

2003 REVIEW OF BOOKS

# political **A**ffairs

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## LEFT IMPRINTS

TAKING A STAND  
WITH WALTER MOSLEY

AN EXECUTION IN THE FAMILY  
AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT MEEROPOL

11>



2003 REVIEW OF BOOKS



# political **A**ffairs

**Ideology, Politics and Culture**  
Volume 82, No. 10

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Vladimir Favorsky  
Portrait of Dostoyevsky 1929

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**WE DID IT!**

We are happy to announce the successful completion of this year's fund drive. With your help we went over the top and brought in \$18,000.

We can't thank you enough for your support. Because of your donations we're able to continue another year of coverage and analysis of the working-class and people's movements for unity, democracy, and equality.

We hope to continue to earn your generous support. We also are eager to read your letters and e-mails commenting on the work of this magazine. Please continue to send those in.

Peace,

PA Editors

## Dear Reader,

We sincerely apologize for the poor quality of the September/October 2003 issue of *Political Affairs*. Difficulties related to the printing process prevented us from bringing you an issue with *PA's* usually good appearance. We will work hard in the future to ensure that this does not happen again. Please feel free to send us your suggestions, comments, or criticisms at [pa@politicalaffairs.net](mailto:pa@politicalaffairs.net) or by mail to 235 W. 23rd St. NY, NY 10011.

Editors

I was shocked to see how many times the word "America" was used for the United States.



### There's more to America than the US San Francisco, California

I was delighted to receive *Political Affairs* for August 2003. It looks and reads really fresh, enlightening, good looking.

With all that enthusiasm, you will allow me one complaint. I was shocked to see how many times the word "America" was used for the United States (on pages 5, 11, 14, for example). For such a firmly anti-imperialist, anti-racist magazine to give this country the name of two continents is a shocker especially in these years of Bush empire-building and to hell with the rest of the world. Calling this country "America" in effect says that 20 other countries with over 550 million human beings (mostly of color) stretching across 7,785,000 square miles are of no importance. The name was truly hijacked by the forces of manifest destiny. We really shouldn't use it and it is offensive to many people. This is not to abolish the word "American," which is technically not wrong since most people in the US are Americans, but just remember that those 550 million other people are also Americans. We can, however, avoid using "American" when the reference is very exclusionary: as in "the American way of life."

In solidarity,

*Elizabeth Martinez*



### The Cold War and Freedom Movement Cherryville, North Carolina

In his letter (August 2003), Adam Minsky raised an interesting point about progressives who misread the positive significance of the Soviet Union. Although they correctly reject the former Soviet Union as a model for the much needed socialist alternative, they tend to deny or ignore its role as a positive factor in the international political environment. As we now confront the aggressive and openly imperial politics of the Bush/Cheney administration, it is clear that the former Soviet Union if nothing else was an important counter to the expansionist designs of US capital.

In fact, it was the political milieu of the Cold War itself that provided the fertile ground for much of the advances by progressives in the post-World War II era. Throughout the civil rights period of the 1950s and 1960s, a major concern of US rulers was the impact of the growing Black movement on the image of this country in its cold war competition with the former Soviet Union and the rest of the Communist world.

Thus, the American Black movement emerged in the context of an international environment that was forcing some US leaders to address in some fashion demands for change in the racial status quo. This international situation, while not the sole factor giving rise to civil rights activity, was clearly among the decisive elements. The former Soviet Union as an important factor in this period is inescapable regardless of what can be said about its political and economic shortcomings.

And even though systemic incorporation of the Black struggle in this country began well before the Soviet Union's demise, the positive value of its role in contributing to the character of the political environment in which Black activism and other forms of political engagement emerged cannot be overlooked. A critical analysis of the Cold War period would contribute a great deal to our better understanding the social change thrusts of the 1950s

The political milieu of the Cold War provided fertile ground for much of the advances by progressives in the post-World War II era.

and 1960s. Such knowledge would certainly give us an appreciation of things missing in the current post-movement period.

*Chuck Hopkins*



**Good Job PA!  
Chicago, Illinois**

I want to congratulate the staff and writers of *Political Affairs* for the great job they are doing with the journal. One example is Wadi'h Halabi's article, "Priming the Pump – Bush's War for an Oil Shortage" (July 2003). The writer succeeds in linking the war in Iraq to capitalist globalization. The article is short, understandable, believable and loaded with interesting facts and even has a Marxist conclusion. I think that Halabi's article not only describes the results of capitalist globalization but also shows how to stop it thorough the workers seizure of power. The only thing that wasn't mentioned in the article is the system of socialism that would replace capitalism. But, that will require another article.

*Lance Cohn*



**Great Illustrations and Cover Art  
Denver, Colorado**

I guess you can call this a fan letter of sorts. Sometimes it is not easy for an artist to throw off the dark visage of his artistic ego and praise another artist. I've thrown mine to the ground and stomped its featureless face so that I can congratulate *Political Affairs* for including the fantastic talent of John Kim. His cover illustrations have a huge impact by giving *PA* a more professional look. I am also amazed at the variety of styles that John utilizes. Oh no! I feel the shadow of my frail ego gathering strength! Keep up the excellent work, John!

*David Baldinger*



**Dixie Chicks are the Bomb!  
San Pedro, California**

Tell me Joel Wendland,  
Why have you not been a fan of the Dixie Chicks? White working-class women from the countryside? Listen to them: they

are better than Zola and more progressive than Bob Dylan ever was! And they have SOUL. Sheesh! What a snob!

*Rick Matthews*



**Art for Art's Sake Ain't so Bad  
Bellingham, Washington**

When I read Tom Riggins on Plekhanov in *PA* (August 2003), I was horrified. "Art for art's sake is one of the things that make life worth living!" I told my wife.

I love jazz. My two favorite songs are *Blues in Green* by Miles Davis and *My Favorite Things* by John Coltrane. I don't have to tell you the 1950s and 1960s were an ugly time for Black Americans. These two songs are so sad they're beautiful. "When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I'm feeling sad. I simply remember my favorite things and then I don't feel so bad." The way Coltrane plays it on his soprano saxophone, it sounds like he has to think of his favorite things to maintain his sanity.

*Joe Randell*



**Debt Leads to Depression  
Yonkers, New York**

It is with pleasure that I inform you of my approval of the proposed changes in *PA*.

I would appreciate it if you would have an article about something of great interest to me. There is a danger of a world depression in the near future. Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises found that recession or depression is always preceded by massive debt.

Right now there is a lot of debt in our country and in various other countries. Bush has been engaging in deficit spending. That means that the government sells treasury bills to banks, insurance companies and businesses. This government's debt is enormous. There is also gigantic consumer debt.

*Albert B. Thurston*

**Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix**

J.K. Rowling, New York, Scholastic, 2003.

Reviewed by Jen Barnett



Illustration by John Kim

**H**arry Potter is an annoying, conceited little brat. Anything that was likable about the character through the first four books of the Harry Potter series has been overshadowed now by his generally distasteful personality. After reading *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, I wished I could have apologized to my mother if I'd ever acted anything like that. And therein lies the genius of the book – Harry Potter is 15-years old.

The book serves as a subtle warning to children who have not yet hit puberty, and their parents, while also providing a certain painful nostalgia for all readers who have made it through those horrible years.

The jokes about Harry's burgeoning manhood have been around as long as the series. It was a question many of the series' older readers were asking – how is it going to be dealt with or will it be dealt with at all? In this book J.K. Rowling dispels any notion that puberty doesn't exist or is all sunshine, lollipops and rainbows in the wizarding world she has created.

Of course, as in all the books in the series, Harry and his friends fight

adventurous battles in the fight to keep the evil Lord Voldemort from regaining his power and taking over the world. But unlike the other four books, that is not the main focus of this hefty novel. If you pared it down to just the adventures, you'd have something smaller than an issue of *TV Guide*.

**While there is much humor and lightness in *Order of the Phoenix*, it is a very dark book.**

What bulks it up is Rowling's investigation of the 15-year-old mind. Harry's crush on Cho Chang continues, and they even go on a date and lock lips. Ginny Weasley, though a year younger than Harry, is shown with multiple boyfriends through the course of the book. Hermione Granger still hangs out with the boys – Ron Weasley and Harry – but a certain sexual tension interrupts their friendship's giddy and conspiratorial conversations.

Harry's adult friends and mentors

aren't as prevalent in this book as they were in the previous installments. And while he deals with feelings of abandonment, he's also unable to stop thinking about how superior he is to all the know-nothing adults around him. In other words, he's 15.

Many of the themes and conflicts that were central to sidestories in previous books are continued in the fifth installment. The financially overburdened working-class Weasley family is still in conflict with the wealthy and politically connected Malfoys. Severus Snape is still good and evil all at once, keeping up the mystery of what side he stands on. Hermione is still smart, and still trying to free the enslaved house elves. And school pride still revolves around which house wins the Quidditch Cup.

While there is much humor and lightness in *Order of the Phoenix*, it is a very dark book. As readers, we are pushed along with Harry as he feels the weight of the world on his shoulders, whether it really is or not.

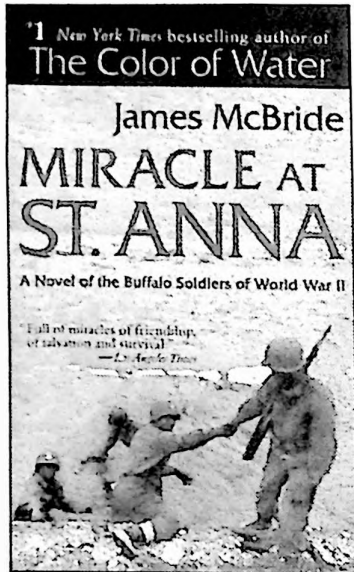
And that's the problem I have with this book – Harry himself. The maturity beyond his years that was seen in earli-

(continued on page 10)

**Miracle at St. Anna: A Novel of the Buffalo Soldiers World War II**

James McBride, New York, Riverhead Books, 2002

Reviewed by Simone Silas



Close your eyes and imagine a scene from World War II. What do you see? US troops storming the beaches of Normandy? A Russian soldier placing the red flag of victory atop the German Reichstag in Berlin? The mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The grim gray dawns of the years-long siege of Stalingrad? Search the awful war-torn terrain. Among the scorched steel and rubble, the twisted trees and cratered earth, between the near ruined armies arrayed against each other in that titanic struggle, do you discern any faces of color?

Sadly, the image of the war shaped in people's minds by such great works of fiction and film as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* or Steven Spielberg's more recent *Saving Private Ryan* is largely an image cast in grays and white, marked by a glaring absence of color.

Works depicting the 20th century war stories of the US's darker citizens never received the prominence accorded those depicting their white counterparts. John Oliver Killens' *And Then We Heard the Thunder* (the title drawn from Harriet Tubman's famous Civil War battlefield lines), written in the same era as *The Naked and the Dead*, depicted the tensions and ambiguities faced by Black soldiers fighting the Japanese in the South Pacific. Segregated by the white officer corps

and harried day and night by Japanese infantry, they often found themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea. Exasperated and perhaps drawn at times to contemplate mutiny, these

soldiers advanced the "double V for victory": to defeat the racists and fascists at home and abroad.

This tragic tale rarely told and often forgotten has been told again, masterfully, by James McBride, author of the bestseller, *The Color of Water*. Inspired by the experiences of the all-Black 92nd Infantry division, his *Miracle at St Anna* tells the story of a group of Black soldiers caught behind enemy lines while fighting Hitler's armies in Italy.

Drawn across the no-man's land separating the engaging armies by a mission of mercy to save an orphan caught in the cross fire, the soldiers embark on a journey from which few will return but through which some find deliverance. Writing in the tradition of, and at times with the grace of, García Márquez, McBride uses magical realism to tell a fantastic tale that is as radical and mysterious as reality itself. In the forests of the Italian mountains, belief, faith, loyalty, trust, hate and unbounding love are tested

The uniting power of love is uncovered, a love born in battle, nurtured in pain and fed by magic ... a love supreme.

in the fierce match between democracy and fascism, a match where friends at times seem enemies and enemies become unwitting friends. And yet across and through this dialectical dance a great divide exists and choices have to be made, from which there can be no return and upon which there is no middle ground.

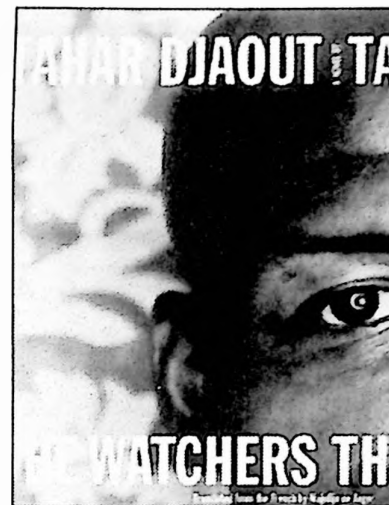
As the journey unfolds, Sam Train, a sleepy giant of a man, is cut down by machine-gun fire from an opposing bank. Miraculously reborn on the breath of another soldier he rises to find a young boy in the middle of a



**The Watchers**

Tahar Djaout, St. Paul, Minnesota,  
Ruminator Press, 2002.

Reviewed by Laura Clark



fierce firefight. Gripping a magical statue head from a bridge in one hand and the boy in another, Train uses the power of invisibility to avoid enemy fire and heads off into the mountains. Pursued by soldiers from his company who attempt a rescue, Train and the near-fatally-wounded boy come across a church and village where an atrocity has recently occurred. The soldiers are befriended by the villagers and there all meet their fate: partisans, Communists, fascists, Italians, Germans and Americans, Black, Latino and white.

The African American characters of *Miracle at St. Anna*, like those of its predecessor, *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, confront what W.E.B. Du Bois called "double consciousness," the dilemma of being of two minds, two cultures, two societies, one a victim of the racist discrimination of the other. Jim Crowed, forced into near-suicidal campaigns by stupid racist officers and under constant enemy fire, the soldiers fight for their lives, dignity and desperately for the future of humanity. And while the stakes are clear, racism disfigures the fight, not only obscuring the enemy but also assisting it.

Through the trusting eyes of a child and the gentle touch of a giant, McBride manages in this lyrical story to uncover the uniting power of love. It is a love born in battle, nurtured in pain, fed by magic and powered by an abiding faith. It is a love supreme. ■

**T**ahar Djaout's novel, *The Watchers*, chronicles social struggles set in contemporary Algeria. Djaout, who gained posthumous international acclaim for his novel *The Last Summer of Reason* (Ruminator Press), was assassinated in Algeria in 1993 by Islamic fundamentalists who deemed his humanistic and secularist portrayals of Algeria threatening. If he wouldn't restrain his questions and criticism, he would be branded a traitor and punished, they insisted.

During his life Djaout challenged the false patriotism used by extremists to stifle Algeria's democratic and

**In the fundamentalist worldview, an inventor is kin to the blasphemer.**

humanistic movements. In the early 1990s, the National Liberation Front (FLN) opened Algeria's political system to multiple parties. The FLN competed with the rising Islamic movement for political power. Fundamentalist terrorists associated with the Islamic Salvation Army inflicted enormous loss of life and damage to the country with its demand for conformity to strict interpretations of religious doctrine. In his fiction Djaout recorded the abuses fundamentalists used to manipulate the people, to limit freedom and to build theocratic control over the political and economic life of Algeria.

*The Watchers* begins with the waning days of retired military veteran, Menouar, who fears that a new

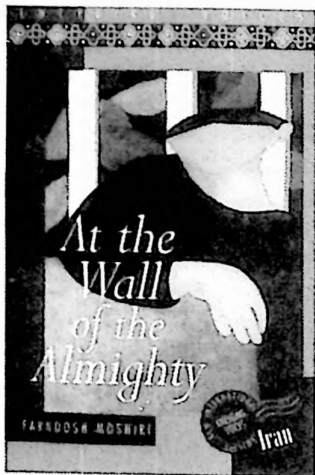
neighbor plans to lead a revolt against the government. This neighbor, Mahfoudh, is an inventor and is temporarily using a nearby house to build a new loom. Menouar isn't a principled individual: his views shift with the winds of changing political fortunes. When the fundamentalist movement comes to power, he leans toward their views. And in the fundamentalist worldview, an inventor is kin to the blasphemer. Mahfoudh's secular and unsettled lifestyle also provides the fundamentalists with fuel against him.

Will Mahfoudh be able to withstand these attacks on his character? Or, will he become entangled in a losing struggle with men who demand that he too conform? Djaout's story shows that the "Arab world" world isn't monolithic. It is fraught with class and cultural struggles that might lead to social progress or to deeper repression. Readers will recognize a parallel struggle between the right-wing fundamentalists who have captured the US government at the expense of the majority who believe in equality, peace and progress. ■

***At the Wall of the Almighty***

Farnoosh Moshiri, New York, Interlink Books, 2000.

Reviewed by Laura Clark



Iranian novelist Farnoosh Moshiri, in her beautiful, and magical realistic novel, *At the Wall of the Almighty*, documents a terrible story. Moshiri escaped from Iran with her family as left-leaning Iranians came increasingly under fire from the fundamentalist government.

Moshiri's novel portrays the anti-Shah movement, the rise of the Republican coalition comprised of religious and secular forces and the eventual takeover by the fundamentalist movement. This story takes place within an Iranian prison called El-Deen. Infamous as a place of torture under the Shah, El-Deen becomes the University of El-Deen under the fundamentalists and continues as a place of torture. *At the Wall of the Almighty* documents first the corrupt, decadent comprador monarchists and then the fundamentalist regime of unparalleled terror and torture. Moshiri has just recently followed up this first work with her second novel, *The Bathhouse* (Beacon Press).

The heroes of this novel, the narrator and his twin sister Sahar, make a vow as children that they will frequently visit the wall of the prison to be closer to their father who was arrested for his leftist opposition to the Shah. A friend says, "El-Deen does not contain the poor, the criminal, the insane, or the deformed. It contains the beautiful, the sane, the whole – those who are capable of thinking constructively about a way out of human miseries." The narrator is caught by the fundamentalist forces and put through a series of tortures designed to force him to name names and to repent his sins. Is there an escape other than within his imagination? What will the future hold for him and those who share his views? ■

(Harry Potter continued from page 7)



er books has faded away. In his conflict with his cousin Dudley, it's no longer a good vs. bad situation. If anything, you start feeling a little bad about Harry's treatment of Dudley, rather than the other way around.

His maturity has been replaced with a textbook stereotype of middle adolescence. I felt compelled to look up what some child psychologists had to say about that age. "Self-involvement, alternating between unrealistically high expectations and poor self-concept," says the website of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology. Based on their list of what the "symptoms" of adolescence are, one wonders if Rowling didn't try to get every single one of them into Harry's character for this book.

It doesn't make *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* a bad read, though, just harder to endure. The black-and-white morality of the earlier books has faded away. The good people are bad, and the bad people are often only slightly worse. While, for adult and child readers alike, this gritty truth might be an unwelcome change, it is far overdue.

Rowling's series has been banned for its "heathen" subject matter. In praise, it has been favorably compared to J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. Now, with the fifth book, I think it actually belongs in that crowd.

The dark side of children's literature has been around for years, and perhaps only hidden in recent decades thanks to the likes of Disney. Rowling's turn at realistic adolescent psychology places the Potter series firmly in the realm of great children's literature.

I was once told by an English professor that literature at its best reflects real life, whether placed in an unrealistic locale or down the street. Rowling has now turned the Harry Potter series from a bunch of kids' books to literature – maybe not at its best – of a very high standard. ■

# TAKING A STAND

## WITH WALTER MOSLEY

Editor's note: Most well-known for his mystery fiction, Walter Mosley is also the author of numerous social commentary books, including *What Next* and *6*. He has also published science fiction such as *Futureland* and *Bluelight*. This interview was conducted by Libero Della Piana.

*PA: The mystery writer and commentator Gary Phillips wrote an article in *Colorlines* magazine in which he says that who gets killed in America, and why and who pays are themes central to the lives of people of color and the disenfranchised. He says no literary form is more conducive to delving into this than the mystery/crime novel. What do you think?*

*WM: I have to come at it like this: about half my books have been mysteries. Any fiction about living in a real world, not even a real world that exists, but just a real fictional world, has to be political. If indeed you don't talk about the politics of that real world, then you can't talk about the characters. For instance, if you have a woman detective in 1925 in New York, and you didn't explain all the barriers of sexism she would encounter investigating her case, it wouldn't be a fiction true to itself. If you were to write about a free Black man riding around with impunity in the South before 1860, it just wouldn't be real. Or, for instance, if you write a book like *The Scarlet Letter* in which there are no Black people and very few*

*Native Americans, it's not real. It's what it is: it shows what the white world wanted to think about itself, but it doesn't talk about the real world at the time.*

*One of the problems we have in the mystery writing field, when I'm wearing that hat, is that people don't take it seriously. I don't think mysteries are any more political or more capable of addressing issues than any other literature. However, because people don't pay attention to it, you kind of have to make noise.*

*Crime fiction addresses crime and punishment in the United States. It talks about who gets arrested and found guilty. I recently wrote a mystery in which a Black serial killer is working in the Black community and no one knows it. You can't have that somewhere else. However in that community, "they're just a bunch of dead Black women." You know? "Because those are violent people down there."*

*PA: You've also written science fiction: another genre that is ignored but also has the potential to reveal political realities.*



This is not an ordinary book about Black people.



Illustration by John Kim

WM: That is the other part of fiction: to elate the reader, because they can see their world or the world they want to exist. If you are a radical lesbian feminist separatist, and write regular fiction, you really kind of have to, unless the fiction just turns its back on reality, deal a lot with males and male politics. But, if you write science fiction you can say, "Here in the year 2198 there were only women on the planet Earth." You can do what you want to do, which is kind of interesting. It brings up all kinds of other problems, because once you have that, what do you have to struggle against?

PA: It allows you to put tension in different places, draw different things to the surface. But you're still dealing with reality.

WM: Well, there's a reality. Once you get rid of all the men in the world, how do women relate to each other? Are there any pressures, conflicts and problems? And are there ways in which you have to legislate people's lives? You thought before this male-dominated world was the problem – and maybe indeed it was.

PA: Your new book *What Next*, is a memoir toward world peace. In it you draw lessons from your father's life.

WM: My father looked at the world much the way anyone who studies the Socratic method would. He questioned it, trying to be as objective as he possibly could. In doing this he discovered things which were amazing to him. For instance, my father didn't think he was an American. So when he went to Europe and they said it was a

### **Fear Itself**

Walter Mosley

New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2003.

Reviewed by Sharon Walker



Paris Minton, not normally a courageous man, finds himself caught up in the dangerous adventures and convoluted entanglements surrounding his longtime troublesome friend Fearless Jones. Paris is dragged out of bed in the middle of the night from his comfortable, uneventful, if impoverished life as a used bookseller into the seamy underside of Los Angeles. Everybody is suddenly looking for him, and they seem to want to do him harm. Once again Fearless has brought trouble to Paris' doorstep.

What do a refined woman claim-

ing to be Kit Mitchell's wife, two millionaires (one white and one Black), a missing watermelon farmer, a white man posing as an insurance agent, a stolen emerald pendant, a couple of mysterious personal secretaries and a hidden book have in common? And, with millions at stake, how will Paris and Fearless survive to live another day? In this fast-paced thriller, neither of the two heroes knows who is behind a series of violent killings and thefts, but they quickly learn that their survival rests on uncovering the truth. Additionally, narrator Paris journeys

war between the United States and Germany, he wasn't worrying. He said, "Fine. I'm not an American. I don't have to worry about somebody coming after me." But indeed they did.

It was just the way he would think about the world, or the Watts riots or the relations between Blacks and whites. He needed to pay attention to those who are suffering in the world, not just himself.

These things were lessons to me on how I need to look, when I look at Black America. I understand Black America doesn't agree with George Bush and his war on terrorism, and isn't so befuddled and amazed that people around the world would hate us. That allowed me to look at the world differently than America presents itself to itself.

*PA: You call on Black America, on individual Blacks, to play a particular role in the call for world peace. As people with a double consciousness, as Americans and as Blacks...*

WM: Or as people who are afflicted by a double consciousness. I think we actually have a single consciousness. It's interesting. I think most white Americans have a double consciousness they're not aware of. And here we are, we're sitting here like, "Oh yeah; we know, we understand this. Yeah. You want this because that's what you want, but meanwhile you're killing people over there in Bolivia." That's not double, it's really very clear.

This is not a gentle book on Black Americans. It's addressed to African America. We are, Black Americans, the wealthiest, most powerful, most influential group of Black people in the world. But still Rwanda languishes, Sudan languishes, Liberia languishes. Uganda. Chad. There's this long line of people suffering from disease, war and debt forced upon them by capitalistic thinking. We have \$650 billion in spending money in America. We should be able to alter the course of American foreign policy.

*PA: In What Next you address the oppressed and the struggling masses of people in the West, the US in particular and the Middle East, and you say the real enemy is not each other, but global capitalism.*

WM: Right. It's always hardest to see your own period in time, because you want to romanticize your history as it unfolds. You find people who talk about "those ignorant people back in Kush, 3000 years ago." And you say, "Wait a second man, those people were much more sophisticated than you are, much more. They knew how to live in peace for centuries. And when a war happened they knew how to squash it, and live in harmony with their neighbors." But it's hard because you see your life, and you think it's good. No matter how bad it is, you think it's good.

The problem with the latter half of the 20th century, what typifies and embodies it, is the struggle between Communism and capitalism. The US and our European allies

a path of self-discovery, finding courage and loyalty that he thought he did not possess.

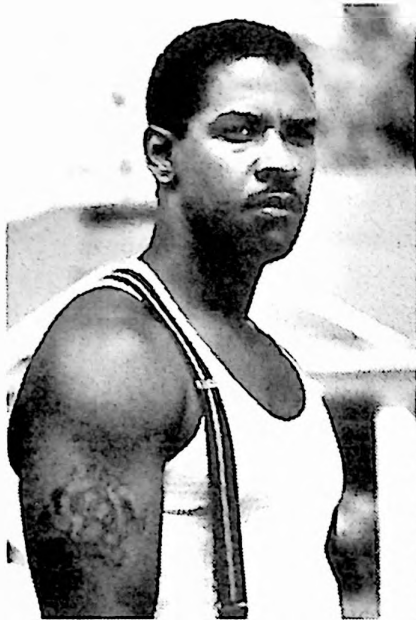
Walter Mosley's latest work, *Fear Itself* is the sequel to *Fearless Jones* published in 2001. It is a lively and thoughtfully crafted plot, as is usual in a Mosley novel. It is also a typical Mosley work in that it vividly and realistically records emotional and material motivations of a diverse cast of characters. Perhaps its strongest feature is the portrayal of depth and complexity in even the most despicable and flawed characters that do not

allow the reader to view them unsympathetically or to regard them simply as cookie-cutter types.

In this novel, Mosley deftly encompasses the broad social terrain of the 20th century American city, recording the quotidian of working-class life, the contradictions and violence of racism, the complexities of African American culture and history, while presenting a riveting crime drama. On this latter score, Mosley subtly drops historical and cultural references in the story line that seem to link the investigative urgency of

the plot to a similar urgency for the reader to uncover hidden facts about our own real life – as if our own survival depends on it. The sheer talent to pull off such a monumental task is rare indeed.

Readers who enjoyed *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *White Butterfly*, *A Red Death* and *Fearless Jones* will not be disappointed and will not be able to put this novel down. ■



Credit: www2.filmweb.no

Denzel Washington stars as Easy Rawlins in *Devil in a Blue Dress*.

were on the side of capitalism. Because we were, the common everyday person thought that capitalism was somehow the firmament for democracy. In believing capitalism and democracy are inextricably intertwined, we made a big mistake. Because in truth capitalism hates everything that believes in human rights, individuality and freedoms.

*PA: And anything that gets in the way of profit.*

*WM: Anything that gets in the way of competition for profit. I mean it's very specific. It's not just profit; it's the competition for profit. The only way you can compete is through wages, either direct or indirect. And so the people that capitalists like are dictators. That's what they love the best. They like people who don't support the rights of individuals, because those people are the ones that are going to give the best kind of competition between the corporations. It's very hard in America to talk about that because we have this history of fighting Communism. People say, "If you don't like capitalism, you're a Communist." I say, well, no. I don't like capitalism, it's the same reason you didn't like*

*Communism. It's because it wants to take away my rights – even more so, as a matter of fact. This is something that's very hard to discuss, because people are living the romance of their own era.*

*PA: Do you think that that reality is more exposed now that the Soviet Union is gone, now that the US is the only superpower? Has the romance of living in our own era begun to peel away?*

*WM: The truth was under the building and the building has collapsed, but the rubble still lies on top of the truth. As we clear away the detritus of the past, we'll see it, but who knows how long that's going to take. This is one of the reasons I wrote *Workin' on the Chain Gang*, which is arguing that we have to learn how to control capitalism. Capitalism doesn't mind being controlled. If you tell somebody, "you have to pay \$5 an hour to somebody, but everybody else does too, you don't have to worry about that," then capitalism says, "OK, fine. Those are the rules of competition." But as soon as somebody else can undercut them with \$4 an hour, they will kill you to be able to do the same thing. That's important, and that's what the everyday person has to know. We all have to know that, because if we don't, then we all suffer.*

*PA: Do you think that the mood in the US and in Black America in particular has changed since 9/11? Are there are more*

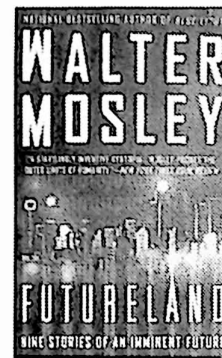
*or less opportunities for folks to stand up for peace?*

*WM: You can always stand up and demand to be heard, no matter where you are. Always. That's not an issue. You could do it in Nazi Germany. There are lots of cases of where people said, "No." Some of them actually even survived. Is the environment conducive to it? Yeah, I think it is still. I think it is still.*

*PA: Are there some positive examples you've seen that give you some hope for Black America playing a role...*

*WM: Wait a minute: I think we have it in Black America. I just came from Atlanta where there was a national Black book club convention. These Black book clubs are very well organized, and very connected and very grassroots, mostly women, but there are some men. That's the first example and it's an easy step to make. I mean it's a really easy step to make. Whether or not people are going to make it is another issue.*

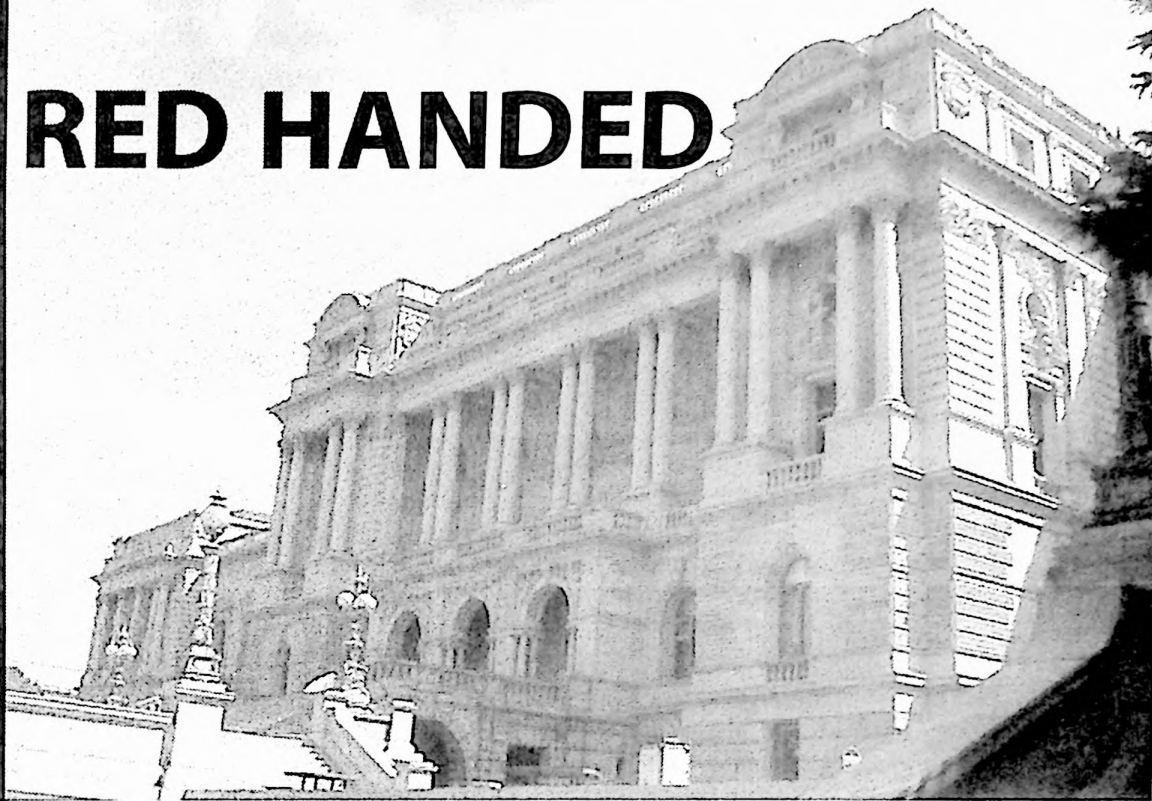
*I didn't write this book to give answers: I wrote to say hey, we've got a big problem here, and we need to be talking about it. We have a war going on. We have a war on innocent people and young children. And we have a lie that permeates our nation. A lie saying that we can actually win a war against terrorism by killing people. It's an insane notion. It's like the last gasp of the white male domination of America. ■*



# CAUGHT RED HANDED

## The Case of the Stolen Communist Archive

By Mark Rosenzweig



Credit: File Photo

Library of Congress.

I had occasion in the last few weeks to visit the Library of Congress (LC) in Washington, DC in order to view a most controversial microfilm collection. I arrived unannounced as patrons do at times, even at the microfilm reading room, knowing full well what I was looking for and (approximately) where I was going to find it.

Actually finding the reading room was another matter. Security was, as they say these days, impressive, and one felt like one was visiting the Pentagon or the CIA rather than a library. Post 9/11 you know. Forms to fill out, questions to answer, IDs needed, just to get in the door. After the form-filling at the desk one was sent to a special "waiting" room to get one's own spiffy photo ID made (that took about twenty minutes) which, inelegantly, one had to wear on the premises. It's the kind of thing that doesn't go with anything and makes you feel like the manager at a K-mart.

This was not a casual visit, preoccupied as I was with my mission: the pursuit of fairness and justice in an

ethical and legal dispute with the LC over their exclusive holding of certain material, the terms under which they are being held, the circumstances in which they were obtained and the conditions placed on their use.

The microfilm collection in question is a supposedly single, restricted copy of previously unavailable papers of the CPUSA. The original papers of a legitimate American political party which ended up in post-Soviet Russia when that federation fell and to which the present government of that country claims ownership (without any documentation of such claim). These papers sent to the then-Soviet Union for safekeeping, represented a large, significant, valuable collection of original material from 1919 to 1944.

These materials had never been properly accessioned in Russia (or the USSR), receipt legally acknowledged or ownership legally transferred to the auspices of either the Soviet or the post-Soviet government archival establishment, which now claims complete rights.

As the Director of the Reference Center for Marxist Studies (RCMS) in New York City, I'm the legally design-

nated superintendent of the libraries of books, periodicals and pamphlets, the manuscripts, documents, indexes, catalogs, photo collections, films, videos, sound recordings, special collections of realia, art work, of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and its predecessor organizations, as well as its affiliated mass organizations. I bear principle responsibility for the collection, its preservation, arrangement, description, cataloging, reprography, rights, access, promotion and reference services – on-site and remote – to these holdings. I hold this responsibility as the chief executive officer of a not-for-profit educational institution registered as such by the State of New York whose Board of Directors has employed me as a librarian, archivist and manager of a public-access research facility. You don't need a photo-id to get in, and you don't need to tell me in writing everything about you before I serve you as a patron.

The greatest part of the CPUSA's material, which is not under my control, is held in Washington DC, not far from the Library of Congress, by the FBI, which it had stealthily and ille-

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*Mark Rosenzweig is the Director of the Marxist Reference Center and Councilor-at-Large of the American Library Association.*



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.

gally stolen, copied, partially or totally destroyed, falsified, disfigured or "acquired," so to speak, by US government spies and informers since 1919. It is probably the greatest secret collection of all of the CPUSA's historical documentation, as well as the documentation of the government's maniacally intense surveillance of the organization's individual members, friends and family of members, sympathizers and attendees of causes and events sponsored by members, of their habits, their love lives, the books they checked out of the library, who they had a drink with, and so forth. It is information meticulously collected yet only very minimally and with great difficulty obtainable by legitimate researchers, the public or the individuals whose lives they document in their peculiar way. Even through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which presupposes that you already know specifically that it is there when you request it, it is released only in heavily "redacted" (censored) form under the best circumstances.

I will not here recount either the hoarding of illegally obtained materials by the FBI or the issues involved in

the on-going dispute between the RCMS, the Library of Congress (directed by James Billington a gouty academic anti-Communist "conspiracy theorist"); his employee, the sub-academic archivist John Earl Haynes (who bought this pirated, purloined material at Billington's behest in poor quality microfilm from unethically entrepreneurial Russian archivists without so much as contacting or recognizing the legitimacy of the CPUSA nor consideration of the possibility the CPUSA had a legitimate interest in the matter); the Russian Government Archive of Social and Political History (known by visiting scholars as an institution in utter disarray and riven with corruption), and the toothless Society of American Archivists (SAA). It's a ripping yarn but the last stitch is far from tied: you can read about it elsewhere and I hope you do.

Having finally found the microfilm reading room where these papers are held, I went to the reference desk with my friends, one a Princeton graduate with an MA in Russian and Soviet Studies and fluent in Russian, brought along in case there were translation issues and because I needed some jocular company, the other someone with some knowledge of intellectual property issues.

We all had to fill out forms including stating what we were there to research. We got one copy of what was called a provisional finding aid telling what was on what roll of microfilm and stating, in the introduction, mysteriously, that there was a finding aid in Russian, but they didn't have a copy and it hadn't been translated yet.

We then were asked to sign yet another form agreeing to stipulations made by the Russians on the use of the material, stipulations which were unusual indeed, especially given it was (a) not their material and (b) they



William Z. Foster.

were requesting things which were ethically questionable in terms of the Society of American Archivists' Code of Ethics, making it dubious for the LC to hold the copy of the material under those conditions. Most unusual was ceding to the Russians the right to decide who could use the material for what purposes in what form - especially since it was my client's material.

I asked as innocently as possible (I'm not a great actor) whether this form we had to sign was typical of signed conditions for the use of others of their collections.

Without a moments hesitation the person at the desk said "No, just this one." Nonplussed (and looking it every bit), I foolishly asked if this didn't seem odd to him, at which point he realized he had better refer me and my pals to higher authorities. He asked if I would like to speak with archivist John Earl Haynes who was "in charge" of the material. I said "Not particularly, but if I did, when would he be available." Oh, he would be in next week. Thanks but I wasn't staying that long.

The head of reference was available after lunch, however, and I was welcome to speak with her. I said I would consider that, but in the meantime would like to see the microfilm. And, "by the way, does





RCMS director Mark Rosenzweig organizes an exhibit on banned books.

this department have a 'patron confidentiality policy?'"

Not to his knowledge. I suggested that it was highly unlikely that it didn't. What about LC as a whole? Not as far as he knew, but he would check and get back to me. Did he know what was going to happen with the forms we had filled out? No.

As my friends and I huddled around a microfilm reader/printer with the boxes of film we had requested as samples of what LC had advertised as the "secret archives of the American Communist Party (sic)" in its press release, we marveled at the way in which a microfilmed "archive" made research about as difficult as possible and that one lost the sense of the connection of things and their context. Finding the provisional finding aid of very little provisional help, we sampled parts of the collection just to get a sense of it. Suffice it to say I was more convinced than ever that it belonged in its original and copy in the hands of the organization whose activities generated it, especially provided they were willing to make it appropriately accessible (as they were).

At some point a friendly refer-

ence librarian came over and said she understood I had some questions about policy.

I told her, indeed, I was interested in seeing the patron records confidentiality policies. I explained that I was a librarian active in ALA and that many fellow librarians were concerned with confidentiality of patron records especially in the context of the new USA PATRIOT Act, thinking that would jog her into action. Puzzled, she said she would look into it. A half-hour later she returned to say they seemed to have no such policies in print, but she would take my contact information and get back to me about it.

I thought it was the kind of thing almost any library had at the reference desk or certainly could produce relatively easily upon request. I was wrong, at least about the LC.

Finishing up, we returned the material, bid the staff good-bye and reminded them they were going to get back to me with the answer to my inquiry. Within 30 minutes we managed to find our way to the place we had checked all our worldly goods and then some time later to the street, feeling relieved to have emerged from the dingy labyrinth and breath-

ing relatively fresh air again.

Weeks passed and I still hadn't heard from the LC. I finally got a formal letter from an Assistant Legal Counsel of the LC. How high up this simple query had gone!

With some irritation I was told not what their patron records confidentiality policy was but what their access policy was. I explained in a response that I was interested in the patron records confidentiality policy, which was not coterminous with the apparently well-hidden access policy.

The Assistant Legal Counsel of LC responded that the question of confidentiality was covered in the US Code of Federal Regulations, and I could find that at the library.

Well, it took a highly-paid lawyer to answer (however misguided, inadequately and inappropriately) a question that any reference librarian should have been able to answer. I guess that's Washington, DC for you, or one of the things that makes the Library of Congress so special. ■

For further information see:  
<http://libr.org/rcms/>  
<http://www.marxistlibrary.org/>

# AN EXECUTION IN THE FAMILY



Illustration by John Kim

**Editor's note:** Robert Meeropol, executive director of the Rosenberg Fund for Children, talks about his recently published memoir *An Execution in the Family*, the 50th anniversary of the execution of his parents, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, and the relevance of defending civil rights and liberties. The Rosenberg Fund for Children provides for the educational and emotional needs of children of targeted progressive activists, and youth who are targeted activists themselves. This interview was conducted by Carolyn Rummel.

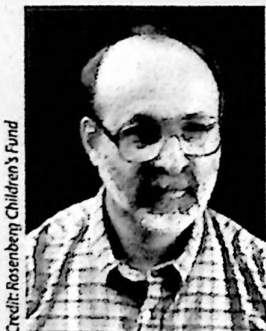
**PA:** Some people who were active in the 1950s had a strong reaction to *An Execution in the Family*, without having read the book. Why did you decide to take a chance like this?

**RM:** First, I see this book as the story of the Rosenberg Fund for Children (RFC). It's really the story of how I survived what happened to me in my childhood, how I ultimately grew

## **An Execution in the Family: One Son's Journey**

Robert Meeropol, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Carolyn Rummel



Credit: Rosenberg Children's Fund

Robert Meeropol.



Robert Meeropol's *An Execution in the Family* renders a fiery challenge to the family values of the right. It is a timely exposé of the violence that flows from the destruction of civil rights and liberties experienced by victims of the "McCarthy-era abuses of power." It indicts the prison-industrial complex and denounces the death penalty as a "barbaric practice" primarily used as a political tool to silence progressive voices or attack disenfranchised communities.

Meeropol was six years old in 1953 when his parents, Ethel and

Julius Rosenberg, were executed for conspiracy to steal atomic secrets for the Soviet Union. Just before they were put to death, the Rosenbergs wrote a letter to their two sons saying they were "secure in the knowledge that others would carry on after them."

Using the most recently released US government documents (Venona transcripts) and new witness accounts, Meeropol also reveals the results of his research into his parents' case. Significantly, this book documents the evolution of Meeropol's



Credit: File Photo

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg pictured during their infamous trial.

up. My entire life experience led to my starting the RFC and what that is all about. Ultimately, I'm a shameless promoter of the RFC, and I thought the RFC would benefit from this story being told. I felt that the 50th anniversary was the best milestone at which to tell it.

I also thought that the RFC had accomplished enough that I was telling a story of achievement rather than one of potential. I couldn't have

told this story 10 years ago, on the 40th anniversary because we were going in the right direction, but we weren't there yet.

The other thing is that there's something about an anniversary of this nature that makes you want to reflect on what it all meant and what it means now. For me, it's my personal story. I felt like I could tell the story of how my views evolved while placing them within a progressive political context.

## The key question in my mind has been did they do the thing they were killed for?

I felt that the discussion of my parents' case had degenerated into guilt versus innocence, and I didn't even think that was the key question. The key question in my mind has been, "did they do the thing they were

killed for?" They were killed for stealing the secret of the atomic bomb, and they didn't do that. So what does that mean? Let's focus on that.

Instead, we were talking about guilt or innocence, which I think muddied the waters and did not focus on the real question. I found that those who have actually read the book generally applaud what I've done.

*PA: I've found that people who haven't read the book but who have read something about it or skimmed through it have misconceptions. But when people hear what you actually say, they have a totally different reaction.*

*RM: It's like one of the things that are really remarkable about the Venona transcriptions. They're characterized all over the place, but they're on the Internet – there are only 80 pages of them – anybody can read them. The remarkable thing is how different they actually are from what they're characterized as.*

own perception of his parents' case and the political importance of the complexity of the truth.

Not without anger, but imbued with a deep and enduring political commitment to justice, Meeropol lashes out at his parents' killers, "Those who tried to have us taken away from the Meeropols were not satisfied with killing our birth parents; they wanted to kill the Rosenberg's legacy as well. They wanted me to grow up forgetting or rejecting my birth parents. In fact they wanted to prevent my growing to create something like the Rosenberg Fund for Children. But they failed." Today, the Rosenberg Fund for Children pro-

vides support for the children of targeted progressive activists and young activists who are targeted themselves.

*An Execution in the Family* describes a personal and political odyssey from being the Rosenbergs' son to becoming a prominent political activist in his own right. One focus of his current work has been on capital punishment. Meeropol recalls that in the 1970s, he was interviewed in Philadelphia by an African American journalist. He was asked if he believed that something like what happened to his parents could happen again. Meeropol agreed that it could. That journalist, as it turned out, was Mumia Abu-Jamal. The

author points to George W. Bush as "Governor Death," because while Texas governor, Bush "had ultimate responsibility for the execution of more people than any other person alive in our country today."

We are fortunate to have this historical and personal account of a difficult time for democracy and justice. It is a remarkable and moving testament of commitment and loyalty and is indispensable for readers of this magazine. Don't assume that you already know Meeropol's story until you read this honest and compelling book. His life hasn't been easy, and there are no easy answers here. ■



Credit: Rosenberg Fund for Children

Youth who have been helped by the Rosenberg fund for children.

*PA: The RFC focuses on children and what they are going through?*

RM: I also look at the motivation of the parents. I think this comes down to questions of purity. If the people that we want to support politically have to be pure, that becomes an argument for disengaging from the political process because no one's pure. That, I think, is ultimately very destructive because when contradictions, when difficulties, when subtleties are exposed, what ends up happening is that people either throw their hands up in disgust and become uninvolved or...refuse to see there's anything wrong.

I have this little mantra I sort of repeat to myself, "see shades of gray but act anyway." In other words, grayness becomes an excuse for disengagement and that can't be. I think those dissenters who are going to make it through the long haul, who are going to be able to change things are those that understand the subtleties and nuances and be able to navigate those waters without making dogmatic proclamations of truth.

One of the greatest advances in the 20th century, both politically and scientifically, has been an understanding of the limitations of our knowledge, of what we don't know and the fact that we don't know it all and we don't understand it all. That is no reason not to be involved. We still have

to muddle through the best we can and try to figure stuff out because we can't leave the stage bare to the Bushes and the Ashcrofts.

*PA: You've talked about how your parents' case is relevant today.*

RM: I conceived of writing something about this in the year 2000 as I was contemplating the 50th anniversary. I actually wrote some essays that form little kernels of what's in the book in the summer of 2000 and the early fall of 2000. But as the book evolved and time went on and September 11 happened, it seemed to me that the closer we got to the 50th anniversary the more June 19, 2003 began to feel like June 19, 1953. In those three years [2000-2003], we were so much closer to the 1950s than we had been. I felt that if you look at what the government, the media, the military, what various forces involved in promoting the ideology of the McCarthy period were doing, they were manipulating public fear. The fear then was that we were going to be overrun by the international communist conspiracy and the public reacted to that. This took place within a wartime framework: the Korean War. You put those two things together and you have the kind of thing that can happen during the McCarthy period.

And look what's happened now: The Bush administration is manipulating public fears, and it's created a wartime context, a never-ending wartime context, to fuel those fears. You then have an enemy. In that case it was domestic Communists. Now it's the international terrorist conspiracy.

Those of us on the left find ourselves trying to defend the civil liberties of the immigrant community.

Many times we end up defending people whose politics are so utterly foreign to us that it can be difficult. At the same time it's easier in the sense that it's clearer that we're not just taking stances in our own self-interest. We're taking stances based on principle.

*PA: In a similar vein, when Cuba recently executed several people convicted of treason, the Communist Party USA issued a statement, which included opposition to the death penalty. Some people thought that should have been left out of the statement out of respect for Cuba. But how can you oppose the death penalty on principle and not oppose it in all cases?*

RM: That's the exact kind of subtleties I'm talking about. I don't know if you're familiar with Castro's speeches in response to some stuff [Pastors for Peace head] Rev. Lucius Walker said. Castro talked at great length about how Pastors for Peace and Rev. Walker were supporters of the Cuban revolution, how he had a tremendous respect for Walker's call to abolish the death penalty and it was something they were studying and they could receive such friendly criticism.

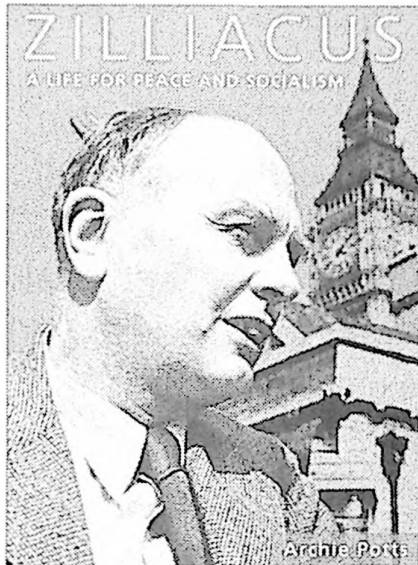
I totally agreed with Rev. Walker's statement. I find the death penalty is just wrong. There's no place for it in civilized society. If you feel that defending the Cuban revolution is defending even those actions that you think are wrong, then that's a real problem. That will come back to haunt you. ■

For more information: see [www.rfc.org](http://www.rfc.org) or write to: Rosenberg Fund for Children, 116 Pleasant Street, Suite 3312, Easthampton, MA 01027

**Zilliacus: A Life for Peace and Socialism**

Archie Potts, London, Merlin Press, 2002.

Reviewed by Norman Markowitz



In this dark age, his humorous quip that those who supported the US in arms race stood for, "no annihilation without representation," stands out.

British socialist Konni Zilliacus represented the best traditions of the broad non-Marxist left, working with Communists, left socialists and others to oppose imperialism, defend the Soviet socialist revolution, build a united front against fascism and oppose the cold war. When Henry Wallace toured Europe in opposition to the Truman Doctrine, Zilliacus was among the handful of Labour Party MPs who stood with him against fiercely pro-cold war Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. Zilliacus had been expelled from the Labour Party after those events. Until reading Archie Potts' biography, *Zilliacus*, I had assumed that he was just another victim of the international shift to the right, like Wallace himself, Senator Glen Taylor, Congressman Vito Marcantonio and others. It turned out that Zilliacus was back in Parliament by the middle 1950s, where he continued to be a voice for left Labour at home and against Labour Party support for the Cold War.

The son of a Swedo-Finnish anti-Czarist exile father and an American mother, Zilly was born in Kobe, Japan in 1894. Educated at elite schools in

England, he became, in part because of his linguistic abilities, an aide to the leadership of British interventionist forces in Siberia against the Soviet revolution in 1918. Bitterly opposed to the intervention, he leaked materials to British progressives about White Russian atrocities and the lies of Winston Churchill and other British leaders who championed the attack.

Joining both the Labour Party and the Fabian Society, Zilliacus worked for the League of Nations through much of the interwar period and became a major influence in Labour Party circles advocating policies of peace, disarmament and anti-imperialism. Often writing under assumed names, he spent much of the 1930s agitating in Labour Party and peace circles for a policy of anti-fascist collective security.

By 1937 he wrote:

I have gradually and reluctantly come to the conviction that the only thing that really matters in the world today is class struggle and that the only way to peace is to get a working class government in power.

After Chamberlain's betrayal at Munich in 1938, Zilly wrote prophetically that the Conservatives were

playing power politics with such crass incompetence that they are not only making the next war inevitable, but losing it before it has begun. They are rapidly producing a situation where we shall find ourselves at war almost single handed against all three fascist dictatorships.

Zilly was elected to Parliament at war's end in the great Labour Party victory in 1945, but his hopes for a post-war socialist Britain were soon dashed. In one of his election speeches he said, "only a British government friendly to Socialism can join effectively in making peace in Europe." However, the new Labour government continued the old Tory foreign policy, now deferring to and appeasing the US as it sought to mobilize anti-Communists, including "former Fascists" to fight the left and the Soviet Union. As a result, Zilly campaigned against his own government's policy, con-

(Zilliacus continued from page 21)

tending that Britain's support for US cold war policies was morally wrong and would bankrupt the country through its military costs, making the Labour Party's promise to build a "Socialist Britain" impossible.

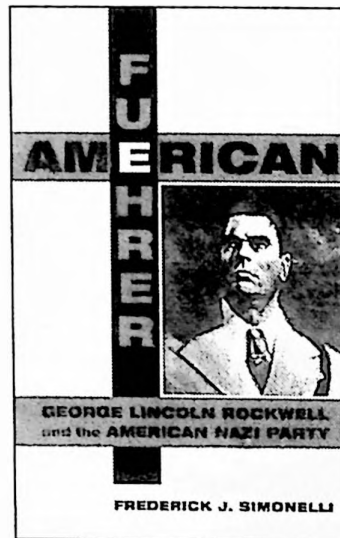
Among many other things, Zilly became a leader in Britain of the international "Let Paul Robeson Sing" campaign, speaking on behalf of the great African American anti-fascist and fighter for socialism who had been his friend since the 1930s. When Robeson's passport was finally returned and he sang again in London in 1958, Zilly was there to greet him.

Diagnosed with chronic lymphatic leukemia at a hospital in the Soviet Union in 1958, he began to take large doses of vitamin C to control the disease. Remarkably, he was to live another nine years. He fought successfully against Gaitskell's attempt to remove the Labour Party's long-term goal of public ownership of the means of production out of the party platform (Tony Blair succeeded in the 1990s) and served as a parliamentary voice for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

Zilly died respected by friend and foe alike in 1967, convinced that the battle for liberty and socialism, peace and internationalism, were one and the same. In this dark age, his humorous quip that those who supported the US in arms race stood for, "no annihilation without representation," stands out. Although both the British and American left have much ground to regain, men and women with the broad sensibilities, flexibility and courage of Konni Zilliacus will be sorely needed to carry forward the struggles for socialism and peace. ■

**American Fuehrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party**  
Frederick J. Simonelli, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Reviewed by Tony Pecinovsky



Rockwell believed all Jews were Communists and that all Communists deserved execution.

*American Fuehrer* documents the life of George Lincoln Rockwell, the head of the American Nazi Party (ANP) from its founding in 1958 to his death in 1967.

According to the author, "During the span of his public career...George Lincoln Rockwell was the most widely publicized anti-Semitic and racist political figure in America." Rockwell displayed the swastika and openly proclaimed his admiration of Adolf Hitler. He believed all Jews were Communists and that all Communists deserved execution. Rockwell also "ridiculed African Americans as ignorant and docile pawns of the Jews," while homosexuals were seen as perverts, whom he promised to "purge."

Rockwell's diatribes about the "Jewish conspiracy" and his calculated use of the words "gas chambers" and "gassing" evoked terrible images and memories for many American Jews. In response they pressured the major national organizations serving Jewish communities to do something.

Many were divided on what to do. Any attempt to stop Rockwell from attacking Jews turned into a freedom of expression issue, granting Rockwell more publicity. But, in the 1940s Dr. Solomon Andhil Fineburg of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), devised a strategy of containment against hatemongers he called "dynamic silence."

Even though "dynamic silence" originated years before Rockwell, the basic principle still applied, argued Fineburg. "Dynamic silence" rested on what he called the "three publics" - the anti-Semitic public, the Jewish public and the general public and the press serving each of these. Fineburg attempted to isolate the anti-Semitic public from information on Rockwell to prevent them from gathering to his cause. He tried to control the spread of rumors about Rockwell's activities in the Jewish community and encouraged restraint in the community's reaction to Rockwell. Fineburg also presented to the

### **Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South**

Robert Rodgers Korstad, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Clyde Appleton

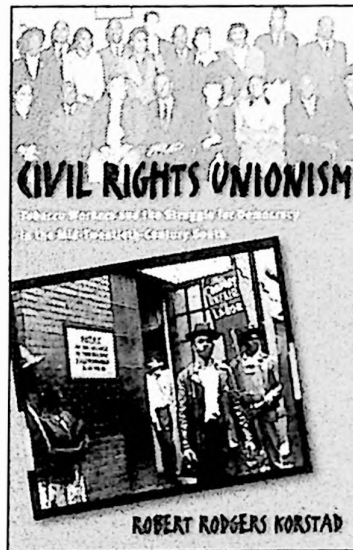
general public a picture of Rockwell as, at best, a curiosity without standing or substance.

"Dynamic silence" wasn't successful at first. And Rockwell continued to enjoy the media attention he desperately needed, leading the AJC's executive vice president to say, "Rockwell's device for winning public attention...proved to be a cunning and effective means of overcoming the quarantine...He repeatedly said publicly that he would goad Jews into publicizing him."

Rockwell's ability to gain media publicity was short lived though. By 1961 debate had ended on the role of "dynamic silence," or quarantine, as it became known within the American Jewish community. As a matter of practicality quarantine effectively isolated Rockwell and made it virtually impossible for the ANP to gain access to the media. For example, in August of 1962 Rockwell was to visit Philadelphia and the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) was about to pursue legal action attempting to deny Rockwell a permit to speak. Fineburg wrote an urgent letter to Jules Cohen, of the Council saying, Rockwell "made a tour of the United States these past five months that netted him practically nothing....The police were kept informed of Rockwell's movements, which is part of quarantine...the mass media were tipped off discretely to give him no publicity....Quarantine was clamped down perfectly on Rockwell again and again."

It was Rockwell who helped develop the idea of Holocaust denial and who wedded the Christian Identity movement into the ANP and other racist, anti-Semitic organizations. Rockwell helped pull together an international organization of neo-nazis - The World Union of National Socialists. And it is the teachings and strategies of Rockwell that skinheads, racists and nazi's of our generation follow.

Simonelli has done a great service by making the ideas and ambitions of Rockwell, and his followers, available in an easily understood and readable format. ■



I begin this review on a personal note. I lived in North Carolina for 22 years and heard wonderful stories about Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers of America-CIO (FTA) Local 22 from my friends W. G. and Eleanore Binkley, two unforgettable comrades who are remembered with deep gratitude and affection. I rejoiced when I read the author's altogether positive assessments of Eleanore's competence and commitment as educational director of Local 22.

Professor Korstad's book begins: "*Civil Rights Unionism* tells the story of a working-class-led, union-based civil rights movement that tried to change the arc of American history in the years surrounding World War II." The book's dynamic and vibrant core is its chronicle of Local 22 and its heroic confrontation with the racial capitalism represented by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in Winston-Salem, North Carolina between 1943 and 1950.

Over 10,000 tobacco manufacturing workers, two-thirds of them African Americans and more than half women, took on an often brutal power structure and achieved some important victories. It was an impressive alliance that took up this fight, including large sectors of the African American community in Winston-Salem: churches, the NAACP, other civic organizations, Democratic Party formations in the Black community and it most definitely included the Communist Party.

Local 22 members were active and dedicated union members, Communist Party members and members of their churches. There was no contradiction. Wasn't that a time!

The selfless contributions of Communists to the struggles in Winston-Salem are given careful attention by the author. Many Local 22 members were active and dedicated union members, Communist Party members and members of their churches. There was no contradiction. Wasn't that a time!

This book is exemplary, being both scholarly and partisan. Korstad's research and writing exhibits all the standards of rigorous scholarship. It is also written from the perspective of African American workers at the RJR Company. More than 100 oral history interviews, mostly of RJR workers, were conducted. Working-class leaders like Robert Black come alive in these pages.

Especially noteworthy was the leadership of African American women in Local 22. The first chapter, aptly titled "Those Who Were Not Afraid," relates the riveting events of June 17, 1943. Theodosia Simpson, a young stemming machine operator, in an act of deep sympathy and solidarity with a fellow worker – an older woman who was treated with demeaning disrespect by her boss – lit the spark that resulted in a work stoppage the next day. That sit-down strike set off a chain of events that culminated in a union contract at RJR in less than a year. Throughout the book one sees strong, dedicated and courageous women.

The final chapter tells the sordid story of the well-orchestrated demise of Local 22 that coincided with the tragic death of Moranda Smith, remarkable militant, dedicated Com-

munist and the first Black woman to serve on the executive board of an international union.

Local 22, with deep roots in the community, was never concerned only with wages and working conditions. It was the very opposite of parochial. Leaders and members of the local union saw their immediate struggles at RJR Company as integrally related to the whole of their lives in the community. Korstad expresses it well when he writes that Local 22 was both a trade union and a "laboratory of participatory democracy."

Red-baited out of existence in 1950, Local 22 left a legacy of militant struggle and an unbreakable commitment to the fight against the class, race and gender divisions that the ruling class uses in its callous and persistent attempts to keep workers separated and weak. Yes, there were company collaborators and informers and, at the end, overwhelming pressures that led to some sellouts and betrayals. Overall, however, the unity of the workers at RJR was remarkably solid and this unity lies at the heart of Korstad's book.

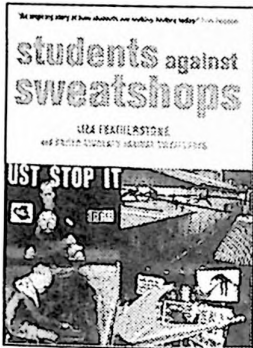
On another personal note, I was a music teacher for 38 years and have a keen interest in the use of music in people's struggles. I was delighted with the many references in the book that affirm the power of music. Local 22 was a singing union.

We must dedicate ourselves in the struggle as she did – to see that this will be a bounteous, peaceful world in which all people can walk in full human dignity. ■



**Students Against Sweatshops**  
 Liza Featherstone and United  
 Students Against Sweatshops  
 Verso, New York, 2002.

By Rosa French



Students liken corporate influence in university decisions to a kind of creeping corporate fascism.

This slim volume documents the origins and directions of the United Students Against Sweatshops, an organization that targets the garment industry. The focus is on college students in the US and shows how students came to understand how they, as consumers in the US, are linked to exploitation in other parts of the world and in their own neighborhoods. It also discusses how they came to learn that they had a voice they could use to try to end exploitation.

Featherstone and the other authors of this book attribute current trends in the garment industry to the primary function of capitalism, the profit motive. Garment manufacturers move production to parts of the country and the world where they can cheapen labor the most, where labor laws are weakest, where safety and health standards are low and where they can extract the highest surplus value.

Though the struggle to organize



Credit: International Labour organization/J. Maillard

*Dressmaking shop in Chinatown, New York, United States.*

garment workers is as old as the industry, the youth movement to publicize the atrocities of companies like Nike, Gap and just about any other garment manufacturer, arose in the 1990s. Youth on college campuses and high schools came to feel that not only were workers overseas and in the US being exploited, but that their own desires and consumption needs were being manipulated by large corporations and the corporate-controlled media.

So the students built an organization called the Workers' Rights Consortium (WRC), whose membership includes dozens of universities. The WRC establishes standards of women's and workers' rights, minimum wages and organizing rights that corporations must follow in order for WRC members to purchase licensing agreements to sell clothing or other equipment on their campuses. Additionally, students and WRC organizers (which also include labor organizers and human-rights activists as well as university officials) refuse to allow garment corporations to control the WRC or manipulate its agenda.

In this way, students have countered another seriously dangerous aspect of life in the US: the corporatization of university education. Some students liken corporate influence in university decisions, as well as the products sold on campuses, to a kind of creeping corporate fascism.

The main problem with the movement as a whole, as the author notes, is the question of social divisions and contradictions that exist and persist in capitalist USA, while the attention of anti-globalization activists is on the "Third World." Class and racial divisions that are exaggerated on segregated college campuses also are reflected within the movement, prompting Erica Smiley, a former student organizer at the University of North Carolina, to suggest that focusing on issues in the US would lead to dramatic social change.

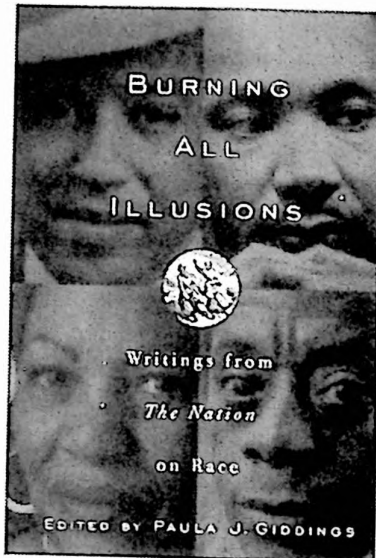
In terms of its stated purpose, discussing the origins and development of one student organization involved in the anti-globalization movement, *Students Against Sweatshops* provides a good introduction into the anti-globalization movement. ■

## Fighting Racism

### *Burning All Illusions: Writings from The Nation on Race*

Edited by Paula J. Giddings, New York, Nation Books, 2002.

Reviewed by Rosita Johnson



*Burning All Illusions: Writings from The Nation on Race* is an anthology of articles published in *The Nation* magazine from 1866 to 2002. It should be required reading for those who maintain the illusion that racism no longer exists and deny its influence in American culture. *The Nation* magazine was first published in 1865 by abolitionists to ensure the end of slavery. With this mission understood, the discussion of race became an integral part of the magazine during its 137 years. The discussion shows the power of race to uphold the myth of white supremacy and keep Blacks subordinated.

The works of many well known authors are represented such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Sherwood Anderson, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King Jr., Derrick Bell, Ralph Ellison, Barbara Smith, Howard Zinn, Amiri Baraka, Claude McKay and others.

In the first essay written in 1866 by a *Nation* correspondent sent to New Orleans, the reader hears the conversation of two former enslaved women walking from New Orleans to Baton Rouge after the Yankees have captured the city. They are cautious

but jubilant. In a story about the Freedman Bureau Schools a former slave ponders how he can afford the \$1 per month charge to send his children to school. The reports in *The Nation* about the Reconstruction period are at first hopeful but after the Northern army leaves, a period of brutal violence against Blacks is instituted and legislation is put in place to abrogate their civil and political rights. Even an 1867 editorial in *The Nation* declares that "The Negro should have to earn his 40 acres and a mule," a very reactionary position for an abolitionist magazine.

There are gaps and omissions. The economic connection to race is hardly mentioned in any of the writings nor is the way race is used effectively to divide the working class. The escalation in the mass incarceration of Black people is not discussed or its relation to the rapid growth of the prison-industrial complex. Only a few female authors are included and only three of the 11 are African American.

Yet turn to any page in this anthology and your interest will be engaged. It is as if the reader is looking into a crystal ball and viewing the past then being fast-forwarded into the present. Don't expect comfort or entertainment. Dozens of writers will share their insight, disappointment and disgust. But they also share their hope and celebrate even the smallest victory. There are stories of progress and the lack of progress. Some of the early writers express a naiveté about race. Sherwood Anderson in 1930 states that it is only the lower class whites who commit the lynching and that "intelligent Blacks and whites get along fine."

Certain themes occur throughout this anthology: racial violence, the resistance to racial equality, the injus-

Required reading for those who maintain the illusion that racism no longer exists and deny its influence in American culture.

tice of the criminal justice system, segregation and isolation of Black people, the struggle for civil rights legislation, the role of the African American in the armed forces and sports and voting. A poem, "The Lynching Bee" is chilling, as is a letter to the editor supporting lynching. First hand accounts of the criminal justice system are disheartening. In Carleton Beals' "The Scottsboro Puppet Show" a judge, jury and spectators don't even pretend to conduct a fair trial. Due process becomes a hateful, shameless display in 1936. 30 years later Gottlieb and Cohen detail the civil trial of Edward Hanrahan, three FBI agents and 16 Chicago Police personnel for the murder of Black Panther Chairman Fred Hampton and member Mark Clark.

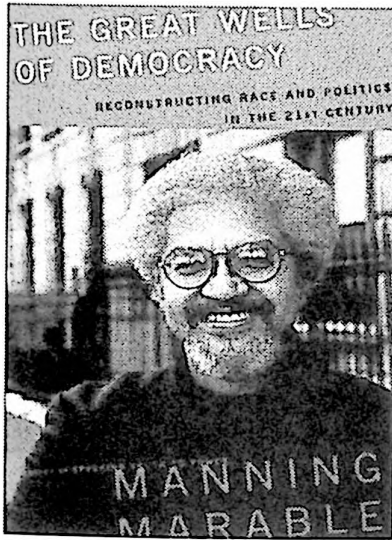
In a time when the anti-war movement is growing, four writings on Blacks in the US armed forces deserved attention. They discuss the injustice accorded to Black soldiers in World War I and a mutiny in 1917, the low morale of Black soldiers in World War II and "The Black Hessians" in the Vietnam War – young Black, unemployed men looking at a bleak future who join the army for jobs and benefits. Isn't this the present scenario for young Black men and women today?

In this anthology the reader will probably be exposed to new information or at least new perspectives of American history from writers who lived it or who observed others making history and recorded it. ■

### *The Great Wells of Democracy: The Meaning of Race in American Life*

Manning Marable, Perseus Books Group, New York, 2000.

Reviewed by Debbie A. Bell



Despite the decades of heroic fight back by African Americans, democracy seems to be elusive.

Manning Marable's *The Great Wells of Democracy* graphically describes the African American quest for equality through accounts of historic events and personal vignettes about the author and occasionally his father's experiences in a racist America.

Despite the decades of heroic fightback by African Americans, democracy seems to be elusive. Descriptions of the author's experiences are followed by detailed historical confirmation about his thesis of structural racism. Structural racism is illustrated by the often used example of the right for Blacks to sit at a lunch counter, but not having the right to live next door to whites. Banks and loan institutions refuse to extend loans to African Americans who seek to purchase homes. These racially motivated policies contribute to establishing pre-dominantly Black neighborhoods, which in turn contribute to increased segregation in neighborhoods and schools.

The author's personal anecdotes about himself and his father were heart warming and reminiscent of many African Americans experiences. Each example of personal history is followed by social data. One such exam-

ple is the author's job expectations upon receiving his doctorate. He followed this with statistics that illustrated the percentage of African American academics and scholars who have difficulty securing a "full-time teaching position at a college or university." This kind of narrative shows a strong connection between personal experiences and broader community experiences. These personal accounts were engaging, but at times I found the transition to the more academic historical discussions a bit awkward.

Marable has a strong command of US history, especially civil rights history. More importantly, he draws conclusions that are not often part of today's mainstream thinking. For example, he shows a strong connection between the slave legacy to the shorter life span and spate of medical problems that are part of today's African American life.

His connection of a string of presidential initiatives on race provides a wonderful reminder to the reader of the initiatives and half steps of modern presidents to address the endemic nature of racism. Bill Clinton's proposal for "a year long conversation about race" made him the fourth president "in half a century attempting to

engage the nation in a dialogue about issues of race." Truman "authorized a commission that produced the document 'To Secure These Rights.'" Challenging racial segregation in the armed forces and government hiring, Eisenhower asked the Justice Department to enforce equal protection of citizens under the law. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders that produced the Kerner report which stated "Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."

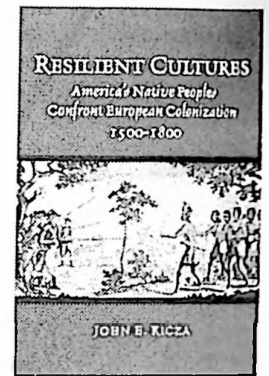
This is not a book solely about the past. Marable cites the historical foundations of current struggles such as reparations in the work of numerous people from Queen Mother Moore to James Foreman and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One strength of this book is its skill at linking today's movements and struggles for justice with people and events of the past. This book has a wealth of information for the young and the old, the student and the activist who is interested in contemporary as well as historical struggles of African Americans. ■

## Fighting Racism

### **Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization 1500-1800**

John E. Kicza, New York, Prentice Hall, 2002.

Reviewed by Anna Bates



In *Resilient Cultures*, John Kicza evaluates the collision between Native American peoples and Europeans during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries utilizing documents, writings, records and testimonies by the indigenous peoples themselves. He analyzes the impact of European contact on both Native American and European cultures, and emphasizes the rich and complex worldwide trading system that evolved from contact between the Old World and the New. His thesis is that native peoples met and reacted to European colonization creatively, resisting and adapting to the invading cultures in ways appropriate to their given situations.

Kicza's book starts with a rather traditional summary of Native cultures prior to contact, and points out that the extensive empires encountered by the first European colonists, such as the Iroquois and Aztec empires, were relatively new and rested on thousands of years of cultural and historical development. Focussing on the economic and technological innovations of the natives, Kicza argues that their well-proven abilities to adapt to their environment and to each other served them well before and during European colonization.

An interesting section of Kicza's work considers the nature of native revolts. He argues that European influences shaped native revolts in several ways. Revolts during the early years of contact occurred at the community level and sought to redress

local grievances. The uprisings were spontaneous and lacked central leadership. Major uprisings, such as that of Tupac Amaru of Cuzco in 1780, occurred during the late colonial years and showed considerable integration of colonial methods. Although



*Inca leader Tupac Amaru led numerous revolts against Spanish colonial power in the 18th century.*

Tupac Amaru's rebels consisted largely of indigenous people, its leaders included Spaniards and *castas* who sought revisions within the colonial system rather than an alternative to it. He concludes that the revolt was ultimately crushed because Tupac Amaru never gained the support of neighboring *caciques* (Inca leaders), who saw him as a rival for the Inca throne. On the other hand, the Pueblos who

revolted against the Spanish in 1680 banded together against their colonizers. The revolt involved cooperation between many indigenous communities. The Pueblos adapted tools of conquest, such as advanced weaponry and horses, and used them to oust the Spanish from the region for ten years. Kicza suggests that while native rebels resisted the oppressive nature of colonization, they adopted from the colonists the things most useful to them and creatively resisted injurious colonial policies.

Kicza's analysis of North American colonization, though interesting, falls short of the deep insights in his chapters about Latin America. He argues that the transient nature of early French and Dutch colonists, and their need to trade with the natives they encountered, caused them to respect native political authority. He discusses the differences between French, Dutch and English colonizers and briefly mentions the ways natives responded to them. For example, he points out that French willingness to intermarry with native women gave them a distinct advantage over the Dutch, who remained culturally distant from tribal peoples.

Kicza says native tribes in North America did not experience the level of disruption that natives farther south experienced. North American natives such as the Iroquois were numerically superior to the earliest English colonists, and better adapted to the environment. Colonists often relied on them for food and military

(continued on page 35)

# MARXIST

# I.Q.

Marxist writers of the 20th century.

**1. In *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, playwright Bertolt Brecht portrays Adolf Hitler as**

- a. a nervous Chicago gangster supported by the rich.
- b. a British aristocrat.
- c. a Latin American dictator.
- d. a southern segregationist governor.

**2. In *Death of Salesman*, playwright and target of McCarthyism Arthur Miller shows in the character of Willie Loman**

- a. a melodramatic celebration of the "American Dream."
- b. an indictment of adultery.
- c. a portrayal of a dysfunctional family.
- d. the tragic, self-destructive illusions of petit-bourgeois individualism.

**3. In Harriet Arnow's novel *The Dollmaker*, the transformation of Kentucky farmers into Detroit factory workers is told from the perspective of**

- a. Clovis, the father seeking a job in World War II Detroit.
- b. the ethnically diverse people living in the Alley.
- c. Gertie, the mother trying to defend the family.
- d. Reuben, the son who cannot adjust to school.

**4. In Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*, the protagonist Bigger Thomas is portrayed as**

- a. a young radical intellectual.
- b. striving to join the small Black middle class.
- c. someone whose violence is a response to dehumanizing racism.
- d. a criminal who turns on his benefactors.

**5. Chinese writer Lu Xun, in his best known work *The True Story of Ah Q*, shows the crisis facing pre-revolutionary China through**

- a. a Buddhist temple caretaker imprisoned by Confucian values that keep him from acting in his own interest.
- b. a peasant who joins the revolutionary movement.
- c. a heroic Communist cadre.
- d. an evil landlord.

### How to score yourself:

**0-2 correct:** Get a two-year subscription to *PA* and make a trip to the library.

**3 correct:** Pat yourself on the back, but you're no expert.

**4 correct:** Your knowledge is solid, so write a book review for *PA* already.

**5 correct:** Impressive, but spend more time in the real world.

Answers: 1 [ a ] 2 [ d ] 3 [ c ] 4 [ c ] 5 [ a ]

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### **The Terrorism Trap: September 11 and Beyond**

Michael Parenti, San Francisco, City Lights Books, 2002.

Reviewed by Lily Wakefield

**T**he loud claim that “we” cannot be blamed for 9/11 is based on one big assumption. That “we” all are a single social entity, that the views and goals of the US working class are shared and expressed by the oil corporations or military industrial giants or George W. Bush. This view says that “we” speak with the same voice and have identical problems and goals for our lives.

Michael Parenti’s most recent book, *The Terrorism Trap*, argues convincingly that indeed distinctions must be made between the “we” who controls US imperialist policy and the “we” who is victimized by US imperialist policy. Parenti correctly observes that most people have been excluded from the development of the long-term aims of imperialism. When the right tries to privatize education and Social Security, bust labor unions, undermine reproductive rights and de-regulate environmental protections, a sharp distinction comes clear between the “we” hurt by these policies and the “we” who benefit.

*The Terrorism Trap* gives a brief history of the various movements and conflicts that set the stage for the attacks. US imperialist support for the thugs who ultimately would form Al Qaeda, anti-Communism, the neoliberal policies that destroyed

markets, and natural resources of countries as so much fodder for the enrichment of the owning and investing classes.” All resources, whether or not owned or operated by the state for the general welfare, must service global capitalism, must

**US imperialism has systematically supported right-wing dictators, corrupt business oligarchs, extremist religious fundamentalists, drug dealers and open fascists.**

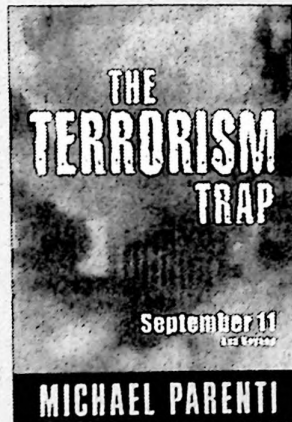
once vibrant economies, and militarism and fascism fostered by US imperialism used to crush democratic movements contributed to the confluence of hate and violence that led to September 11th.

An important feature of Parenti’s well-crafted book is the definition of the right. “Rightist governments and groups, including fascist ones,” Parenti writes, “are dedicated to using the land, labor,

produce profit for corporate elites. If this does not happen, the right deems justifiable the use of whatever coercive means necessary to accomplish this task. Redistribution of wealth to the already rich is the right’s purpose for existing. To this end, US imperialism has systematically supported right-wing dictators, corrupt business oligarchs, extremist religious fundamentalists, drug dealers, open fascists, violent



Michael Parenti.



#### **Michael Parenti: Counterpoint**

In her review of my book *The Terrorism Trap*, the reviewer makes much of the fact that I said that post-September 11 is not a different world from pre-September 11. All I meant by that is that the ruling class hypocrisies and violence and repression are the same, and its vision for a better world is just as false, and the supposedly

special crisis that the terrorists have created has not been created – at least not by the terrorists as such.

The reviewer says my book is “refreshing, readable, and highly recommended,” but it would have been nice if she had made a little more effort at telling readers about the book’s actual content, specifically

military movements and any of these in combination.

These ultra-right movements, led by US imperialism, have attacked democratic, populist, reformist, social democratic, socialist and other leftist movements and governments. Without these kinds of social justice movements, people are left with no genuine way to resist exploitation. It is not the desperation of poverty or jealousy of prosperity that fuels violent acts. It is the missing hope for a democratic and just society in our lifetimes that feed the movements and acts that destroyed the World Trade Center.

Though overall, readers will enjoy the thoughtful arguments and analysis Parenti offers in *The Terrorism Trap*, there is one reservation. At one point, Parenti raises the question, "Has the world been changed due to the attacks?" Many people from numerous perspectives claimed that it had. Parenti proceeds to compare Bush's affirmative answer to the question, with that of the Communist Party, USA, as if these two points on the political spectrum shared similar views of the September 11th attacks. This comparison ignores the complex differences in the views of the CPUSA and the Bush administration.

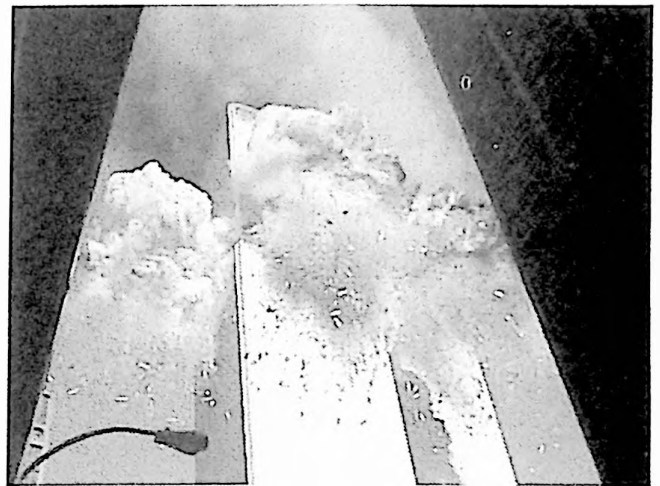
From a working-class perspec-

tive in the context of late 2001, very much did change as a result of the attacks. Democratic movements were gaining momentum, Bush's approval rating sinking at 44 percent, he was the laughing-stock of the international community, and the Republicans had lost control of the Senate. Essentially the ultra-right was on the ropes. The anti-globalization movement was uniting a broad range of people and organizations. But the shift in political terrain and the support Bush got domestically and internationally to return to aggressive imperial and reactionary domestic policies, as a result of the September 11th attacks, did change our world. The indifference to how the world has changed, however, makes his assessment seem abstracted from the struggles that drive the immediate concerns of working people. It also doesn't seem possible for Parenti, in this mode of thought, to provide blueprints for rebuilding the momentum of pre-September 11th.

What is also missing is an emphasis on planning strategically for defeating the practitioners of the violence he describes. His definition of the right, though useful, is

limited in that it ascribes a false unity to the ruling class. This is not dialectical. Contrary to his view, the ruling class and US imperialism is a quite contradictory social formation. In the current period, it is led by an extremist section that favors militarism and purposefully fosters the "Third Worldism" that Parenti describes as the result of neoliberal policies.

Overall, among the spate of books that have been published on the question of September 11th, this one is refreshing, readable and highly recommended. ■



September 11th attack on the World Trade Center.

the discussion on the terroristic aspects of religious extremism, religious terrorism as an outgrowth of the suppression of democratic movements throughout the Middle East, the reasons why the attacks occurred, and the ruling class's opportunistic use of the crisis.

The reviewer also might have mentioned that I devote an entire chapter to the neglected and misrepresented political history of Afghanistan (a subject that should be of special interest to PA readers),

and another chapter to the whole question of why US leaders intervene everywhere, and how exactly one can make a determination about the motives of these interventions.

I disagree with the reviewer that the ruling class is "quite a contradictory social formation." My failure to see this, she says is a failure to think "dialectically." True there are often differences in tactics and strategy and even personalities within ruling circles, but what impresses me is how cohesive and

consistent the imperialists have been in pursuing a goal of free market globalization, and attempting to undermine all traces of national democracy everywhere.

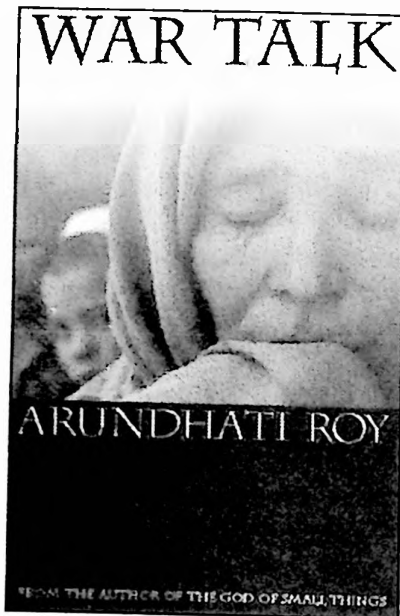
Finally, while faulting me for not coming up with a "blueprint" and failing to develop "a strategy for defeating the practitioners of violence," the reviewer failed to offer one herself. If she has one, she should not keep it a secret. ■

## War and the International Scene

### War Talk

Arundhati Roy, Boston, South End Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Thomas Riggins



In this book the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy presents her recent essays. Roy is an activist in the mold of Noam Chomsky. Her style is expressive and at times poetic. Her message is directed against militarism, corporate globalization and environmental destruction.

She discusses the development of Indian and Pakistani nuclear arsenals and the threat they present to South East Asia.

As an Indian, Roy is concerned with her own government. She provides evidence that the road India is following leads to fascism and genocide.

She describes the struggles of the Indian peasants against big dam construction in the countryside. The national and local governments have defaulted on pledges to relocate and people displaced by these projects. Hundreds of thousands have been driven off the land by the authorities. This leads to impoverishment and starvation for thousands of people. The state of Madhya Pradesh, which refuses to resettle the dispossessed, is reported ready "to make huge tracts of land available for corporate agriculture." National policies have created famines in the countryside largely unreported by the media.

More discouraging is the nature of the present Indian government under Prime Minister Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party (the BJP or "Indian People's Party"). The BJP is hand in glove allied with its "ideological backbone" the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the RSS or "National Self Help Group"). The BJP/RSS program is anti-Muslim, propagates an ideology based on "Hindu identity" and seeks to turn India into a "Hindu State."

In 2002 the BJP sanctioned a pogrom against Muslim citizens of Gujarat after the murder of 58 Hindus by alleged Muslim terrorists. Organized mobs of Hindu fundamentalists, under police protection, drove over 150,000 people from their homes, killing up to 2000. Muslim women were sexually assaulted and hacked to death.

Roy writes, "The founders of the RSS have, in their writings, been frank in their admiration for Hitler and his methods." Prime Minister Vajpayee stated, "Wherever Muslims are they do not want to live peacefully."

The coming of reaction to India is part of a trend associated with globalization. Roy also has criticisms of the United States and its unconditional support of Israel and for US interventions around the world.

She has an essay on Chomsky whom she credits with practically single handedly discovering that the bourgeois press is not to be trusted. There are a few other Chomskian features which may be questioned by some.



A powerful message against militarism, globalization and environmental destruction.

Her statement that "nationalism – in all its many avatars, communist, capitalist, and fascist – has been at the root of almost all the genocide of the 20th century" ignores the fact that fascism is a capitalist political form and that no Communist states engaged in genocide – attempts to exterminate a whole people.

No distinction is drawn between progressive and reactionary nationalism. The root of genocide can be traced to imperialism and the legacy of colonialism.

She says, "venality, brutality, and hypocrisy are imprinted on the leaden soul of every state." This lumps together oppressed and oppressor and is based on anarchist notions of the state. The equivalence of the US invasion of Vietnam with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan might also be questioned. Roy's view that American and Soviet propaganda "more or less neutralized each other" may not be held by those who see differences between arguments for and against apartheid, nuclear disarmament, economic exploitation and neo-colonialism, to name a few.

She may be on shaky ground in stating "it is a myth that the free market breaks down national barriers." "The free market does not threaten national sovereignty, it undermines democracy." It might do both.

Roy's book is full of useful information but she has, I think, few solutions. How to end fascism? It "will self-annihilate because of its inherent stupidity." She opines, "A world run by a handful of greedy bankers and CEOs who nobody elected can't possibly last." The destruction of the environment is due to "the arrogance of the human race." So how should we fight back and build a better world? We will boycott the enemy. "The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability." Just say "No!" This is the main fault, in my opinion, with Roy's book. She is like a doctor who gives you the best diagnosis of your disease but hasn't a cure.

Yet a cure is available. The prescription needs to be filled at the Marxist pharmacy, which allows us to uncover the historical agency capable of confronting capitalist domination. That agency is the class-conscious workers and their struggles against capital. ■



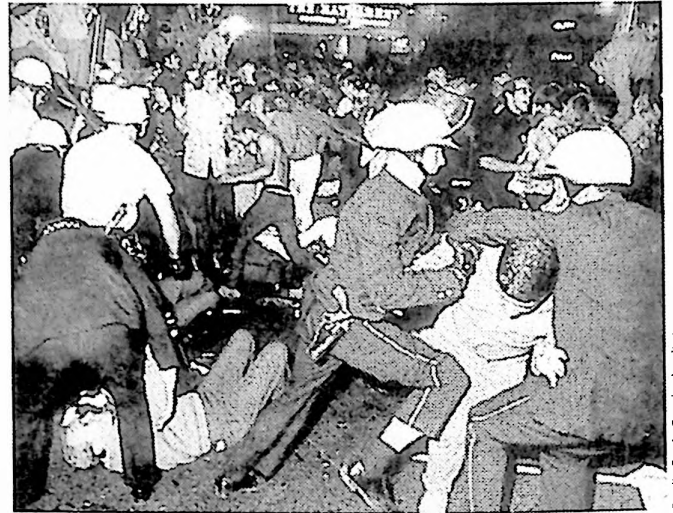
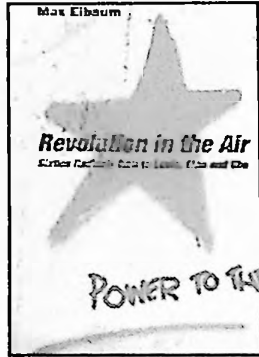
Credit: indianet.net.com

The Hindu fundamentalist-backed ruling party of India sponsored a wave of anti-Muslim violence in the state of Gujarat that saw hundreds killed and tens of thousands more forced into exile.

## Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che

Max Elbaum, New York, Verso, 2002.

Reviewed by Adam Minsky



Police attack anti-war protesters during the 1960s.

Credit: Eagle Condor Institute

Max Elbaum, a former SDS member and a veteran of the struggles he writes about, respectfully but not uncritically, analyzes those 1960s radicals who ended up embracing Maoism, or to a lesser extent, some version of Marxist Third World nationalism.

One of Elbaum's primary goals is to debunk the idea of an enlightened humane "good" 1960s (pre-1968) that is often juxtaposed against an irrational, violent, "bad" 1960s (post 1968). This viewpoint is expressed by sociologist Todd Gitlin in his influential work *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*.

In polemicizing against this perspective Elbaum writes, "The turn towards revolutionary politics was a completely logical response to a generation's concrete experience." The two most salient aspects of this experience were the movement against the Vietnam War and the struggle for Black liberation.

Elbaum writes convincingly of why many of the most dedicated and militant young people of the late 1960s and early 1970s embraced Maoism. "Mao Tse-Tung Thought held that political line was paramount, irrespective of objective conditions.

Maoism reeked of idealism – a revolution could be accomplished on the basis of will alone."

The turn to Maoism resulted, Elbaum contends, in a political dead end. All the major Maoist organizations of the 1970s are either defunct (October League, League of Revolutionary Struggle) or trapped in the swamps of fierce sectarianism or ultra-left irrelevancy (Revolutionary Communist Party and Progressive Labor Party).

Elbaum believes that the bulk of the blame for this state of affairs can be laid at the door of Mao's concept of the "two-line struggle." This idea holds that there exists a constant, unceasing struggle between a "proletarian" and "bourgeois" pole within every revolutionary organization. Once this viewpoint is adopted, the inevitable result is purges, splits and a feverish hunt for heretics.

In order to avoid this scenario, Elbaum advocates that the anti-capitalist left organize around a shared program (socialism) as opposed to an ideology (Marxism). This will help revolutionaries to avoid "constant suspicion of heresy."

Elbaum's desire to avoid counter-productive divisiveness within radi-

Elbaum advocates that the anti-capitalist left organize around a shared program (socialism) as opposed to an ideology (Marxism).

cal ranks is praiseworthy. But one wonders how firm an organization grouped around a vague definition of "socialism" stripped of its Marxist mooring will end up being in times of crisis and opportunity.

*Revolution in the Air* indirectly points to how important it is to build an organization based on a Marxist working-class perspective, which is capable of intervening in popular movements and struggles. If such an organization is absent in times of mass upheaval, revolutionary-minded activists will find something else to fill the vacuum. In the late 1960s and much of the 1970s that something else was Maoism and Third World nationalism. The results, as Elbaum's work demonstrates, were not encouraging. ■

**Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions**

Clyde Prestowitz, New York, Perseus, 2003.

Reviewed by Joel Wendland



Clyde Prestowitz's *Rogue Nation* is an important book, not necessarily because of what it says but because of what it represents. Prestowitz is a former Reagan Administration official, who was catapulted to prominence during the 1980s because of his scorching critique of Japan, and what he then saw as its unfair trading practices.

## Brought to you with a murderers' row of endorsements.

In *Rogue Nation*, he assails the Bush Administration's foreign policy on matters ranging from the Middle East to the Kyoto Treaty, the environment, the International Criminal Court and our policy toward the European Union and China. Readers of this journal will find little new information within these pages – but that is precisely what makes this book important. When a self-described “conservative” makes a critique of the Bush White House that, in a sense, would not seem out of place in *Political Affairs*, then something remarkable is taking place.

Moreover, this book comes with a murderers' row of endorsements from the likes of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the hawkish former National Security chief in the Carter administration; billionaire investor George Soros; and former high-ranking General Wesley Clark; even leading European Union officials Chris Patten and Pascal Lamy weigh in with words of praise.

The title itself is bracing. Referring to US imperialism as “rogue” is infrequent in leading bourgeois circles. But what better term can be deployed to describe a nation whose justification for war on Iraq relied on the “imminent threat” posed by “weapons of mass destruction” that have yet to be discovered. Yes, there were “WMDs” involved that drove this nation to war – “whoppers of mass dimension.”

There is increasing unease in ever wider circles about the policies of the present occupant of the White House. This book is just one more bit of evidence that this unease has yet to diminish. ■

(Resilient Cultures continued from page 28)

aid. The necessity of interaction forced the British to respect traditional practices, such as gift giving, when dealing with tribal peoples. When European diseases decimated large parts of the native population and trade became less critical to English colonists' survival, native societies creatively formed liaisons by cultural adoption to remain resistant to European domination.

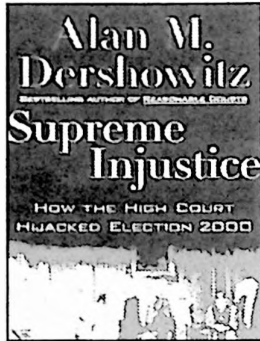
An important difference between Latin American and North American patterns of conquest concerned the use of native labor. North American conquerors traded with local natives, but did not, for the most part, use them as laborers. In their pursuit of precious metals and other forms of wealth, the Spanish and Portuguese immediately set about forcing the natives to labor for them. (As Kicza says, “the environment and immediate possibilities ... affected the nature of colonial settlement and the colonists' expectations of the local peoples.”)

Overall, Kicza's book provides an interesting and informative overview of the collision of European and Native American cultures. Absent, though, is any mention of African slaves. Kicza leaves to other scholars the task of assessing their impact on, and interaction with, natives and European colonists. However, for a book that encompasses both North and South America in the span of 200 pages, Kicza says a lot. It is concise, readable and will no doubt inspire others to write more detailed analysis of the labor systems and cultural conflicts resulting from European contact. ■

### Supreme Injustice: How the High Court Hijacked Election 2000

Alan M. Dershowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Reviewed by Gabe Falsetta



Tying together prior court opinions of the majority justices with Florida election law, the author of *Supreme Injustice*, Alan Dershowitz, makes an overwhelming case for his position, one which moved Justice John Paul Stevens in his dissenting opinion to say, "the American people are the clear losers of this election." One does not have to be a legal expert to understand what transpired when the US Supreme Court handed the presidency to Bush.

The underhanded tactics used by the Republican machine included purging thousands of "felons" from voter registration lists; setting up "check points" in neighborhoods of color to deliberately delay and discourage people from voting; and attacks by goons, led by Republican John Sweeney of New York, on Miami-Dade county clerks who were hand counting votes. But set these aside. What mat-

### All progressive forces must join together to avoid a repeat of this supreme injustice.

ters for Dershowitz is that the analysis of the majority justices (Rehnquist, Scalia, Thomas, O'Connor and Kennedy) ignored longstanding Florida election law.

When the Florida Supreme Court ruled to have a hand count of ballots because of the many complaints arising from machine malfunction and irregularities, it was acting upon precedent.

The case which lays the basis for the Florida court's action to hand count, stems from a case involving the use of a pencil mark which could not be read by a scanner. The instructions to the voter clearly said to use a No. 2 pencil. Many voters, for various reasons, did not follow the direction. Therefore their votes could not be registered. The Florida Supreme Court ruled that "we construe 'defective ballot' to include a ballot which is marked in a manner such that it cannot be read by a scanner," regardless of whether the problem was caused by voter error. If the Florida legislature had disagreed with this entirely reasonable reading of its statutes, it

could have amended them. Instead, it effectively ratified the state supreme court's interpretation by changing the voting laws in other respects, while leaving the voter intent provisions unamended.

The Supreme Court used the argument of equal protection to overrule the Florida court's decision to hand count. The majority agreed that by hand counting votes in specific voting districts (there should have been a recount of the entire state) those that were not hand counted were not afforded equal protection!

Dershowitz goes on to show that the majority acted in a partisan way rather than abide by the past precedent of Court. In fact, the majority did not just go against past court decisions, but against their own explicit opinions made from the bench. When Justice Scalia, widely considered to be the foremost intellectual of the Court's conservative majority, breaks with his prior convictions conveniently in *Bush v. Gore*, we can only wonder what motivated the other four majority justices.

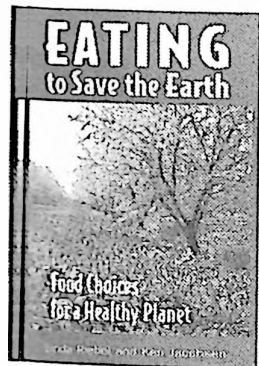
Dershowitz quotes many other legal scholars throughout his book. Jeffrey Rosen, a legal writer and professor, in an unusual personal attack, called the majority justices "preening" as well as "addled and uncertain." Vincent Bugliosi, a former prosecutor used even stronger language, accusing the Supreme Court's "brazen, shameless majority" of "being a knowing surrogate for the Republican Party instead of being an impartial arbiter of the law." Professor Cass Sunstein, who had praised the Supreme Court's initial unanimous decision, calls its final one "illegitimate, undemocratic and unprincipled."

The majority justices undermined the stature of the highest court in the land and cast aside our Constitutional system of checks and balances. All progressive forces must join together to avoid a repeat of this supreme injustice. As the author suggested from the outset, he would lay the foundation to prove his case, not by partisan opinion but by the majority justices' own judicial opinions in building their reputations as jurists. For this reader, he has succeeded. ■

**Eating to Save the Earth: Food Choices for a Healthy Planet**

Linda Riebel and Ken Jacobsen, New York, Celestial Arts, 2002.

Reviewed by Elaine Sloan



There's an old query that asks "Think you can be a meat-eating environmentalist? Think again!" In *Eating to Save the Earth*, Linda Riebel and Ken Jacobsen reveal countless ways in which the environment and the world's population is being destroyed. It discusses global warming, ozone layer depletion, rain forest devastation, water and air pollution and species extinction.

They also point out everyday practices that contribute to the devastation of the environment like inefficient use of home appliances, eating practices, the costs of dining in or out and our penchant for consumerism.

The authors contend that agribusiness and animal-based diets seriously abuse the environment and our health. They state that animals raised for food eat a huge percentage of our grain crops. By the late 1990s, 60 percent of the grain in the US went to animals. Livestock consume millions of gallons of water and produce waste that pollutes rivers, groundwater and soil. "Leaks from hog waste cesspools pollute thousands of miles of river and kill millions of fish," write Riebel and Jacobsen. They dramatically describe the cramped and unhealthy living conditions livestock live in. Farmers and ranchers pump them with antibiotics and hormones to make them grow faster and larger than they would naturally. Livestock consume almost 75 percent of all antibiotics produced in this country.

Riebel and Jacobsen graphically point out the tremendous cruelty to animals that occurs in factory farming. Chickens are kept in cramped cages so small that they can't turn around, stretch their wings or lie down. They often have their beaks cut off with a hot knife. They are so cramped that some can't reach the food and starve. Dairy cows are kept pregnant to increase milk production, which causes constant pain and discomfort. They suffer from chronic cystitis of the udders. Their offspring spend their short miserable lives in narrow "veal crates" where they can't turn around or lie down comfortably. They are given liquid diets low in iron that keep their flesh pale. The book argues that factory-farmed animals are treated like machines rather than sentient creatures and that their short, tortured lives are a living hell.

Riebel and Jacobsen present a strong and compelling argument that animal-based diets seriously compromise human health. Prophylactic antibiotics and growth hor-

mones fed to livestock end up in human consumers. Modern medical research shows that meat-heavy diets contribute to heart disease, stroke, hypertension and cancer. Some studies even question the benefits of milk. In a study of milk drinking vs. non milk-drinking men, 70 percent more of the milk-drinking men developed prostate cancer. They show that vegan (a person who does not eat any animal products) nursing mothers had only a 1-2 percent pesticide level in her milk vs. milk-drinking nursing mothers who had pesticide levels 50-100 percent greater. It also substantiates the theory that milk actually depletes a body of calcium, thus weakening bones. They mention studies that attribute allergies, heart disease and high cholesterol to milk.

## Think you can be a meat-eating environmentalist? Think again!

*Eating to Save the Earth* discusses the role of big corporations and the government in the exploitation of natural resources. It points out how the Bush administration in Washington has ignored the Kyoto Treaty, pushed to drill in the Arctic and cut critical environmental controls. It outlines ways readers can influence elected representatives to lobby for laws that support a healthier environment.

Riebel and Jacobsen give encouraging examples of environmentally enlightened people and communities that have made positive changes to help the planet. They promote organic farms, foods and natural food stores. The authors list earth-friendly foods such as soy, plant proteins, fruits, grains and vegetables and tells the reader where and how to buy them.

Yet their dietary solution ends up falling short. After presenting a powerful and thought provoking segment on the horrific damage to the environment and our health due to a meat-based society, they suggest that in an attempt to reverse that damage we eat less meat and "less seafood or none at all." They ask that we "choose the less endangered species." This seems contradictory. At a time when our environment is in major crisis, one would expect them to strongly recommend a meat-free diet.

*Eating to Save the Earth* is a book that will awaken the readers to the real concerns of the environment, present solutions to save it and inspire readers to embrace the most effective and compassionate ways of contributing to keep our planet alive and well. Remember, "Think you can be a meat-eating environmentalist? Think again!" ■

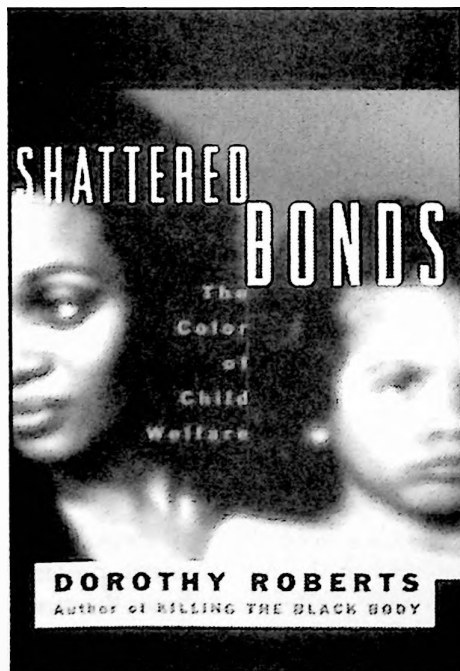
### **The Way We Never Were – American Families and the Nostalgia Trap**

Stephanie Coontz, New York, Basic Books, 2000.

### **Shattered Bonds – The Color of Child Welfare**

Dorothy Roberts, New York, Basic Books, 2002.

Reviewed by Jessica Watson-Crosby



Stephanie Coontz's, *The Way We Never Were – American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, takes as her central theme – literally, figuratively and accurately – America in the 1950s. In the cultural imagination and public script, this decade seemed to promise and become the “American Dream.” (The term “American Dream” itself is an advertising slogan from the 1930s, concocted to sell consumer goods to immigrants.) The “Dream’s” graphic depictions were Norman Rockwell images of apple pies, white picket fences and blond children. It was reinforced on the new cultural medium – television – in shows like *Donna Reed*, *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. A good family was a white suburban family with a stay-at-home mom, 2.5 children and a gray flannel-suited dad.

Stephanie Coontz upends the nostalgia of “everybody pulled his weight...those were the days!” The “American way of life” was loaded down with governmental welfare: the GI Bill, no down-payment, very low-interest suburban home loans for returning veterans, paved highways to get to those homes, state-subsidized higher education and more.

*The Way We Never Were* served as background for Dorothy Roberts' book, *Shattered Bonds – The Color of Child Welfare*. As an African American attorney and law professor at Northwestern University in Chicago, she stumbled upon the child protective industry by accident, through a client, in the late 1990s. She discovered it was overwhelming comprised of children from African descendant families and wanted to know why. She comes to the conclusion, by careful, extensive and voluminous research, that it is a racist system – a conclusion many of her child welfare clients came to without ever going to the library.

From 1945 to 1961, the number and rate of African American families who were forcibly separated from their children, doubled and tripled. Before this time, Africans, Hispanics and other non-European descendant families were excluded from the system, for fear they would “contaminate” and therefore interfere with the possible rehabilitation of indigent and potentially worthy families.

Dorothy Roberts never quite gets to the why of entrenched racism that paints families of African descent as inherently untenable and unviable. She knows the models and myths of the nuclear family that Stephanie Coontz has taken great pains to debunk are not correct and true. She knows the child welfare system operates as if the American myth is the American reality; that African American families are measured against this false construct and are always found wanting.

So, while Dorothy Roberts knows that the received reality was not the lived reality, she still tries to fit the African American family into the model – trying to prove they are “just as good as...”; never questioning the “American Dream”; only wondering why the African American families she worked with could not be treated the same as others. It is as if she believes the oppressor “knows best.”

Coontz deals with African Americans in the 1950s only peripherally. They are treated as a special case – to be dealt with in a separate chapter. At a time when segregation was legal in some parts of the country and de facto in most others; when African Americans had to ride in the back of the bus in the south; her chapter on African Americans is at the back of the book.

Yet it was African Americans with their demands for equality and fairness who were jeopardizing the precarious myth of happiness and wealth throughout the decade.

The 1950s started the trend towards African American families dominating the foster care system in America. The 1950s saw a large migration from the South to the North of Africans looking for work and a little relief from the relentless Jim Crow laws of the South. For those families that ended up on welfare – who didn’t find the work, or enough work because Jim Crow came with them; in order to survive, put themselves in the path of the public welfare authorities. Welfare caseworkers were given social work status and the authority to decide which families would live and which would die. Social work attained the status of profession and became a college degree program.

Both books are fascinating accounts that center on the same period of American historical time, although Roberts does not realize it. Coontz chose to ignore the significance of Americans of African descent during the decade: The first legally integrated armed conflict (Korea, 1950); *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison (1952); desegregated school system (*Brown v. Topeka*, Kansas Board of Education, 1954); Rosa Parks refusal to take a back seat (1955); Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1956). Roberts does not see that the oppression of one group (Africans), allows the other group(s) (European descendants) to continue to believe in the “old ways,” by having a scapegoat, (a black sheep, if you will), for why things are the way they used to be.

Both Roberts and Coontz think the answer is more government intervention and surveillance. Both seem to think they are offering a novel solution that should work. But the government works as it has always worked – catering to the wealthy and only conceding power when social forces show an inclination to upset the market place. ■



Credit: LTB

*Middle-class, white suburban images of childhood imagined in 1960s television sitcoms are contrasted with the reality of enduring child poverty.*

It was African Americans with their demands for equality and fairness who were jeopardizing the myth of happiness and wealth.

## Awakening of Geometrical Thought in Early Culture

Paulus Gerdes, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Marxist Educational Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Beatrice Lumpkin

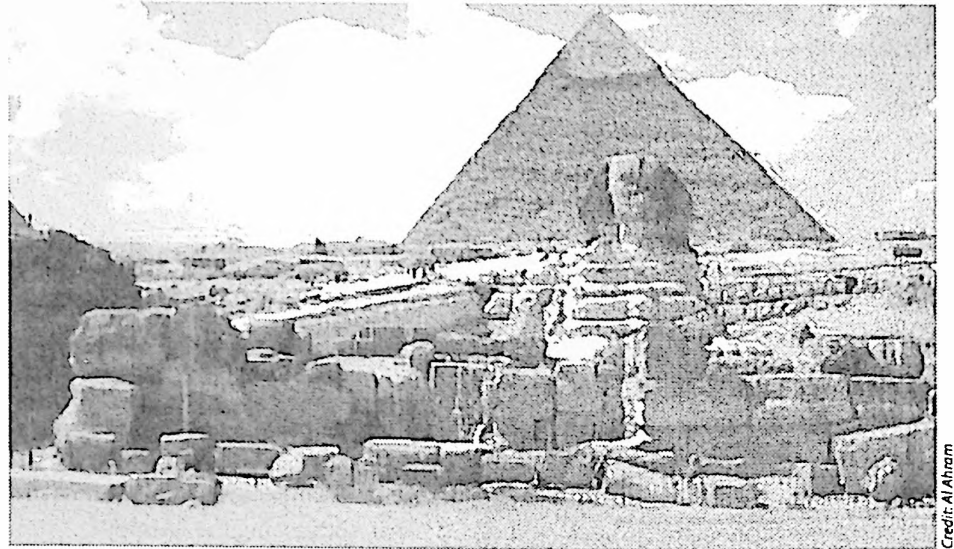
Generations of scientists have gained from the study of Marxism and dialectical materialism. Their understanding of Marxism has helped them sharpen their understanding of the scientific method. However, some have tried to make an exception in the case of mathematics. They deny any connection between mathematics and reality including denial of any connection between mathematics and society. Mathematics is often considered a purely intellectual construct. Paulus Gerdes' work, *Awakening of Geometrical Thought in Early Culture*, is of particular interest because he uses the approach of dialectical materialism to study the development of geometric thinking.

In contrast to the idealist rejection of the relationship between mathematics and reality, Gerdes' study shows that geometric thinking was developed in the process of social labor. He considers very early tool production, such as the sym-

## Gerdes' study shows that geometric thinking was developed in the process of social labor.

metrical hand axes produced by people of the Middle Stone Age. Gerdes reasons that symmetry of the cutting edge reduces friction; therefore the tool can be used with less muscular effort. He rejects the conclusion commonly held that the shape of these axes was a copy of symmetrical objects seen in nature. Instead, he writes:

The shape was attained in the course of the production traditions of thousands of generations. The formation of the concept of symmetry was dialectical ... the most



Construction of Egyptian pyramids and other monuments required a sophisticated understanding of mathematics.

rational form became what was considered beautiful.

In addition to the theoretical interest of *Awakening of Geometry*, the author makes a contribution in three practical areas. First, in a refutation of racism, he supplies a wealth of examples that demonstrate that mathematical thinking developed among all peoples, in all

parts of the world. In many cases, this development took place outside of Europe, thousands of years earlier than the supposed origin of mathematics in classical Greece. Here, he adds to the efforts of other worthy warriors against racism and the imperialist rewriting of the history of mathematics. It is more than a coincidence that most of these writers who have advanced multicultural mathematics and ethnomathematics have benefited from a study of Marxist ideas and methods.

A second related contribution of this work is the inclusion of ample

material for teachers to use in the development of an anti-racist curriculum. A third contribution to mathematics education is the examples he gives that connect mathematics to real-life situations. This real world connection is a standard of the reform movement in mathematics, to help students relate the abstract subject of mathematics to their own everyday experiences.

Since the awakening of geometrical thought is the focus of this book, geometry guides Gerdes' discussion of a famous ancient Egyptian problem, the formula for the volume of a truncated pyramid. Bourgeois historians wonder how the Egyptians could have developed such a complex formula with a level of mathematics that they judge to be "primitive." Their chronic underestimation of ancient Egyptian mathematics leads them to rule out any analytical explanations. Instead these historians have tried different dissections and assemblies to produce the result by trial and error. These attempts were dismissed as "foolish" by Cheikh Anta Diop, the renowned African scholar.

Gerdes produces an original construction of the ancient Egyptian formula with the use of what he calls Nyassa

Credit: Al Ahran



### *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars: A New Pandora's Box*

Anthony Dawahare, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2002.

Reviewed by Jack Hutchens

pyramids and cubic baskets, "material products of human labor." Nyassa pyramid is the name Gerdes gives to the shape of a product made by basket makers in the Nyassa province of Mozambique. It is a funnel with three triangular sides and is used for the evaporation of salt. By assembling the Nyassa pyramids and dissecting a related cube, Gerdes is able to achieve the formula in a way that he believes was possible in Egypt about 1800 BC.

In this same chapter, "Role of Societal Activity," the author considers the right-triangle theorem, often called the "Pythagorean theorem." This is a misnomer because the right-triangle theorem was known in Babylonia over a thousand years before Pythagoras. Gerdes writes, "Taking widespread plaiting patterns as the starting point, I have shown how the factual relationship that today is called Theorem of Pythagoras could have been discovered." In a similar approach, Gerdes studied the production of circular mats in ancient Egypt, made by sewing together a coiled rope. From this activity, Gerdes is able to derive the very accurate (for that time) ancient Egyptian value for what we now call pi. The Egyptian value for the ratio of a circle's circumference to diameter was 256/81, approximately 3.16, an accuracy of 99.4 percent.

Gerdes' constructions may or may not have been the actual way these formulas were developed. Their value, I believe, is their focus on the material, productive life of the people and the mathematical thinking that was used in the development of early technology. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the application of dialectical materialism to science. For educators, especially art and mathematics teachers, the book is a good source of multicultural examples for classroom instruction. ■

During the period between the first and second World Wars, two different intellectual doctrines vied for control of shaping the future of Black Americans: nationalism and Marxism. In his book *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars*, Anthony Dawahare illustrates the influence of this struggle and provides an excellent and thorough examination of the two most influential ideologies of the Harlem Renaissance, historicizing the movements in their proper context.

As the book opens, Dawahare provides an excellent background. The nationalism of Du Bois and Garvey was directly influenced by the Wilsonian nationalism, which appeared after World War I. Garvey's ethnic nationalism is strongly preoccupied with origins and traditions. He proposed that people of the African Diaspora "return" to Africa to create a Black republic, the leader of which would be he himself. As Dawahare rightly notes, Garvey had the misconceived belief that a person can return to a place he/she has never been. Garvey's ideas are rooted in patriarchal notions of the sons returning to the mother, "Mother Africa," in order to redeem Africa. This included the "'civilizing' of backward tribes and the expulsion of colonists." In his desire to "civilize" backward tribes we see that even though he saw Africa as the "ur-mother," Garvey was not averse to "giving her a makeover to render her more attractive to her modern sons."

In contrast to Garvey, Du Bois believes in the existence of "a dual identity or 'double consciousness' that is both African and American, and, consequently rejects black nationalism proper." Du Bois makes



Garvey.



Du Bois.



Poet Langston Hughes.

It is tragic that Hughes' radical poetry of the 1930s has been largely ignored in the academic world.

no suggestion that Black Americans should "return" to Africa, but that they actually have more right to call themselves American since they did the bulk of the work to build America. However, his nationalist ideas are similar to Garvey's in relation to his beliefs of "origins" and the historical basis of modern Black identity. When he discusses beginnings "he makes a number of claims about the superiority of Africa," and like Garvey "he professes that more so than other groups, Africans advanced 'from animal savagery toward primitive civilization.'" Du Bois sees African Americans as a "protonation" not yet realized, a "nation within a nation," and "privileges an African *Gemeinschaft* (an organic community based on kinship) over the European *Gesellschaft* (a rationalized, mechanistic community)."

In direct opposition to these different nationalist programs was socialism. Dawahare believes that "[t]he nationalism of Du Bois, Garvey, and the Harlem Renaissance cannot be fully understood except within this political dynamic and context." He examines this political dynamic through the three varieties of socialism that confronted Du Bois and Garvey at the time; the Socialist Party, the African Blood Brotherhood and the

Communists' Workers Party. These leftist movements represented a real challenge to the rhetoric of the nationalists. The greatest challenge they raised against Du Bois and Garvey was their belief that identity was more complicated than ethnic nationalism would have it, and that only by allying themselves with the white workers could they overthrow capitalist rule and bring about the liberation of Black Americans. By rehistoricizing these competing positions Dawahare shows that Harlem Renaissance writers did have political choices, and that our popular perception of the Renaissance has been influenced, and often skewed.

Dawahare also provides a study of the poetry of Langston Hughes. It is tragic that Hughes' radical poetry of the 1930s has been largely ignored in the academic world, especially since it challenges "scholars of Black literature and culture to look more critically at Black nationalist literary aesthetics and politics, and prodding us, perhaps, to rethink the historical relationships between poetics and politics." Here Dawahare analyzes several of his works, beginning with *Scottsboro Limited*. According to Dawahare the agit-prop play illustrates Hughes's move away

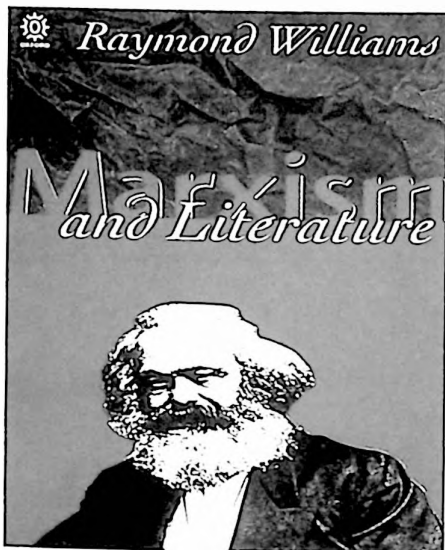
from his "nationalist perspective as a Harlem Renaissance writer and toward a view of class rather than race as the basis for both racism and collective struggle." He goes on to examine Hughes's first anti-imperialist poem "Merry Christmas," as well as other poems like "Song for Ourselves." In "Song for Ourselves" Hughes parallels the "'lynched' Czechoslovakia and thousands of lynched Black Americans."

In the end *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars* proves to be an important book in the study of Black American literature and culture. It continues the tradition of Black Marxist studies in the vein of Cedric Robinson's groundbreaking *Black Marxism* and William Maxwell's *New Negro, Old Left*. Dawahare's use of primary sources such as speeches and pamphlets provides the reader a close look at the period's important works. A study of the socialist works of the time will prove important to Black cultural studies in the future. As Dawahare says: "[W]e can expect ideologies of race and nation to continue to play an important role in misleading the working class to attack each other instead of the systemic causes of their oppression. ■"

**Marxism and Literature**

Raymond Williams, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Daniel Deleanu



Raymond Williams

The republication of this classic cannot be but extremely beneficial for anyone interested in Marxism, especially since Raymond Williams' prolific output is increasingly recognized as one of the most influential bodies of work on literary and cultural studies in the past 50 years. *Marxism and Literature* provides the most comprehensive study to date of the theoretical and historical context of Williams' thinking on literature, politics and culture.

This book extends the theme of Raymond Williams's earlier work in literary and cultural analysis. He analyzes previous contributions to a Marxist theory of literature from Marx himself to Lukacs, Althusser and Goldmann, and develops his own approach by outlining a theory of cultural materialism which integrates Marxist theories of language with Marxist theories of literature. Williams moves from a review of the growth of the concepts of literature and ideology to a redefinition of determinism and hegemony. His incisive discussion of the "social material process" of cultural activity culminates in a re-examination of the problems of alignment and commitment and of the creative practice in individual authors and wider social groups. That is

why this book is intended for general readers with an interest in Marxist theories of literature and language.

Raymond Williams traces the trajectory of Marxist literature from 1847, when the first version of the *Communist Manifesto* was published, across the development of a New Left cultural politics, to its culmination in the theory and practice of cultural materialism. Williams vigorously disputes many of the received ideas concerning prejudiced opinions on

**The way the literary establishment excluded ordinary people has to do with problem in adult literacy: most of us hate writing.**

the role Marxism has played in literature and culture in general. In so doing, he offers a significant challenge and correction to many of the current (mis)representations of Marxist thought and a powerful argument for renewed engagement with it.

For anyone who has been touched by Raymond Williams' previous works, this is a requisite. The book takes us on a fascinating intellectual journey with Williams, painstakingly recreating the

changing contexts in which his ideas were formed, and giving us the tools to see how they emerged from the debates of the time, from a long struggle between socialism and individualism, which he never really resolved.

One of the problems you have with Williams as a non-academic is that he didn't write "simply" or "clearly" – he's hard work. Yet, Williams recreates the great Marxist arguments that liberated us from the straightjacket of Leavisite literary criticism, where an elite of critics determined what the "canon of literature" was, and dismissed everything that was not in that. The idea of all embracing culture, that culture and literature potentially includes everything that anyone writes – fantastic stuff, and very relevant today especially in North America, where some of this appalling stuffiness is returning to orthodoxy with uncomfortable speed.

And in adult education, especially adult literacy, I can see that we owe Williams so much. I sometimes wonder if the way that the literary establishment excluded ordinary people from taking part has anything to do with the extraordinarily widespread problem in adult literacy – that most of us hate writing.

Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature* is a must for anyone with a socialist perspective on culture. ■



Illustration by John Kim

**Man Asleep at the Foot of the Stairs:  
BART Station, Berkeley, CA: 6:05 a.m.**

He slept this way as a child:  
turned on one side, face resting  
on bent right forearm, left arm  
flung out, covering his face.  
Habits last a lifetime.

Broken statue, clothed in garments  
out of charity's ragbin,  
or wrested from the newly fallen;  
soft light bleeds from your fingers.  
I can only make note of you.

It is this fear of falling  
which keeps me moving  
toward dark buildings  
of ruined commerce.

Michael Shepler (From the book *RED WINDOWS*. Samizdat Press), 1999