deficit is not determinative of whether on balance an EAP program serves the general welfare. The program's overall impacts, including its indirect benefits and costs, must also be accounted for and compared with other alternatives, such as the existing antipoverty programs or doing nothing at all. Accordingly, Harvey devotes several chapters to a discussion of the impact of an EAP program on such factors as the social costs of unemployment, recession and inflation, the private job market, the demand for private versus public goods, societal wealth and wealth distribution, and the administration of government. If anything, in the effort not to overstate his case, Harvey underemphasizes the enormity of the social costs, both to the unemployed and society at large, which the EAP program would help alleviate, and the enormous value of the public services it could provide. Nonetheless, despite the speculativeness of the overall benefits and costs of the program, Harvey concludes (and his argument is forceful indeed) that "it is simply irrational for a society to allow a sizable element of its workforce to remain in a condition of involuntary idleness."

This raises the question of why an EAP program is not already in place, particularly in light of the strong public support Harvey cites over at least the last half century for a federally guaranteed right/opportunity to work at a job paying living wages. Harvey addresses this question in the book's final chapter, which discusses the "brief and politically turbulent history" of the New Deal's EAP-like Civil Works Administration and the ultimately watered-down Employment Acts of 1946 and 1978. He attributes the lack of an EAP program to "the entrenched political power of special-interest groups that oppose the idea," especially business interests, and to the inability of the proponents of guaranteed employment "to transform popular sentiment into effective political pressure." This analysis could be fleshed out a bit more, I think.

Certainly many programs have been enacted over business objections, particularly when public support for them has been as strong as that expressed for guaranteed employment. But perhaps this expressed support is soft—support for the idea in the abstract (and how could one not support the notion of an opportunity for all who want to work to do so in a society based on the work ethic?), but not for its actual implementation. Why might this be? As Harvey notes, the immediate beneficiaries of an EAP program would be the politically weakest and least-favored elements of society. In addition, perhaps the potential social benefits of an EAP program are seen as too speculative and amorphous to justify a possible tax increase, and the consequent loss of spending power, in an era of a stagnating standard of living. Not only

are collective goods at a natural disadvantage as against individually marketable goods due to organizational constraints, but a market dominated by big business creates a materialistic atmosphere in which profitable private goods are more desired than nonmarketable public goods. The impact of big business on society's values may be even greater than its disproportionate political power.

On the other hand, while some businesses would clearly suffer from an EAP program, notably low-wage employers and businesses against which the program would compete, Harvey notes that others might benefit, notably those providing goods and services to the program and its recipients. And while an EAP program might push up wages and strengthen workers' bargaining power to the perceived detriment of business interests generally, business interests might also benefit from the program's potentially antirecessionary impact and from reduced opposition to efficiency-producing technological changes which displace workers now cushioned against unemployment.

Moreover, it is by no means clear that business interests benefit from what seems to be a gradually increasing reserve army of the unemployed. Harvey cites data on unemployment rates in nine major industrial countries from 1959 to 1986. While the rates differ considerably among countries (with Japan, Sweden, Italy, and Germany having significantly lower rates than the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and Great Britain), all nine had substantially higher unemployment rates from 1975 to 1986 than from 1959 to 1974. Other data Harvey cites show that unemployment has risen in the United States every decade since World War II—from a mean rate of 4.5% from 1946 to 1959 to a rate of 7.5% during the 1980s. This alarming phenomenon is perhaps endemic to advanced capitalism. If the trend continues, we can expect severe social upheaval, challenges even to capitalism itself, or at least increasing public demands for guaranteed employment. Thus an EAP jobs program, though bearing "the taint of socialism," might well help stabilize this society's dominantly capitalist system and deter more fundamental challenges to the system, much as did the New Deal. So perhaps the uncertainties of an EAP program's impacts, along with ideological predispositions against it, lead business interests to be wary of change at a time when they do not perceive capitalism to be in crisis. And perhaps an enlightened business community will one day support an EAP program in order to save its own hide.

Finally, although Harvey does not tell us whether he regards himself as a socialist, shall we who so regard ourselves see the EAP proposal as furthering the cause? Labor is certainly central to Marx's vision of communism as a social order in which labor has become "life's prime want," in which "the full and free development of every individual

forms the ruling principle," and in which everyone has the opportunity to contribute according to his or her abilities. Socialism is committed to the notion that people want fulfillment, and that under supportive social conditions they will willingly work not only for their own interests but for the betterment of society. Socialism is committed to a social order in which some do not exploit the labor of others.

Measured against these high ideals, the EAP proposal obviously falls short. Whether one views exploitation as inhering per se in private ownership of the means of production or as deriving more from the unequal distribution of wealth and power, the proposal would still leave this society with an economy dominated by private entrepreneurs and with vast inequalities. On the positive side, though, there is no doubt that most unemployed people in the United States desire work, prefer work to welfare, and would flock to a jobs program. To the extent that there are some malingerers, and I am confident they are very few in number, that attitude is produced by the prevailing social conditions and would likely diminish under a sensitively run program. The right to a job would be empowering, would likely enhance the political awareness and participation of the dispossessed, and would help build worker solidarity in the ongoing struggle against exploitation and inequality. And the services provided by the program might help people to appreciate more the value of public goods and the merits of communitarian thinking.

Perhaps the United States can be transformed from a dominantly capitalist to a dominantly socialist society through its imperfectly democratic and imbalanced political processes. Perhaps an EAP program can help us move in that direction. Or perhaps not. In any event, assuring jobs for all our unemployed brothers and sisters is the humane thing to do, and Philip Harvey has shown us how doable it is.

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