
**Review by Kacey Calahane**

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The struggle for LGBT civil rights is still very much alive today in America; intense debate has surrounded controversial legislation such as the Defense of Marriage Act and Proposition 8. While gay marriage is now legal in some states, the LGBT community continues to face historic difficulty with earning legitimate recognition, as heterosexuality remains the legal standard defining social normativity. Margot Canaday’s *The Straight State* is an insightful social, cultural, political, and legal critique that explores the history of the marginalization of and discrimination against homosexuals in the United States from the turn-of-the-century through the 1960s. Her purpose is to explore the process of how and why the state apparatus constructed regulations for policing sexuality through a bottom-up approach. By “bottom-up,” Canaday means all state employees at all levels of federal government and in all locations, which certainly still seems top-down, especially since she discusses no elements of socio-cultural change from below as it relates to the mass public. Rather it is all top-down legislation that, as she argues, “constituted homosexuality in the construction of a stratified citizenry.”¹ Thus, as the state recognized homosexual characteristics, legislators moved to regulate against them, constructing a homosexual identity that is both a political and a “legal category.”² It is in this period that the state formed a legislative definition of sexual identity and was itself transformed by its understanding of sexuality.

The United States inched toward recognizing homosexuality slowly. Prior to the Progressive Era, there was no legal framework for policing homosexual behavior. However, this changed by the Second World War as the state explicitly articulated an exclusionary policy against what legislators found to be deviant behavior. Therefore, Canaday’s monograph is divided into two parts to reflect the transitional period before legislation was passed to construct homosexual identity. Part one investigates early regulatory policies of homosexuality, while part two continues to build upon the idea alongside a fully formed and codified “straight state.” Canaday mirrors part one both topically


² Ibid.
and chronologically by reversing her order of investigation in part two; chapters on immigration sandwich the set of chapters on the military (two and five) and welfare (three and four).

The structure of the narrative in this thematic, chronological manner serves to show how "the category of homosexuality through regulation" was produced by the state. Chapter one focuses on immigration from 1900 through 1924, when homosexuality was believed to derive from corruptive immoral behaviors brought by Europe’s immigrating masses to America's urban centers. Canaday cites the Moral Turpitude Provision and The Public Charge Clause of 1882 as the first pieces of legislation directly targeting homosexuality. She notes that immigration policies exemplified “federal monitoring... [that] emerged in tandem with the rise of the bureaucratic state.” They were purposely vague mechanisms that barred people from entering the country on the basis of questionable gender and sexuality, thus utilizing the condition of degeneracy as grounds for deportation. These provisions were hard to refute in court because they blended contemporary Progressive ideologies of economic independence and moral values into their framework. There is a connection between the Progressive notions of social control and paternal government that factor into this early regulation against homosexuality as well; the Moral Turpitude and the Public Charge Clause exploited the belief that homosexuality came from Europeans, and that those of European descent had bodies that bared physical signs of perversion through similarity to female daintiness, which was believed to lead to deviant sexual behavior and, as such, served as grounds for exclusion. After all, the state had to consider them as a threat to the normative American heterosexuality before homosexuals could be considered an important category to properly regulate and police.

The second chapter of Canaday’s book discusses the military’s treatment of gays from 1917 through 1933. Here, Canaday advances her first argument that “the awareness of perversity was far ahead of a reliable apparatus to handle the condition.” Military personnel could not have been considered sexually corrupt because that would threaten the masculinity of the army. As a result, the military blamed the general civilian population for creating degeneracy and court-marshaled soldiers believed to engage in homosexual acts. This shifted the military’s policy from ignoring homosexual behavior to a practice of sending those who were suspected of being perverse home. The presence of perversion among the soldiers’ ranks reaffirmed that the military could not produce perversion but that it came from somewhere else. The military’s response, thus, was proactive, and preemptive of non-heterosexual behavior, rather than reactionary.

Chapters Three and Four respectively investigate the construction of the welfare state’s establishment and subsequent policing of homosexuals. Chapter three addresses Depression Era programs, examining why the Federal

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3 Ibid., 3.
4 Ibid., 20–21.
5 Ibid., 57.

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Transient Program (FTP) failed while the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) succeeded. Canaday argues that the FTP ultimately failed because it was associated with a state sponsorship of single, perverted men, all descriptions that were synonymous with homosexuality. While the CCC was also comprised of single men, they were required to send money to dependents monthly. Legislators believed that such a training program would uphold family values and prepare young men to support their own families. Canaday, moreover, asserts that the Social Security Act of 1935 created a “gendered imbalance of the welfare state.”

This imbalance of favoring men over women was also “(hetero)sexualized” by 1939 with congressional amendments to the Social Security Act benefiting families with the inclusion of “dependents’ and survivors’ benefits for the wives and widows of those breadwinners who were already covered by the law’s social insurance programs.” This transformative legislation formed a social binary between homosexuality and heterosexuality, thereby constructing the normative and the perverse that was standardized in the straight state in the 1930s.

Canaday’s study of welfare state legislation continues into chapter four with an examination of the GI Bill and the congressional battle with the Veteran’s Association (VA) over who would receive benefits. The VA refused access to the benefits of the GI Bill to suspected homosexuals. The welfare state produced a standard of the citizenry’s duty to the state; for men it “was the idea that besides soldiering, [his] other obligations were to get a job and have a family.” Homosexuals were barred from the same access to state benefits as heterosexuals: by the late 1950s, McCarthyism made it harder for suspected homosexual men to receive benefits because homosexuality was linked to communism. Canaday concludes, “The military establishment used the GI Bill to build a closet within federal social policy.”

Continuing this military theme, chapter five discusses lesbianism and how it was not a concern of the federal state, but it mattered in the military because male officers did not want female officers making a career out of the masculine military. There was a fast move to police lesbianism in order to preserve gender hierarchies and push women back into the home. Integrating women into the military did not change their citizenship status because women were still considered unequal and inferior to men.

The final chapter on immigration from 1952–1983 has limited evidence from thirteen administrative-level hearings, and twelve federal court cases; the proceedings in these cases produced the arbitrary criteria for determining immigrant deviancy. Unqualified doctors made the final decisions over whether or not an immigrant was deported based on the psychological evaluations they conducted. Since immigration hearings did not follow judicial standards for criminal proceedings, the INS was free to do what it wanted with the mandate of

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 133, 131.
8 Ibid., 152.
9 Ibid., 170.
the executive branch. Canaday asserts that these reports show that “federal officials perfected the art of manufacturing homosexual acts into homosexual people.”

A transition was made from defining homosexuality as a type of behavior to defining homosexuality as someone’s acts and identity. Regardless of state legislation, it was federal decisions that mattered the most; when homosexuality becomes a defining characteristic of personhood, a legal-political identity was formed. Sexuality became a construct like race and gender.

It is odd to have a history of sexuality without mention of the religiosity of the state. Without the integration of religious discourse there is no way to understand the rationale as to why those who constitute the state react the ways they do. This study could benefit from a larger emphasis of a binary view of sexuality as it relates to religious morality; sexuality is comprised of both hetero- and homosexuality and a greater focus on these constructions in a religious regard could illuminate more of the motivations of the state in legislating against homosexual acts. The state functions to define what is normative, permissible, and acceptable. It also draws lines in the sand over what is considered verboten, deviant, perverted, and thus unacceptable. These are arbitrary cultural constructs, but there is a difference between outlawing homosexuality and affirming heterosexuality.

Canaday’s conclusion is dated as it ends with her calling for a repeal of the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy in the military, but her motivation is disturbing as she believes the plight of gays and lesbians “stand apart from the parallel relationship between the federal government and most others who can also claim long histories suffering discrimination and prejudice.” If she intended to state that on a legal basis there is a need for strict scrutiny that other groups have since gained, then she should have engaged the judicial branch in a dialogue, which she did not. Canaday asserts, “There isn’t one sweeping act of Congress that can undo what’s been constructed over the better part of a century [to the LGBT community].” Yet the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not manage to fix all of the problems for African Americans (as she insinuates). However, Canaday’s narrative and analysis successfully builds upon work done by George Chauncey, while also adding new analysis to the construction of legal and political identity. She has made a positive and much needed contribution to the scholarship regarding the historical motivations for the construction of heteronormative standardization.

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10 Ibid., 227.
11 Ibid., 263.
12 Ibid.

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Shepherds, Vampires, Guilty Cats, and Buffalo Bill: A Historiography of Discourse

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I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous awesome materiality.

----Michel Foucault

The historiography of discourse is predicated on a break in the tradition of approaching and writing history as a series of conquests. It examines evidence in a larger societal context, searching out the voice of the subjugated and placing it within the historical frame. Foucault’s essay “The Discourse on Language” pushed discursive theory beyond structuralism. He examined how discourse regulates what can be said and what can be thought, delegating what is true in a moment for a discursive group. Discourse gives status and dominance to the paradigms that shape society. There are propositions that do not adhere to the true/false binary, that break with the regulated structural system, excluding the author of these ideas from discourse. These caesuras are of particular interest to Foucault in that they frame the space for dissonance, in which the discourse can be strengthened or reshaped. Discourse is the medium through which power is expressed and people and practices governed. In his book The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge, he maintains that “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere,” it is not an institution or a structure in that it has no agency, it is a “regime of truth,” constantly negotiated, and constantly in flux.

I will briefly outline Foucault’s conditions under which discourse can be employed since I will be utilizing them as classification strata to demonstrate how his theories have been utilized in the historiography of power negotiation. Discourse is bound by a complex, regulated set of controls between speaker and

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audience. These controls must be navigated in order to qualify the participants of a specific discursive subject. First, ritual is the combined effect of language, gesture, circumstances, and all associable signs supposed or understood to be of significance. The ritual defines the role of the speaker and the audience. Foucault classifies religious, judicial, therapeutic, and, in some ways, political discourse as being barely dissociable from the functioning of ritual. The second condition is the fellowship of discourse, which functions to preserve or reproduce discourse within a closed community. The discourse is subject to strict regulation, functioning through exclusivity and disclosure, but without dispossessing those that disseminate the discourse. Next is doctrine, the opposite of fellowship of discourse. It limits the class of the speaker, trends towards diffusion, and “links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others.”

Doctrine includes religious, political, and philosophical discourse, those areas most reliant on the sign and the manifestation of previous adherence. The fourth classification of discourse is education, which is simply the social appropriation of discourse. Most of the time, these categories are linked together in an overarching edifice that dictates and disseminates subject and speakers. Foucault’s theoretic lens allows the historian to give the subaltern voice, to read against the grain and discover relationships between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power.

In examining history through the lens of discursive classification to identify power negotiations in moments of caesura, Robert Darnton, David Nirenberg, Luise White, and Louis S. Warren are able to track complex cultural, political, and economic discourse between entities that would traditionally be considered in binaries of bourgeois and working class, ruler and subject, colonial and colonized, or mainstream and marginalized. The breaks they identify become the moments in which power and, by extension, truth are negotiated.

David Nirenberg’s Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages explores the discourse of power relations between social hierarchies and religious groups. His research is primarily focused on the Crown of Aragon in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This region had a particularly unique population matrix for Europe, with long held and well-established populations of both Muslims and Jews. The minority populations were vital in maintaining the economic health of the region. The Muslim population provided a cheap and plentiful source of labor—a de facto peasant class that was simultaneously exploited and a requisite component for prosperous seigneurial economies. The Jewish population, which provided a steady flow of treasury monies via taxation, was of such importance that Jews were granted legal status akin to “royal serfs.”

It is in this space, which had already been negotiated between minority and majority groups to stabilize

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3 Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, 226

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the Christian population challenging the existing economic structure. Jews were massacred and royal buildings damaged as a way of communicating the dissatisfaction of the public with the Crown and its reliance on and relationship with the Jews. As violence could not be done directly to the Crown or its agents without repercussions, it was couched in the language of sacral kingship, a ritual conditional in which the discourse of dissatisfaction with the crown could be negotiated without challenging the tenets of absolute rule and divine right. The dissatisfaction stemming from the role of Jews in the administrative kingship that was demonstrated through massacre could be negotiated, even legitimized, by claiming that the intention was “not to challenge the monarchy, but to restore to it the purity the monarchy itself claimed to desire.”7 Discourse as rebellion against monarchical power had to be negotiated in terms of fidelity and loyalty for the king’s sacral well-being. The lacuna between the ritualized violence of Holy Week and the outbreak of violence against Jews in 1320 is indicative of a population effectuating change through purposeful displacement of violence in order to utilize the power they had to obtain the results they desired, not through a direct confrontation of the king, but through symbolic action. Nirenberg utilizes the theories of Foucault to pierce the surface and recognize these actions as more than violence between religious entities.

Nirenberg also explores power relations between minorities. Religious boundaries between the three faiths were also in regular negotiation, each attempting to leverage faith and law to maintain power over their own adherents by rigorously defining social boundaries for “the other.” Conversion was one negotiation that all faiths had a vested interest in and sexual intercourse between groups, due to the legal framework surrounding sexual congress, created a space for power to be negotiated through accusation. Nirenberg defines accusational violence as an indirect mode of violence—the accusation itself has no power until it is acted upon officially, with the violence being carried out “in the name of the collective.”8 Given the anxiety over conversion and the legislation of boundaries prohibiting sexual intercourse between religious populations, accusational violence could be an effective tool in discourses of power. With intermarriage having been successfully suppressed through secular and religious pressures, prostitutes became the vehicle by which these sexual boundaries were negotiated. These liminal members of each faith became the frontier in which power was negotiated. Discursive power relationships were being negotiated with the end goal of excluding the other while reinforcing inclusion of the fringe through the legal systems established independently by each faith and within the overarching monarchical jurisdiction and hierarchy of faiths. Accusations of sexual transgression then, whether factual or not, become one of the ways in which power was negotiated between groups. “Christians wanting to craft believable accusations against a Jew, for example, knew the importance of putting a prostitute at the center of the story.”9

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7 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 50–51.
8 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 129.
9 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 145.

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economic structures, that Nirenberg examines how cultural power relations were negotiated.

The power dynamic between Christians and Jews, on a religious level, is tainted with the Christian belief that Jews were responsible for the murder of Christ. During Holy Week, the past was brought to the present, articulated through the performance of Passion cycle plays and culminated in the stoning of the Jewish call. The Holy Week riots "self-consciously represented a violent ritual paradigm for Christian toleration of Jews, one that persisted with little formal change over a period of centuries." 5 They served both as a reminder of the genealogy of Jews in Christianity, in that Jesus was Jewish, and as the catalyst by which their religion is brought into being through the act of Jesus’s crucifixion, reinforcing the divide between the two societies. Where the Passion plays were integrative, with Jews participating as players as well as representations, the stoning of the call was a clear reminder of the delineation of cultural space. This ritualized discourse served as regular reminder of the negotiated doctrinal power structure in which the majority was dependent upon minority ancestry for its identity, but mindful of the dangers that integration held. Moments of increased violence against Jews outside of the Holy Week rituals were generally indicative of an entirely different mode of discourse—one that was not simply between religious factions over issues of faith.

In 1320, a shepherd in Spain had a vision of the Holy Spirit in the guise of a dove alighting upon his shoulder and head. When he reached for the dove, a maiden appeared and tasked him with fighting the Moors, leaving behind an account of the tale on his arm as proof of his divine missive. When the shepherd told others of his vision, other shepherds joined him in his Holy quest; they began attacking royal castles in France and the Crown of Aragon and massacring Jews. Nirenberg explains this shift in violence from the Moors to the Jews and the choice to attack royal properties as explanation for how "the violence of one subordinated group against another can constitute resistance to the powerful." 6 By recognizing the connections between economic and political motivations in play and the caesura between justification and action, Nirenberg is able to see the Shepherd’s Crusade as a negotiation between the Crown and its Christian population, the newest link in a long chain of discursive power transactions that was seated in economics and framed by the Foucauldian ritual conditional. The Crown negotiated the toleration of Jews in the kingdom by levying extra taxes against them. In exchange, the Jews had access to wider commercial markets, a place to lay down roots, and a Christian population that would, by proxy, bear the brunt of the extra tax imposed on Jews through increased loan interest paid to Jewish lenders. These terms resulted in a returning Jewish population that, in France, was allowed to collect any outstanding debts from before their 1315 expulsion, with the full cooperation and support of the royal offices. The fiscal affairs of the king were, in very obvious and public ways, intertwined with the Jews, eventually culminating in

5 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 201.  
6 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 48.
become ritualized discourse, a way in which power was negotiated between minority groups in order to maintain stability; violent accusations were generally brought to conclusion by payment of fines, an outcome that reinforced community boundaries. Because all parties understood that accusations were not necessarily predicated upon reality, a system of fines kept physical violence to a minimum. Nirenberg identifies a few instances where this is not the case, when “the victims were individuals stripped of the customary protections and social relations that tended to be mobilized by such accusations and to attenuate their force.”

Without the ability to engage as part of a community, they fell outside of the discursive boundary and were unable to negotiate on the same terms, coming to violent ends.

Luise White’s *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History on Colonial Africa* is a recent work that explores the fellowship of discourse conditional. White investigates the way in which colonized Africans invented and retold vampire stories as a way to verbalize their fear of colonialism. She demonstrates the way in which discourse is utilized to negotiate a common language and empower the subaltern to relay fears and critiques from the safety of the “in” group, giving them the power to accuse the colonizer of stealing the blood of Africans, in a variety of symbolic and literal ways. You can hear the echoes of Foucault when White states, “absolute notions of true and false, of interviewing technique and legalistic practices, are simply overwhelmed by local ideas about evidence, ideas that are continually negotiated by talking.”

Her chapter “Roast Mutton Captivity” set in Northern Rhodesia links vampire rumors to labor practices. Colonialism introduced a monetized economy that gradually grew to dominate traditional barter, replacing the value of the product and quantifying it instead with the European values of time. For example, a bride price equating to about a month of European wages replaced the service that the potential bridegroom had traditionally offered the family. The missions were a space in which this new economic and colonial truth was not exercised; poor students were expected to provide free or token payment for labor in exchange for uniforms and food, Christian men were supposed to provide free or near free porter service for the White Fathers (missionaries) and the missions were allowed to operate barter stores. These work relations were negotiated in the only power that the colonized Africans had at their disposal—labor strikes and accusations of vampirism. What is different between Nirenberg’s accusational violence and that described by White is specificity. Nirenberg’s plaintiffs brought specific charges against specific individuals with an expectation of a fine being levied, and the power relationship between the parties was negotiated within the ritual conditional. All parties knew how events would unfold and the underlying reason for false accusation. White’s plaintiffs simply made accusations against “The White Fathers” rather than a specific individual. They turned the missionaries into a representation of colonial

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10 Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 165.
authority, something that they could not take on judicially. Their discourse is
confined to the *fellowship*, the “in” group, and because of the power divide, they
did not have a route that allowed for the judicial intervention that the construct
of the *ritual* conditional offers. They negotiated power by creating a divide, of
reinforcing the “other” status. White’s thesis hinges on the supposition that
people “construct and repeat stories that carry the values and meanings that most
forcibly get their points across.”*12* Rumor and gossip demonstrate the connection
between parties, the *fellowship*. If you participate, understand, or disseminate,
you are part of the sodality, and the power that lies therein. This is the key to
unlocking the associations she is making in this chapter when she suggests “that
vampire accusations may have taken hold when relations of work and
remuneration were severely disfigured. Accusations that the White Fathers
sucked African blood may have described a specific labor market.”*13* The
conditional frames the understanding of complex associations and responses,
and by recognizing the discursive mode the voice of the subaltern can be heard
and meaning negotiated.

In her chapter “Why is Petrol Red?” White uses the vampire rumor as
corollary between vampire abduction and the effect of new technologies. She
argues that:

Specific vampire accusations [are] a debate among working
men about the nature of work: not its material conditions or
remuneration, but how the experience of skilled or semi-
skilled labor and involvement with machines could change the
men who were so engaged.*14*

The new regime brought new technologies, vehicles, sirens, streetlights—things
that were ubiquitous in a western context were an imposed, foreign addition to
African urbanity. They changed the soundscape, piercing it with frightening new
noises that indicated danger. They changed the night into regions of light and
dark, areas of safety and peril. They were indicative of the colonial bureaucracy
and its ability to project power, power that could change the landscape and the
rhythm of life. Throughout the chapter, White makes connections between
vampires and specific new technologies. Firemen are, in rumor, accused of
abducting victims for the vampires. The sirens that portend danger, the uniforms
that were used to express authority and the red trucks became representative not
of a civic good, but of colonial hegemony. Working with machines, with the
physical embodiment of colonial power had a psychological effect that was
expressed in rumor. Moving into a workforce that was essentially a colonial
construct made participation in vampire rumor a way in which workers could
distance themselves from their new roles. They may work for “the man,” but
they negotiated their place in African society through the *fellowship* of rumor.

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*14* White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 123.
They erected a place for themselves that expressed their fears about the nature of work indicating the nature of the worker. Blood, which is representative of life, being taken by agents of the colonial administration, who are easily identified by the machines and uniforms they used, "represent[s] certain reservations about specific skills and the alliances made through on-the-job training, hierarchy, and an extended working day." The symbolic accusations of abduction worked to separate what was interpreted as projection of colonial power from the indigenous individuals that participated in that projection.

Robert Darnton's essay, "The Great Cat Massacre," also explores symbolic accusations. The fellowship is comprised of French print workers in the late 1730's. The oligarchy of print shop owning bourgeois had banded together to effect industry wide wage fixing while at the same time freezing the mechanism by which individuals rose through the guild ranks. Fewer print shops meant fewer masters and fewer opportunities for advancement. Factor in the practice of hiring unskilled, cheap labor, which threatened the journeymen's position within guild society, and you had a situation where print men "stood in danger of being cut off from the top of the trade and swamped from the bottom." The workers were stuck in a system that was easily controlled by a few men who were more interested in personal prosperity than communal. Labor had been commoditized in a new paradigm, and the shift, similar to the one explored by White, resulted in a discursive display of power by the subjugated.

Print shop worker Nicolas Contat relayed to Darnton the "funniest thing that ever happened in the printing shop of Jacques Vincent." Tired of being overworked, abused, and kept up one night by cats cavorting on the roof, the workers reached their breaking point. For several nights following, one of the print workers went on the roof and meowed like a cat, keeping the entire neighborhood up and prompting the Master to get rid of the cats, save for Madame's beloved pet cat, la grise. The men organized the hunt, the first victim being la grise, whose body is hidden in a gutter while they round up the rest of the cats in the neighborhood. Some were killed on the spot and some were used to recreate the judicial process, in which they were found guilty and hanged. To members outside of the fellowship of printers, this does not seem particularly funny, but as Darnton points out in language reminiscent of Foucault's caesura, "when you realize that you are not getting something—a joke, a proverb, a ceremony—that is particularly meaningful to the natives, you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning." The break between the expected form of revolt and the massacre of cats is the space in which power was negotiated. To the printers the act and the retelling of the cat massacre is filled with cultural associations that can only be understood as part of the fellowship:

15 White, Speaking with Vampires, 125.
17 Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre," 75.
18 Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre," 78.
the workers found the massacres fun because it gave them a way to turn the tables on the bourgeois. By goading him with cat calls, they provoked him to authorise the massacre of cats, then they used the massacre to put him symbolically on trial for unjust management of the shop. They also used it as a witch-hunt, which provided an excuse to kill his wife's familiar and to insinuate that she herself was the witch. Finally, they transformed it into a charivari, which served as a means to insult her sexually while mocking him as a cuckold. The bourgeois made an excellent butt of the joke. Not only did he become the victim of a procedure he himself had set in motion, he did not understand how badly he had been had. The men had subjected his wife to symbolic aggression of the most intimate kind, but he did not get it. He was too thick-headed, a classic cuckold. 19

In the same way that White’s “White Fathers” are representative of dissatisfaction with a larger system of subjugation, so were the cats. The accusational violence in Nirenberg, White, and Darnton is revealing of the power that can be negotiated when the right discursive conditions are met, regardless of social strata. Nirenberg’s exceptions to miscegenation accusations with non-violent outcomes reinforces this construct; all were bereft of this protection. The fellowship of discourse conditional outlined by Foucault, demonstrative in both its practice and its absence, validates the existence of discursive space for the subaltern to negotiate power inside a larger ritualistic discourse. This is not to say that a single voice cannot exhibit discursive power—it can, but only under the right conditional.

Louis S. Warren’s essay “Buffalo Bill Meets Dracula: William F. Cody, Bram Stoker, and the Frontiers of Racial Decay” is an excellent example of the single voice negotiating power. Under the doctrine conditional, in which the purpose of discourse is diffusion, the author is not reliant upon reception by a single social classification. He is able to couch his discourse in personal terminology and significance, some of which may resonate with the audience in a similar or utterly independent manner. Bram Stoker, in penning Dracula, was able to articulate a growing social concern about racial degeneration and his personal jealousies of his social superior, Buffalo Bill Cody.

In broad strokes, Dracula is about the colonization of England. Dracula invades the island, draining his victims of their identity, their blood, and turning them into vampires, a race without the weaknesses of the English. Given the contemporary understanding that race “invariably implied culture as well as physical attributes, and was demarcated by more subtle variations than mere skin pigment,” the fear of becoming the colonized was buttressed by England’s declining industrial power, falling aristocratic fortunes, and slowing birth rates,

19 Darnton, “The Great Cat Massacre,” 100.

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all of which implied a weakening of the Anglo-Saxon strain. In opposition, stood America, an expansionist world power that was flourishing while England withered. When Buffalo Bill Cody went to England in the 1880s in hopes of finding an export market for his Wild West show, his larger-than-life persona, embodiment of manliness, and sex appeal reinforced these fears, prompting the English press to cast him as an invader of English womanhood, and by extension, the entire race. Dracula became a vehicle for communicating fears, similar to the way in which vampire rumor functioned in colonized Africa. Stoker tapped into a cultural fear and gave it a vehicle of dissemination. Cody, as representative of the American frontier and its “continual westward expansion and continual race war [which] secured the racial decay of white people,” was set in opposition to Dracula, who tainted the white race and ensured its destruction.

In Dracula, Stoker further anthropomorphizes America in his representation of Quincy Morris, a westerner created in Cody’s iconic image, but characteristically a buffoon. Or perhaps, as current literary theory has suggested, Morris is a “secret vampire.” Cody’s virility is transported to Morris, who can create others of his kin with a bite. He becomes representative of English fears of racial decay along the frontier, of the mixing of the white race with the frontier populations in the American West. As such, Stoker creates the doctrine in which he is able to paint Cody as an untrustworthy individual, duplicitous and dangerous, as well as racially degenerative, and he is able to encapsulate all of America within this characterization. The racial and cultural anxieties negotiated through literature function in a similar manner to White’s vampire rumors, creating a fellowship that understands Stoker’s terms within the doctrinal dissemination.

In addition to the cultural concerns expressed through Dracula, were Stoker’s personal anxieties about his standing in Henry Irving’s social circle, a precarious, liminal position that “required constant, careful courting of his notoriously fickle affections.” Cody entered this world with an ease and acceptance that Stoker could never achieve. Irving provided Cody a way into English society and Cody reinforced Irving’s standing as a virile, authoritative celebrity. Stoker’s personal anxieties mirror England’s in microcosm and he creates Quincy Morris and even Dracula himself as literary representations drawn from Cody and typifying the brand of American bravado for which he was known. It is only through his writing that Stoker could find a socially acceptable arena in which to negotiate power for himself. He was a fringe member of his social circle, unable to negotiate a secure position for himself within the group, unable to successfully confront his social and physical superior under any other discursive conditional. He created the doctrine that becomes the

way in which he could confront Cody, and the success of *Dracula* empowered his social standing. His fear of genetic degeneration resonated beyond the *fellowship* of English readers, couched in the familiar trope of gallantry and damsels in distress, but while propagating his own commentary and negotiating power within Irving’s social circle.

Foucault’s theories on power and discourse have done much to advance the way in which we study and write history. By understanding how discourse works, we are able to look at historical phenomena from a new vantage. It is another theoretical lens that allows the historian to find the voice of the subaltern, to identify the caesuras that are indicative of moments in which power is being negotiated and to analyze these occurrences in their greater cultural relevancies. Recent historiography has taken advantage of this lens, revealing the voices of those not typically heard in power negotiations. Events like the Shepherd’s Crusade can be seen as more than just episodic violence between religions and new evidentiary vehicles, such as rumor and literature, can be leveraged to interpret reaction to, and negotiation of power between social constructs. Without Foucault, history is driven by binaries and analyses relegated to surface interpretations. We lose nuance and veracity. The goal of every historian is to uncover and relate the truth about the past. We are now driven beyond simply studying the great events and great personas of history; we are looking for a more authentic recreation of the past. Within the caesura we are creating a new historiography, and we are defining our own *fellowship*, negotiating truth inside our field of study, looking to our peers to reinforce and challenge our suppositions, the process of debate reinforcing our inclusion.
Bibliography


What is to be done…and who is going to do it?
Historical Interpretations of the Relevance of Marxism

Gregory Sherman

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“Crises, we may conclude, are the irrational rationalisers of an irrational system.”¹

“It is the simplest thing so hard to achieve.”²

What could be simpler than the idea of communism? It is the suggestion that society should organize to provide to each as per their need, and that all should produce as their ability allows. Yet in much of the western world, and in the United States especially, this simple idea has been demonized and disregarded so thoroughly that it has become taboo. The suggestion that communism, or Marxian theory, may have applications to modern society and current economic crises has been so completely brushed aside that one who suggests exploration of the topic is often viewed as idealistic, un-educated or simply ignorant of how the world works. Capitalism has ruled the west for more than fifty years and capitalism run amuck—un-regulated imperialist expansion and the pursuit of free and open markets—has led to massive exploitation of less developed societies and has resulted in many of the Marxist predictions regarding the contradictions of capitalism coming true.

One must ask if the shared American consciousness is yet far enough removed from the stigma of the Cold War that the time may have come to change the nature of the debate. Has the economic crisis of 2008 allowed us to question the infallibility of ever-expanding free market capitalism? Has America removed itself far enough from the history of the Cold War to break free of the binary opposition that insists that communism is bad and capitalism is good? Has society become sufficiently dissatisfied with the concentration of capital, and its accompanying political power, into the hands of a very small minority

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that we are actually willing to do something revolutionary about it? The answers
to these questions may not be readily apparent, but what is clear is this: the
purpose of the study of history should be to attempt to understand the way the
ideas around which we organize our society have taken hold and been
implemented. Therefore, an historical analysis is an appropriate way to attempt
to understand why Marxian theories have never been fully embraced or properly
implemented. This analysis will take place by examining the work of hegemonic
Marxists historians, those who have applied Marx’s ideas to revolutions that pre-
date Marx’s writings and those who have analyzed the success and failure of the
application of Marxian theory in various historic revolutions.

From the Diggers and Levelers of seventeenth-century England, to the
French Jacobins and the Russian Bolsheviks, to the Maoists and the Cuban
Revolutionaries, at varying stages, society’s workers have questioned the nature
of the means of production and the appropriation of surplus value and, at times,
have attempted to change the system. However, any detailed analysis reveals
that none of these incidents have truly been a situation in which the ideas of Karl
Marx have been properly implemented. Could it be that now is the time?
American capitalists have established an economy in which more than enough
goods are produced to provide for everyone’s needs, if only distribution were
determined based on meeting those needs. Furthermore, in establishing this
economy, American imperialism has expanded beyond the limits of its
capabilities and the truth of many of Marx’s predictions about capitalism has
been revealed; we see the concentration of capital in terms of the disparity of
wealth between the 99% and the 1%. Meanwhile, the consequences of the
decreasing rate of profit and over production and under consumption have been
kept at bay by a credit system that contributed greatly to the failure of the banks
and the collapse of the economic system as we know it.

But the question remains, as Lenin asked so long ago, “What is to be
done?” Hopefully, an analysis of the implementation of Marxian theories as
interpreted by hegemonic Marxist historians could begin to change the
conversation in a way that looks for real answers within the works of Marx,
based on the value of the logic inherent in Marxism and separate from the Soviet
experiment or any other historical movement that has been called Marxist.3 The
aim is to assess the value of Marx’s theories based on their own merits and to
understand why Marxism should not be necessarily equated with or judged by
the various revolutionary movements of the past that have either appeared
communist in nature or openly claimed to be inspired by the ideas of Marx.

As a historian, I am inclined to begin the analysis chronologically. Of
course, communal societies have existed on various scales throughout human
history. It is a natural inclination to organize in a manner by which we all work
to produce for the greater good of everyone. But Marxism requires a specific

3 Chris Wickham, ed. Marxist History Writing for the Twenty-first Century (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2007). While several essays in Wickham’s text were studied,
the idea that Marxism should be studied “unlinked to the Soviet past” comes from the
back cover of this collection.
three-stage process, which focuses on the way vital materials are historically produced. This mode of analysis, which emphasizes the manner of material production as paramount in understanding the way our society functions, is often called historical materialism. This Marxian theory dictates that the economic nature of a functioning society moves in several stages: a transition from feudalism to capitalist methods of production, a transition from capitalist to socialist production and distribution, and a final transition to communist utopia, a classless society. After the English Civil War, particularly in the twenty-year period between 1640 and 1660, we see the first major instance of workers attempting to overthrow the existing power structure and produce their own goods, for their own use, on their own terms.

It is clear that bourgeois and proletarian revolutions have occurred only when the majority of society was suffering due to a great disparity of wealth. Marxism seems to hold sway when hunger and hardship are the realities faced by the majority, and a small ruling minority enjoys a life of luxury and institutes policies to maintain the status quo. Historian Christopher Hill suggests that “class antagonism exacerbated by the financial hardships of the years 1620 to 1650” was at the root of the problem. The government was blamed for the mismanagement of the economy, which increased the cost of living and led to monopolies. According to Hill, lack of religious influence likewise had a substantial role in allowing for the possibility of an uprising. He writes, “What matters for our purposes is the existence of a large population, mostly living near if not below the poverty line, little influenced by religious ideology but ready-made material for what began, in the later seventeenth century to be called ‘the mob.’” To be displeased with the power structure of seventeenth-century England was to be displeased with the church. As Sir Edward Dering said in 1642, “Heresy is always the forerunner of rebellion.” Hill addresses a long tradition of “materialist skepticism and anti-clericalism,” which manifested as “opposition to the state church, to the tithes which paid for its ministers and to the patronage system which assured that its clergy were appointed by the ruling class.” Ministers were seen as “dumb dogs, greedy dogs, which can never have enough.”

Thomas Hobbes suggested in 1651 that, “under the pretence of religion...the lower sort of citizens...do challenge [liberty] to themselves.” So to cast off this self-imposed challenge to one’s own liberty, one must question the established religious order and its influence on the structure that assures liberty or its opposite, oppression. This structure is, of course, the political structure of society. The questioning of religious institutions begins, in part, with the Anabaptists. They suggested that infants should not be baptized, but rather

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5 Ibid., 41.
6 Ibid., 34.
7 Ibid., 31.
8 Ibid.

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At baptism, the symbolic acceptance of Christianity, should be reserved for ults who were capable of understanding the choice they were making. This as one of the many feelings, along with the opposition to tithes and the rection of ministers, which contributed to the willingness to question, and to be against, the existing power structure. Another factor that, according to Hill, must be considered is the Thirty Years War. Hill suggests that this war, lasting from 1618 to 1648, “looked like a death grapple between Protestant and Catholic, and had given widespread credence to the view of an influential group of Bible scholars, that the end of the world was at hand.” If one feels that the end of the world is at hand, then there is nothing to lose and only liberty to gain by attempting to overthrow the powers that be. It was the Leveler Richard Overton that began to make the connection between the power of the Church and the power of the aristocracy and to equate the need to overthrow one with the need to overthrow the other. Overton suggests that, “Without a powerful compulsive presbytery in the church...a compulsive mastership of aristocratical government could never long be maintained.”

The proto-organizations that emerged out of this revolutionary period in English history were the Levelers and the Diggers. Diggers often called themselves the “true Levelers.” The origins of these groups can be traced back to the formation of the New Model Army at the end of the first Civil War. The Army was called “the common people in uniform” and it is from dissent within the army that the Diggers and Levelers emerged. Levelers got their name from attempts to level enclosure hedges, designed to restrict access to what had previously been communal agricultural plots. The name Levelers also originates from the general idea of leveling the imbalance of wealth between the social classes. The Diggers are likewise aptly named for their actions. They engaged in the practice of digging up common lands for planting and harvesting, inviting all to participate. Levelers focused on the extension of freedom to sufferage for all (not just land owners) and suggested that, “all should be free who can freely dispose of their own labor.” Diggers had a slightly different focus, as stated by their leading voice Gerrard Winstanley: “True freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation and that is in the use of the earth.” The government had chosen enclosure as a means to deal with the poor and to give them “an interest in toiling, whom terror never yet could enure to travail.” Winstanley saw the poor from a different perspective: “The poor must first be picked out and honored in this work, for they begin to receive the word of righteousness, but the rich are generally enemies to true freedom. The poor are those in whom the blessing lies, for they first receive the gospel.”

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9 Ibid., 26.
10 Ibid., 31.
11 Ibid., 37.
12 Ibid., 25.
14 Ibid., 129.
15 Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, 52.
16 Ibid., 38.
Hill, "For Winstanely the 'word of righteousness,' 'the gospel' near communism, subversion of the existing social order."\(^{17}\)

The English Revolution is not an historical instance of Marxian theory being implemented by a revolutionary movement. Marx would not make his mark on the world for another two hundred years. In fact, the English Revolution is quite unique in its development, primarily due to its origins in opposition to established religion. It can be seen as a protestant revolution, emphasizing individual liberty and rejecting "all mediators between man and God."\(^{18}\) Similarly, these first iterations of English communism, instigated by the Levelers and the Diggers, can be seen as an attempt to eliminate all government mediation between man and his labor. This simple aim, with its foundations in Protestantism, may be the primary lesson to be learned from this period of agrarian reform. It is hard to say if the English revolution could have benefited from the guidance of established Marxian theory. Marx left no prescription for the nature of the methods of revolution. Only recent revisionism has determined that this period represents a revolution that applies the principles of Marxism, and Marx's comments on the matter are limited. However, we see clearly the development of the English Revolution as a proletarian revolution, in which the workers attempted to bypass the church and the government (the bourgeois power structure) and take control of their own labor for their own interests. Similar to the Bolsheviks, and likewise unsuccessful, they attempted to bypass the bourgeois revolution and move directly to placing the means of production in the hands of the proletariat. Unlike the Bolsheviks (but like the French), they succeed only in "the political ascension of the bourgeoisie."\(^{19}\)

For the next major revolution in European history, we look to France in 1789. The French Revolution is an historical event on which Marx has commented extensively. To help understand Marx's analysis, one can look to the efforts of French historian François Furet and his work, *Marx and the French Revolution*. Furet asserts that "the state does not maintain civil society; it is the other way around."\(^{20}\) If civil society maintains the state, it does so by choice and therefore, by definition, could choose not to do so. On July 14, 1789, citizens of France made this choice.

Furet uses a Marxist analysis to criticize the French Revolution as merely a reformation. Marx felt that, in the French Revolution, one could find the origins of the modern state and "the birth of democratic citizenship and its illusions."\(^{21}\) Citizenship, according to Marx, was not the final form of man's liberation.\(^{22}\) Furet argues that the French Revolution, by overturning the *ancien régime*, created modern politics. However, he also claims that politics is an

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\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 42.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 22.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 16.

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illusion and the French Revolution must give way to the "real" revolution, which would destroy the political realm by absorbing it into a socialist society. The "real" revolution, according to Furet, would eliminate the state and develop into a socialist society. Politics is not the means to transform civil society; politics is "the mystification of society." Furet quotes Marx: "Only in socialism can a philosophical nation discover the praxis consonant with its nature and only in the proletariat can it discover the active agent of its emancipation." According to Furet, the French Revolution is a bourgeois revolution. This bourgeois revolution, which results in the establishment of a new state, cannot fulfill Marx’s goal of a permanent proletarian revolution that leads to world communism. Marx considers the French Revolution a "political event, but a political event determined by economic and social evolution, by the development of productive forces—the market economy and the bourgeoisie."25

It seems, for Marx, that the limitations of the achievements of the French Revolution are the result of the fact that the French were satisfied with the overthrow of the ancien regime and the establishment of a bourgeois society. Citizenship was the goal, not a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. The goal of establishing the bourgeois state separated the masses from their revolution. The conditions required for the emancipation of the masses were "essentially different from the conditions within which the bourgeoisie could emancipate itself and society."26 Furthermore, the need to protect the newly established state, to retain power for the bourgeoisie, results in the implementation and justification of the Terror. For Furet, the Terror is the failure of the French Revolution.

Robespierre and the Jacobins instituted the Terror to prevent counterrevolutionaries and foreign conflicts from undermining the gains of the revolution, but Robespierre also saw vast disparity of wealth as an obstacle to democracy. Marx comments on Robespierre, saying that he regarded "great wealth and great poverty as an obstacle to pure democracy. He therefore wished to establish a universal system of Spartan frugality." This frugality of great discipline could not be universal if it was expected to be voluntary. Robespierre would have to establish a socialist society in which frugality was ordered and administered by the state. For Furet, "Jacobinism, and to an even greater extent Robespierism, because they represent the illusion of the priority of the political over the social in its most complete form, reveal the truth of the French Revolution."28 The truth, in this case, is that the nature of the French Revolution was a political revolution that established the modern state and bourgeois society and not a proletarian revolution that established a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. There are

23 Ibid., 14–15.
24 Ibid., 6.
25 Ibid., 37.
26 Ibid., 25.
27 Ibid., 15.
28 Ibid., 15.
similarities here between the violence of the Terror and the violence in Russia that followed the ascension of the Bolsheviks. However, unlike in Russia, the French did not sacrifice the peasants in order to support the urban poor and defend their revolution. Robespierre’s Committee of Public Safety, in its efforts to break from the Old Regime, focused their aggressions on the wealthy and the faithful. Furet writes that, “The French bourgeoisie of 1789 did not leave its allies the peasants in the lurch for one moment. It knew that the basis of its rule was the destruction of feudalism on the land and the establishment of a class of free peasant land owners.”

Free, peasant landowners would need a market economy, a bourgeois establishment, in which to exchange their goods. To protect the revolution and establish this market for the free, peasant landowners, Marx felt that, “just like money, and despite appearances to the contrary, the Terror was integral to the implementation of liberalism.” “The ‘hammer’ of the Terror still finds its justification, just like in 1789, in the necessity of realizing the bourgeois revolution...”

There are many more things to learn from the French Revolution, and this analysis could go much deeper. Marx felt that the French Revolution not only pre-dated his own ideas but generated ideas that went beyond its own achievements, standing as the origin of the idea of communism and a new world order. This may be why Furet suggests that “anachronism is another name for Jacobin ideology.” Robespierre’s belief that disparity of wealth dilutes the purity of democracy and Furet’s assertion that “politics is the mystification of society” are hard to refute given contemporary political circumstances. Furet seems to assess the failure of the French Revolution as not only a result of the Terror but, at its conception, as a bourgeois revolution that was satisfied with being a bourgeois revolution. For Marx, “the bourgeois revolution was pregnant with an embryonic proletarian revolution, just as bourgeois society was pregnant with the proletariat.”

We see in France in 1789 how a strictly bourgeois revolution was unable to fulfill Marx’s vision. We will see in Russia in 1917 how a revolution that bypassed the bourgeois phase and moved directly to the proletarian phase was equally doomed to fail.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 has been historically regarded as the primary example of a socialist revolution, based on Marxist goals of establishing a communist utopia. It is the only instance in which we see the working people of a nation overthrow the established leadership and take power in their own name. However, this Soviet experiment has also been used as evidence that Marx’s ideas have been tried and failed. For a brief moment, it was even suggested that the collapse of the Soviet Union represented the victory of capitalism in the battle of ideas. Yet, if we look more closely at the Russian

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29 Ibid., 44.
30 Ibid., 38.
31 Ibid., 55.
32 Ibid., 20.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 40.

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Revolution, we see that it may be a stretch to claim that the Revolution was an implementation of Marxian theory. To analyze the Russian Revolution scrupulously, we turn primarily to the works of S.H. Rigby, E.H. Carr, and Isaac Deutscher.

An examination of the Russian Revolution’s implications for the viability of Marxism may begin with Georgi V. Plekhanov, who was described by his biographer, Samuel Ho Baron, as “the father of Russian Marxism.”35 Plekhanov was a former Narodnik who converted to Marxism and established a Marxist group called “The Liberation of Labor” in 1883.36 Plekhanov was a devout materialist and felt that “the recognition of the primacy of the social role of productive forces was one of the clearest signs of Marx’s greatness and the answer to the riddle of social evolution which had perplexed earlier thinkers.”37 He focused on Marx’s attention to conflict and change in human history and the stress on the material origins of this cycle. Plekhanov understood through Marx that man was merely a tool-making animal and that, by acting on the external world, man may change his own nature.38 Plekhanov’s group insisted that a revolution could only occur through “the development of capitalism and as the achievement of the industrial proletariat.”39 His work inspired the formation of another group, “The League of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class” in 1895. This group featured among its members “a young and enthusiastic disciple of Plekhanov,” Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, who would go on to lead the Bolshevik party and whom history would know as Lenin.40

According to E.H. Carr, Lenin rose above his peers by knowing what he wanted: “to establish an accepted body of revolutionary doctrine and an organized revolutionary party.”41 At the time that Lenin, Plekhanov, and other early revolutionaries were spreading their ideas through the weekly paper, Iskra (The Spark), Marx’s philosophies were spreading throughout Russia. However, Russians were interpreting them in a “peculiarly Russian way, arguing that Russia, being a predominantly peasant country, would avoid the stage of bourgeois capitalism and that the specifically Russian commune would provide a direct transition from the feudalism of the past to the communism of the future.”42 The Russians believed that there were a number of historical circumstances that prevented them from being western Marxists. These circumstances demanded a “different Marxism which [was] appropriate and necessary for Russian conditions.”43 There is a certain amount of arrogance in

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38 Ibid., 63.
40 Ibid., 5.
41 Ibid., 6.
42 Ibid., 8.
43 Ibid.
this perspective. Russians felt they were unique enough that they could change Marx’s recipe as they saw fit, despite the fact that Marx makes it very clear in his prescription that one stage of the revolution is entirely dependent on the previous stage.

Carr writes that “the core of Marxism was the analysis of the transition from capitalism to socialism. Capitalism was the creation of the bourgeoisie, the ruling class of capitalist society; the socialist revolution which would be primarily the work of the proletariat would usher in a future society in which all classes would be merged and finally disappear.”44 There was a belief that one could separate the political Marxist theory from the economic theory, even though they are also entirely dependent on one another. Lenin and the Bolsheviks developed a tendency to disregard the Marxist “economists” who wished to separate economics from politics. Carr believes that this distinction indicates that the workers had no concern for political ends, only economic ones. To separate the political and the economic aims of the revolution serves to reduce class struggle to “a form of trade unionism—a struggle of men against masters for better conditions of work and social improvements within the framework of the existing order.”45 In other words, to separate Marx’s economic ideas from the political ideas turns his revolution into little more than a reformation.

Lenin attacks the Economists and trade unionists in his first major treatise, *What is to be Done?:* “The idea of the social democrat must not be a trade union secretary but a tribune of the people...A trade union policy of the working class is simply a bourgeois policy for the working class.”46 This battle against trade unionism is yet another example of the selective application of Marxian theory that results in its perceived failure and lack of viability. There are a multitude of reasons that the Russian Revolution failed to transform society into a classless communist utopia. The attempt to separate the economic theory from the political may have contributed. However, two of the primary factors appear to be rooted in the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

In July and August of 1903, the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party met for its second congress in both Brussels and London.47 Among the primary issues on the table were the nature of the party and the nature of the revolution. The debates on these issues resulted in the split of the party into two factions: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The first point of contention was regarding what defined a party member. Isaac Deutscher illustrates the debate: “Lenin had advocated a clear-cut, strictly defined massively built organization consisting only of actively militant members. Martov had envisaged a much broader party accommodating well-wishers and fellow-travelers as well as full

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46 Ibid., 11.

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time activists. This debate over who was to be considered revolutionary enough to be a member of the party had relatively little bearing on the split within the party. Debate about the nature of the revolution was far more divisive. The Menshevik position was that the Revolution should follow Marx’s prescription for the transformation from a feudal to a bourgeois to a socialist society and that the socialist revolution should be put off until a later date. The Bolshevik position suggested that an immediate proletarian revolution was necessary in Russia and that the period of capitalist development should be bypassed, so that the workers of the world could immediately take power. According to E.H. Carr:

The dispute between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, though it appeared to turn on esoteric points of Marxist doctrine, raised issues fundamental to the history of the Russian revolution. The Mensheviks, clinging to the original Marxist sequence of bourgeois–democratic and proletarian–socialist revolutions, never really accepted Lenin’s hypothesis, thrown out as early as 1898, of an indissoluble link between them. The bourgeois revolution had to come first; for it was only through the bourgeois revolution that capitalism could receive its full development in Russia, and, until that development occurred, the Russian proletariat could not become strong enough to initiate and carry out the socialist revolution.

The validity of Carr’s point is evident in the violent collectivization of agriculture that later came to pass. After the Bolsheviks took power, there was a mass of urban workers that needed to be fed. Failing to provide for these workers would mean the failure of the proletarian revolution. This meant that grain had to be acquired by any means necessary. The period of violence immediately following the Russian Revolution must be examined critically. The violence of the civil war was deemed necessary in order to defend the Revolution against a potentially devastating allied intervention that was determined to undermine it. This was not something that occurred as a result of the Russians’ own actions (although it could, of course, have been handled better). The violence of the collectivization of agriculture was a direct result of the decision to follow the Bolshevik line and ignore the Mensheviks. Had a period of capitalist development occurred, it is possible that the agrarian economy could have been productive enough to feed the urban proletariat without resorting to the violent collectivization of agriculture that led to millions of deaths. Isaac Deutscher suggests that the Mensheviks had a concealed “attachment to bourgeois democracy, or rather [a] yearning for it.”

48 Deutscher, Ironies, 214.
50 Deutscher, Ironies, 217.
argue, to the contrary, that the Mensheviks were the true Marxists with the more complete understanding of Marxian theory.

The violence of the collectivization of agriculture undermined the idealistic goals upon which the Bolshevik Revolution was founded. One cannot establish a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry if one must sacrifice the latter to provide for the former. It is, of course, impossible to say what may have happened in Russia if the Marxian theory had been respected and the bourgeois revolution had preceded the proletariat. It is also impossible to say how Marx may have addressed the truly unique circumstances of the Russian Revolution. Russia was a late-comer to the industrial revolution, a backward nation by all accounts, nearly one hundred years behind England in industrial development. Russia also faced a unique circumstance in having to rapidly modernize, in order to fight in the First World War, defending itself against allied intervention and safeguarding the Revolution against civil war. However, if collectivization could have been avoided, it clearly should have been. As Soviet historian Moshe Lewin points out: "Reconstructing [the productive system of agriculture] by coercive bureaucratic fiat, without seeking the producers consent, amounted to the expropriation of a huge mass of peasants. The unanticipated consequences of this policy were to weigh upon Soviet agriculture, as well as the Soviet state, until the very end."51 Would the Soviet experiment have succeeded if it had followed the Menshevik path or, perhaps, if the collectivization of agriculture had not undermined the righteous principles of the revolution? This is impossible to say. However, disregarding the need for a bourgeois revolution and a stage of capitalist development was not the only way in which the Bolsheviks ignored the prescriptions of Marxian theory. What would later become Trotsky’s rallying cry against Stalin’s motto of “socialism in one country” was an idea critical to Marxism. The call for permanent revolution begins with Marx. The origin of Trotsky’s failure to institute this permanent revolution is extant in the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

At the time of the split, Trotsky chose to side with neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks. His writings of the period, however, tended to lean toward the Menshevik position. Lenin was the undeniable leader of the Bolsheviks, despite the fact that he was considered merely the first among equals. Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks in the later days leading up to the overthrow of the provisional government and he was immediately made Lenin’s number two (I suppose this makes him the second among equals). Trotsky’s instant ascension caused resentment amongst the “Old Bolsheviks.” When Lenin later passed away, there was lingering resentment in the party against Trotsky, who was always bold, always outspoken, and refused to suffer fools. Despite these resentments, Trotsky was still the most appropriate choice for new leadership in Lenin’s absence. However, Trotsky’s failure to assert himself at the appropriate time, combined with Stalin’s maneuvering and the relative ease with which he formed alliances against Trotsky, allowed for the rise of Stalinist


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socialism and the subversion of Marxian theory. If Trotsky had taken power and perpetuated the doctrine of permanent revolution, the results in Russia may have been quite different. E.H. Carr quotes Marx: "our interests and our tasks consist in making the revolution permanent until all the more or less possessing classes are removed from authority, until the proletariat wins state power...Their fighting slogan must be 'permanent revolution.'"52 And Isaac Deutscher also points out: "Classical Marxism never envisaged 'socialism in a single country'... It was always international in its outlook; yet in the actual historical development it became national in scale... This was a profoundly anti-Marxist view."53

Within the Russian Revolution, one sees evidence of "a profoundly anti-Marxist" theory of revolution at work. The attempt to bypass capitalist development and the bourgeois revolution and the willingness to be satisfied with socialism on a national scale paint a picture of the Russian Revolution as an improper or incomplete application of Marxian theory. When analyzed along with the French and English revolutions, there is a substantial argument to be made that there has never been a proper application of Marxian theory that has followed the progression of bourgeois to socialist revolutions to a classless, communist society.

To completely omit Maoism and the Cuban revolution would be like ignoring the elephant in a room. However, due to the lack of reliable historical analysis, their treatment will be brief. Isaac Deutscher addresses the topic of Chinese Maoism briefly in his work, The Ironies of History. Deutscher points out several unique factors of Chinese communism. The first is the complete lack of any Socialist-Marxist influence in China prior to 1917. While Russian Bolsheviks were able to stand on the shoulders of many generations of great revolutionaries, Maoism has no native Marxist ancestry and therefore existed as a direct descendent of Leninist Bolshevism. According to Deutscher, "Mao stands on Lenin's shoulders."54 Since we have already thoroughly analyzed how Russian Bolshevism contradicts Marxism, I will go no further in justifying that Maoism is not an application of Marxian theory.55

The case of Cuba is unique because Cuba is a small island nation that is highly dependent on its allies, which have traditionally been great powers. When relations between the U.S. and Cuba deteriorated in the 1960s, Castro shifted his alliance to the Soviet Union. Cubans did well under Soviet support and today

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54 Deutscher, Ironies, 89–90.
55 Deutscher, Ironies, 88–120. Deutscher also makes a keen observation regarding Maoism and the relationship with the peasantry. For Stalin, socialism in one country meant no support for Mao's uprising. This leads Mao's army to retreat to the country and rely largely on the peasantry for survival until they could re-emerge and take power. This strong relationship with the peasantry makes collectivization a much better organized and far less violent process in China. It is truly an Irony of History that socialism in one country (Russia) prevented violent collectivization in another (China).
can boast one of the highest literacy rates and most comprehensive universal health care systems in the world. However, since the fall of the U.S.S.R., Cuba has largely been left to fend for itself. This small Caribbean island is not fully capable of self-sufficiency. Thanks largely to the persistent American embargo (an unfortunate relic of the Cold War) and the collapse of the Soviet system, Cuba has not had a fair opportunity to try to make its place in the world and therefore can only be judged within the context of its truly unique circumstances.

These revolutions, in England, France, Russia, China, and Cuba, are the revolutions that have been the major events in history which have commonly been referred to as communist, socialist, or Marxist. Arguments within the historiography support the claim that there is no real reason to view any of these events as an incident by which we can judge the validity of the practical application of Marxian theory. Marxism has yet to have its time. But Isaac Deutscher points out that Marx envisioned no timeline: “Marx never promised victories for the revolutions at any definite date of the calendar. All that he forecast was that there was going to be a struggle...a struggle that would go on for generations and which should...lead to the dissolution of capitalism and the emergence of socialism.”56 Perhaps there is still a time for Marxism in the West. No country exemplifies Marx’s predictions about the contradictions of capitalism better than the U.S., and no country is more suited to provide for the needs of all, if only goods were distributed judiciously. For perspectives on the possibilities for western Marxism, the works of Perry Anderson and David Harvey are worth comment.

Perry Anderson offers a criticism of Marx and his failure to elaborate on the transitions of his revolutionary stages. Anderson sees Marx’s economic theory of the capitalist mode of production as “coherent and developed” but criticizes him for leaving “no comparable political theory of the structures of the bourgeois state or of the strategy and tactics of a revolutionary working class party for its overthrow.”57 Anderson argues that this is one of the fatal flaws of Marxism and that Marxism as a theory must be renounced. He writes, “There is however a tradition that derives from Marx that is at the antipodes of such a theory and should be honored.”58 This distinction between the Marxist tradition and the Marxist theory, as Anderson describes it, is merely an attempt to forestall any suggestion that Marxian political and economic theories should be practically applied. Writing in the 1980s, Anderson attempts to analyze contemporary Marxism: “Not every contribution to socialism as a body of thought coincides with the output of Marxism, which has no monopoly of critical theory on the Left either. Where does this leave historical materialism in the 80s? In a sense where it has always been: at the cross-roads of past and

56 Deutscher, Marxism and Revolutions, 250.

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future, economics and politics, history and strategy." Moreover, Anderson argues that Marxism is a flawed idea that exists in ebbs and flows and should be honored as a tradition, not practically applied. According to Anderson, the flaw of Marxism is that it does not precisely lay out the steps of the revolution.

However, there is an opposing argument suggested by Marxist historiography that Marxism is an ideal that pre-dates Marx and was only fully formed by Marx’s writings. Marxism is a constant in the human experience. Precisely the reason we have not seen an instance of the successful implementation of Marxism is because Marx’s prescriptions have never been literally applied as he envisioned. And the fact that Marx did not strictly define the “strategy and tactics of the revolutionary working class party” seems to leave open a world of possibilities. The idea of a violent revolutionary uprising in the western world today is almost laughable. Nevertheless, a revolution need not be violent. Perhaps there is a way that a revolution can occur within the framework of our existing government, which can transition America from its long phase of capitalist development to a new stage, in which each is provided for according to their need and each contributes according to their ability.

The prominent voice arguing for an implementation of Marxian theory today is David Harvey. Harvey describes our modern credit system and its predatory lending practices in Marxist terms of accumulation by dispossession: “The resurgence of the mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession has been particularly marked in the expanding role of the credit system and financial appropriations, the latest wave of which has resulted in several million people in the United States losing their homes through foreclosures.” These foreclosures “allowed assets to be acquired at low cost and transferred wholesale to boost the long run wealth of the capitalist class interest.” Harvey asserts that this strategy is the intentional implementation of the neoliberal policies of the 1980s, which have kept wages stagnant and concentrated the gains from technological advancement and increased productivity firmly in the hands of the capitalist class. Meanwhile, the stagnant wages have decreased homeowners’ ability to pay mortgages and have forced them to rely increasingly on credit, tripling the debt of the average American homeowner in the period between 1980 and 2008. As Harvey states, “the resultant property-market crash was utterly predictable.”

The successful implementation of neoliberal policies could only have occurred as a by-product of the Cold War. It seems that people will believe anything is good for them if there is an enemy doing the opposite. The dichotomy of the U.S.–Soviet conflict has meant that for the past sixty years, the ideas of communism and socialism have been forbidden subjects in much of American society. Many in the U.S. have been afraid to explore these ideas because they have been taught to believe that socialism is the same as

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61 Ibid., 335.
62 Ibid.
communism. The dominant American ideology, which remains as a relic of the Cold War, asserts that communism is bad because it is the opposite of freedom and, while the Soviet Union was communist, America is free. This binary opposition has allowed for the neoliberal revolution to come to pass and succeed in “privatizing the production of surplus.”63 All of the surplus value of the laboring masses remains in the hands of the capitalists. Socialism would be the next appropriate step to transition out of this long period of capitalist development, but many in western society have become complacent participants in the existing system and no longer consider socialism as a theory that may provide solutions. David Harvey addresses the true nature of socialism and what its practical application would mean for a modern society:

The difference between socialism and communism is worth noting. Socialism aims to democratically manage and regulate capitalism in ways that calm its excesses and redistribute its benefits through progressive taxation arrangements while basic needs—such as education, health care and even housing—are provided by the state out of reach of market forces.64

Progressive taxation that calms economic excess and redistributes resources so that the basic needs of healthcare, education, and shelter are met sounds like precisely the remedy for America’s economic woes. When one looks at the ideas of Karl Marx, purely on their own merits, separate from the assumptions associated with any historical interpretations, one could easily conclude that socialism could be the cure for America’s current economic woes. And if socialism could begin in the world’s most successfully developed capitalist nation, then perhaps the rest of the world would see fit to join the permanent revolution. If this form of socialism could become pervasive throughout society so that basic needs were met and prosperity was shared amongst all equally, would we not be on our way to a classless society? Why couldn’t this work? It has never been properly attempted. The question is no longer merely what is to be done? Marx told us what is to be done. The more relevant question, as David Harvey points out, is “who is going to do it?”65 We must not leave Marxism to the dustbin of history. When examined objectively, Marx’s theories on capitalism may never be truer and there may never be a more appropriate time for their application. There is substantial evidence within Marxist historiography suggesting that the theories of Marxism may be more relevant now than at any previous moment in history. For the last word, we return appropriately to Isaac Deutscher:

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 215.

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Marxism is a way of thinking, a generalization growing out of an immense historical development; and as long as this historic phase in which we live has not been left far behind us, the doctrine may prove to be mistaken on points of detail or secondary points, but in its essence nothing has deprived it, and nothing looks like depriving it, of its relevance, validity and importance for the future.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{66} Deutscher, \textit{Marxism and Revolutions}, 245.
Bibliography


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