

AMERICA'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

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How the Radical Left
Conquered Everything

By Christopher F. Rufo
With a foreword by Christopher Hitchens

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of the past. "We must meet this society on its own ground," he said. "Total mobilization."⁸⁸

The capture of the universities, more than anything, represents a model for the future. The critical theorists and DEI administrators believed they could manufacture the new set of values in the academic departments and perpetuate them through the bureaucracy. They understood that critical theory could no longer remain a pure negation. After its conquest over the disciplines and then over the administration of the university, it inherited, for the first time, the responsibility of governing. Once their critical theory turned into the governing principle of the university—sanitized as "diversity, equity, and inclusion" and concretized in the sprawling bureaucracy—it was only a matter of time before it sought to extend itself beyond the campus gates.

As Rudi Dutschke once explained, the revolution had begun in the universities out of necessity but would require the activists to reshape every domain of human life. "Our historically correct limitation of our action to the university should not be made into a fetish," he said. "A revolutionary dialectic of the correct transitions must regard the 'long march through the institutions' as a practical and critical action in all social spheres. It must set as its goal the subversive-critical deepening of the contradictions, a process which has been made possible in all institutions that participate in the organization of day-to-day life."⁸⁹

The revolution, in other words, would not succeed until it captured everything.

The long march through the institutions has wrought a strange kind of revolution. The images of the old revolts—soot-covered laborers burning down prisons and sacking ministry buildings—do not apply. The critical theory revolution, by contrast, was almost invisible. The long march through the institutions was so gradual, so bureaucratic, it went nearly unnoticed.

But today, after it has come to a conclusion, the dynamics of this new ideological order have become clear. It is revolution from above, rather than from below. It is revolution in the abstract, rather than the concrete. It is a revolution of information, rather than production—and it is a revolution no less significant than the great revolutions of the past.

In the 1960s, Marcuse had sketched out the beginning stages of this process, arguing that bourgeois capitalism and state communism were both destined to fail. Like Marx, he was convinced that "capitalism produces its own gravediggers,"⁹⁰ but, additionally, he had lost faith in Stalinist communism, having written a bitter book denouncing the Soviet Union's descent into tyranny.⁹¹

Marcuse proposed a third way, encouraging his predominantly white, college-educated followers to learn the methods of managing the large enterprises and to gradually install the critical theories as their governing ideology. Although Marcuse lamented that the working class had become "antirevolutionary," it was also rapidly becoming obsolete: the "means of production" in the advanced technological society were increasingly abstract, rather than concrete, affairs, and the most urgent task was to constitute a new elite, rather than a new proletariat.

This revolution has now run its course. Marcuse established the ideology with his critical theory of society. His disciples developed the model

for elite capture in the universities. And the next generation of left-wing activists expanded it everywhere.

The result of this process is the creation of a new ideological regime—composed of a unity between the university, the media, the state, the corporation—that has coalesced around the critical theories, transmitted them through the public bureaucracy, and enforced the new orthodoxy through the top-down management of private life. This regime is decentralized and diffused. It functions through the maintenance of myths, beliefs, and incentives, rather than central leadership or direction.

The universities served as the initial hub, but the language of the critical theories was quickly translated into the language of the state and the corporation. The practices of the New Left were professionalized as “social science” and “diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

When the New Left was in the minority, Marcuse preached “extra-parliamentary” political mobilization and criticized the Establishment for using manipulative language. Today the roles are reversed. After the left-wing ideologues began to dominate the institutions and consolidate power in the bureaucracy, they created their own one-dimensional linguistic universe, seeking to put their authority beyond political opposition. Thus the political concept of “liberation” becomes the mathematical concept of “equity.” The ideological concept of “white privilege” becomes the scientific concept of “implicit bias.” The moral concept of “racism” becomes the statistical concept of “racial disparity.” They framed their revolution in terms of the social sciences because, they believed, it would legitimize elite management of society—and freeze out the “antirevolutionary” working classes, which had, since Marcuse’s time, opposed their rule.

The new regime is a synthesis of Marcuse’s critical theory, which he supported, and one-dimensional society, which he opposed. The university, the media, the state, and the corporation have all submitted to this strange hybrid and, together, now function as the “vital center” that mediates the relationship between the institutions and the public.³ The new elites participate in this governing system through osmosis, absorbing the concepts and vocabulary created by the critical theories, then transmitting them through the management of the institutions.

The story of the long march through the universities was largely complete a generation ago—but that was only the beginning.

Marcuse believed that the university could serve as the “initial revolutionary institution”⁴ but was not, in and of itself, powerful enough to transform the broader society. The intellectuals could produce knowledge but, left alone, could not break through the one-dimensional universe of the Establishment. “Under the rule of monopolistic media—theirelves the mere instruments of economic and political power—a mentality is created for which right and wrong, true and false are predefined wherever they affect the vital interests of the society,” he said. “The meaning of words is rigidly stabilized. Rational persuasion, persuasion to the opposite is all but precluded.”⁵

The solution, then, was to extend the “long march through the institutions” to the media and to build a counter-narrative apparatus with the power to subvert the Establishment narrative and replace it with the narrative of the critical theories. He implored the students to learn “how to use the mass media, how to organize production,” as part of a “concerted effort to build up counterinstitutions” and develop mastery over “the great chains of information and indoctrination.”⁶

Over time, they did. The radicals waged a generational war for the prestige media and the critical theories became the house style of establishment opinion.

The triumph of this “long march through the media” can be represented in miniature through the conquest of the *New York Times*, which has long been the top prize in American media. Fifty years ago, the *Times* ridiculed Marcuse. One reviewer trashed *An Essay on Liberation* as a “rehash of discredited fantasies” that “reeked of totalitarianism.”⁷ Another published a snide criticism of *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, portraying the philosopher as a ridiculous, if slightly dangerous, figure who gave false legitimacy to violence and revolution.⁸ When Marcuse died in 1979, the paper published an obituary dismissing the professor as a transitory historical artifact, noting that “as the social unrest of the 1960’s dissipated, Dr. Marcuse faded from view just as suddenly as he had become a visible, if reluctant, folk hero.”⁹

But the Establishment voices at the *Times* underestimated Marcuse, whose ideas would outlast and eventually supplant the moderate position at the paper of record. Like one of the Weathermen’s time-controlled

bombs, Marcuse's philosophy would eventually explode—and consume the newsroom.

This conquest came late but progressed quickly. According to a veteran *New York Times* reporter, who requested anonymity out of fear of reprisals, the paper's ideological shift began in the aftermath of the Great Recession, as executives laid off many veteran writers and began hiring hundreds of younger reporters who had been steeped in the critical theories at elite universities. These new employees waged a "generational battle" against existing leadership at the paper and the writers' union, eschewing traditional labor concerns in favor of agitating for the implementation of diversity programs and left-wing ideological priorities. "I think what's happening in the larger body of the *Times* very much mirrors what was happening in the union," said the reporter, "and now we're deeply immersed in DEI battles and battles over race [and] gender."

It was, in the words of another writer, a "revolution."¹⁰

Following their takeover of the union, the faction of younger, ideologically driven employees—not just writers, but designers, coders, marketers, and other creatives—set a new tone for the newsroom and shifted the paper dramatically leftward. As the social scientist Zach Goldberg has meticulously documented, the vocabulary of the critical theories rapidly conquered the paper's linguistic universe. Between 2011 and 2019, the frequency of the word "racist(s)" and "racism" increased by 700 percent and 1,000 percent; between 2013 and 2019 the frequency of the phrase "white privilege" increased 1,200 percent and the frequency of the phrase "systemic racism" increased by 1,000 percent. This new sensibility quickly captured the op-ed page, as well as the hard news sections and the offices of management, human resources, and diversity programming.¹¹

Meanwhile, the spirit of Marcuse's "liberating tolerance," in which accusations of racism and sexism are wielded to silence dissent, has become the dominant internal culture. According to the veteran *Times* reporter, there is a pervasive fear among many older managers and editors, who "feel which way the wind's blowing" and disappear during moments of controversy, hoping to maintain their reputation and avoid public condemnation. "There was a strain of left-liberal thinking on free speech that owes very much to Marcuse, and that's probably true in our newsroom as well," said the senior reporter, noting that the old stalwarts of free expression, such as

the American Civil Liberties Union, have also succumbed to the logic of Marcuse's philosophy. "It could be a real disaster," the writer said. "You can't just keep calling everything racist and think that that's going to hold forever."¹²

The capture of the *New York Times* was a pivotal turn in the long march through the institutions. The New Left-inspired activists had already achieved hegemony over the academic journals, but these publications reached a limited, insular audience of professors and administrators. The *Times*, by contrast, penetrates the consciousness of 100 million readers, plus immense secondary audiences on television, radio, and social media.¹³ If the university provided the theory of the revolution, the paper provided the mechanism for transmission, turning the fringe ideas formulated in *An Essay on Liberation* and at the Flint War Council into the new liberal consensus. As the *Times* changed, the other primary channels of left-leaning media followed suit: the *Washington Post*, NPR, MSNBC¹⁴—even the wire services¹⁵—all converged on the framing and language of the New Left.

After securing power, the activists in the new "counter-media" deployed the model of political change that had been developed in the universities: flooding the discourse with heavily loaded political concepts in order to shape the popular consciousness and precondition the public for left-wing political conclusions. This process could be called "linguistic overload," in which a key set of ideological phrases is repeated at mass scale and embedded into the public mind through the force of repetition. As Marcuse had counseled the young activists, "the sociological and political vocabulary must be radically reshaped: it must be stripped of its false neutrality; it must be methodically and provocatively 'moralized' in terms of the Refusal."¹⁶ When this is accomplished, the activists believed, the masses will interpret their experience through the language of revolution—say, "systemic racism" or "police brutality"—and arrive at the predetermined conclusions almost automatically.

The next conquest in the long march through the institutions was the state.

Already, by the time Marcuse had emigrated to the United States, the New Deal had established the federal government as the great shaper of American life. It employed more than 1 million citizens and scattered an army of managers, bureaucrats, and technical workers throughout the

country.¹⁷ With President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the federal government redoubled its efforts and pushed the bureaucracy even deeper into social, political, and family life.

The situation today has, if anything, intensified: public agencies employ approximately 24 million Americans,¹⁸ spend more than \$1 trillion per year on means-tested welfare programs,¹⁹ and subsidize approximately half of all households through entitlements and transfer payments.²⁰ Moreover, the modern state has a much more sophisticated technology of control: through advances in the social sciences and specialization of the managerial professions, the state not only seeks to build suspension bridges and administer Social Security, as it did following the New Deal, but to quantify and manipulate the most intimate expressions of human behavior, down to the relationship between parent and child.

Thus, for activists who want to influence society in a profound way, the state is the ultimate mechanism, both through its direct political power and its subtler capacities for social engineering. By the 1970s, the ambitious and highly educated activists of the New Left came to see the state, especially the vast administrative bureaus that operated outside of meaningful legislative control, as the highest prize. They realized, as Marcuse had suggested, that the most effective way to circumvent the democratic process was to administer the institutions of knowledge production and to ensure that the discourse was guided by the spirit of liberation—that is, according to the critical ideologies.

The state, it turned out, was an easy capture. The revolutionaries were able to easily translate the strategies, tactics, and policies of the universities to the state bureaucracy. There was barely any resistance at all.

The activist-bureaucrats had a simple list of objectives: capture the culture of the federal agencies; enforce political orthodoxy with critical theory-based DEI programs; turn the federal government into a patronage machine for left-wing activism.

The first step has already been accomplished. The political culture of the federal agencies is almost indistinguishable from that of the universities. Using political donations as a proxy for political culture, the federal departments are overwhelmingly left-wing. In the 2020 presidential election cycle, employees at the Department of Justice sent 83 percent of all contributions to Democrats. At the Department of Housing and Urban

Development, the number was 84 percent. At the Department of Health and Human Services, 88 percent; and at the Department of Education, a full 93 percent.²¹ Overall, according to analysis by Bloomberg, non-defense federal employees sent 84 percent of all presidential donations to Democratic nominee Joseph Biden—within striking distance of the rate in universities, 93 percent.²²

This culture is further reinforced through the creation of permanent “diversity, equity, and inclusion” programs that turn the narrative of the critical theories into orthodoxy and use the methods first developed by Erica Sherover-Marcuse to enforce codes of speech and behavior. These programs are now pervasive. The administration of President Joseph Biden has mandated “diversity, equity, and inclusion” in every department of the federal government²³ and the largest agencies have phalanxes of “diversity officers” who administer the bureaucracy in accordance with left-wing ideology.²⁴

The programming at Sandia National Laboratories, which designs America’s nuclear weapons arsenal, is representative of the general orientation of “diversity and inclusion” in the federal government. In 2019, executives at Sandia sent a group of white male employees to a three-day reeducation program in order to expose their “white privilege” and deconstruct their “white male culture.” The mandatory training, which was called the “White Men’s Caucus on Eliminating Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in Organizations,” utilized the techniques of the New Left-style “consciousness-raising” groups to humiliate, degrade, and disintegrate the participants, so they could be reoriented toward “anti-racism.”²⁵

To begin the sessions, the trainers explained that their intention was to expose the “roots of white male culture,” which consists of “rugged individualism,” “a can-do attitude,” “hard work,” and “striving towards success”—which might be superficially appealing but are, in fact, rooted in “racism, sexism, and homophobia” and “devastating” to women and minorities. This culture, according to the program materials, imposes a “white male standard” on others and leads to “lowered quality of life at work and home, reduced life expectancy, unproductive relationships, and high stress.”

In order to break down this culture, the trainers for Sandia demanded that the white male employees make a list of associations about “white

men” and read a series of statements about their “white privilege,” “male privilege,” and “heterosexual privilege.” The trainers wrote down the answers to the first question, which included “white supremacists,” “KKK,” “Aryan Nation,” “MAGA hat,” “privileged,” and “mass killing,” then asked the men to accept their complicity in the white male system and repeat a series of confessions: “white people are more wealthy”; “white privilege is viewing police officers as there to protect you”; “white privilege is being first in line.”

As the reeducation program concluded, the trainers asked the men to write letters “directed to white women, people of color, and other groups regarding the meaning of this Caucus experience.” The men were exhausted and apologetic, pledging to atone for their whiteness and to become “a better ally” to the cause. “The caucus allowed me to see the [privilege], although not previously realized, that I have as a white male in society and at Sandia,” wrote one. “I’m sorry for the times I have not stood up for you to create a safe place. I’m sorry for the time I’ve spent not thinking about you,” wrote another. Their submission was complete.

Finally, as a broader structural matter, the new federal “diversity and inclusion” apparatus also functions as a patronage machine for left-wing activism.

All of the major grantmakers in education, humanities, and sciences—the Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Science Foundation—have become permanent benefactors of the critical theories, no matter which political party holds the presidency and the legislature. For decades, these entities have showered hundreds of millions of dollars on universities, artists, researchers, writers, and cultural figures who echo the euphemisms of the revolution, as if they constituted a secret password for support. The institutes function as their own fiefdoms: career bureaucrats outmaneuver political appointees and, through long-built patronage networks and a “one-party” selection process similar to those in the universities, funnel enormous gifts to outside activists, who are not subject to federal oversight and transparency requirements.

The list of approved arts and humanities grants during the Obama and Trump presidencies—the latter of which was ostensibly opposed to the critical ideologies—illustrates the absolute nature of this patronage system.

During this period, the Department of Education funded hundreds of left-wing programs, including an endless repetition of programs and studies that repeated the basic mantras of DEI: “educational equity,” “using data to achieve equity,” “equity through action,” “building school capacity to address equity at scale,” “equity-driven research-practice partnerships,” “efficacy, efficiency, and equity,” “systemic change to improve equity,” “equity-focused educators,” “opening pathways to institutionalize equity,” “creating an equity-minded campus,” “building equity through sustainable change.”²⁶

Meanwhile, the NEA and the NEH pursued the same political line, funding, for example, a speaking series on “race, reconciliation, and transformation,” a national black writers’ conference on “reconstructing the master narrative,” an artist-in-residency program for “racial equity,” a leadership certificate program in “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” an art exhibit on “race, gender, and globalization,” an overseas research program that “aims to dismantle hierarchies of race and civilization,” and a biography exploring “the Black Power movement,” a “dance theater trilogy on race, culture, and identity,” and a stage play for “a manifesto on race in America through the eyes of a black girl recovering from self-hate.”²⁷

Even the National Science Foundation, which one might assume to be insulated from the critical theories, has succumbed. Through Democratic and Republican administrations, the institute has subsidized left-wing political work, including a multimillion-dollar initiative for dismantling “the institutional and intersectional barriers to equity” in universities, a million-dollar partnership to “accelerate diversity, equity, and inclusion systemic change,” a plan for “creating faculty change agents” who implement policies related to “unconscious bias,” a program to explore “the use of technology in building more socially conscious systems to mitigate institutional racism,” a dissertation on “the lure of whiteness and the politics of otherness,” a postdoctoral fellowship on “racial/ethnic subjectivity and grassroots community organizing,” a conference to advance “diversity, equity, and inclusion” in the astronomical sciences, and dozens of other programs on “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion.”²⁸

Together, these programs direct hundreds of millions of dollars toward left-wing activism and have become the dominant culture of the agencies. The federal bureaucracy, which was designed to be neutral, or at least

accountable to the executive, is now a creature of its own prerogatives. The bureaucrats claim to pursue knowledge, but, in truth, pursue power, all under the justification of technical expertise. The state becomes the primary vehicle of revolution. It no longer seeks to serve the public but, following the dictates of critical theory, seeks to subvert itself.

It is a revolt of the state against the people—and, to that end, it is rapidly gaining power.

* * *

The final conquest in the long march through the institutions is the extension of the critical theories into America's largest corporations.

At first, this seems like an insuperable contradiction: the critical theorists were vicious critics of capitalism and wanted nothing more than to abolish it. Yet their ideas have made inroads into the centers of capitalist power. Today, every one of the Fortune 100 corporations has submitted to the ideology of the critical theories, filtered through the language of "diversity, equity, and inclusion." They have established new bureaucracies, created new programs, and organized new training regimens for their employees on "whiteness," "systemic racism," "racial capitalism," and "prison abolition."²⁹

How is this possible? Because the corporation is no longer the domain of the conservative establishment.

In fact, the cultural orientation of the most profitable companies matches, or even exceeds, the liberalism of academia, government, and education. According to employee political donations, Google and Facebook are more liberal than the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Michigan; the consulting firms Deloitte, Accenture, KPMG, PwC, and Ernst & Young are more liberal than the departments of the federal government; and the employees of Disney, Nike, Starbucks, and Capital One are more progressive than the teachers and administrators of the public schools.³⁰

Part of this is due to a change in cohort and, as with the *New York Times*, a generational "revolution." For the graduates of the prestige universities who then enter the corporate world, the critical theories serve as a proxy for a sophisticated, progressive worldview and an aesthetic connection to the 1960s counterculture, which is still perceived as high-status. They see Marcuse's "new sensibility" and the managerial-class career ladder as

methods of personal liberation from suburban upbringings and Middle American values. For many of them, the culture captures the mind and the politics follows.

Meanwhile, for executives, adopting the principles of the critical theories, watered down as "diversity, equity, and inclusion," functions as an insurance policy against left-wing activism campaigns and costly, often frivolous discrimination lawsuits under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. By circulating materials and requiring training programs on "racial equity" and "systemic racism," corporations can signal their liberal bona fides and create a preemptive defense for any "hostile work environment" or "race and gender discrimination" claims.

In addition, under the aegis of "diversity and inclusion" initiatives, executives can direct financial contributions to left-wing activist organizations, which serve as protection payments against protests, boycotts, and public relations campaigns. The major corporations have made a simple calculation: they have achieved all of their desires from the political right on economics—tax cuts, free trade, deregulation—and so they are looking to appease their potential enemies from the political left on culture. It is a classic inside-outside game. Corporate lobbyists quietly secure favorable legislation through congressional Republicans, while corporate executives publicly announce their contributions to "racial equity" and pledge allegiance to "social justice."³¹ *What is the system to avoid injuries?* This dynamic was crisply illustrated following the *death* of George Floyd, which inspired months of rioting, looting, and violence in American cities. As looters sacked retail stores and burned commercial districts to the ground, the CEOs of the great companies announced themselves not on the side of "law and order," as they had in the 1960s, but on the side of the protesters and rioters. The largest fifty companies in America immediately pledged \$50 billion toward "racial equity,"³² with the CEOs of companies such as Cisco, Pepsi, and Nike publicly repeating the street slogan "Black Lives Matter,"³³ JPMorgan Chase chief executive Jamie Dimon kneeling in simulated protest of the national anthem,³⁴ and McDonald's declaring the social-justice martyr George Floyd "one of us."

These businesses understand there is always a tax: in the past, they might have paid the mob or the union to achieve peace; today they pay the equity consulting firm and the racial activist organization. The latter is perhaps

more sophisticated—after all, it was created by elite intellectuals rather than working-class toughs—but the arrangement is the same. The outside pressure group, backed up by the threat of violence, extracts payments from the dominant economic player, which calculates them as a cost of doing business.

The problem, however, is that the critical theories can never be satisfied. Petty corruption eventually congeals into bureaucracy: one-time cash payments to activists become long-term contracts with diversity consultants; the discovery of subliminal bias in the workplace leads to an endless inquiry; temporary initiatives harden into full-time departments. Once corporate managers have accepted the premise of the critical theories, they can never rid themselves of the consequences.

The content of corporate “diversity, equity, and inclusion” programs is nearly identical to those of the universities and the federal agencies. In recent years, these programs have become enormously popular at Fortune 100 companies, such as American Express, Bank of America, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Disney, Verizon, AT&T, Google, and Facebook.³⁵ Some of these firms now force white male executives to repeat a series of self-criticisms and renounce their “white privilege,” “male privilege,” and “heterosexual privilege”;³⁶ others encourage employees to “identify [their] privilege,” “defund the police,” “participate in reparations,” and “decolonize [their bookshelves].”³⁷

But this style of program is not limited to the high-tech corporations in the coastal cities. Walmart, for example, is hardly the stereotype of the left-wing corporation—the company is based in deep-red Bentonville, Arkansas, and has traditionally supported conservative causes—and yet its executives have bought into the critical theories hook, line, and sinker.

In 2021, chief executive Doug McMillon announced the creation of the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity and pledged \$100 million to “address the drivers of systemic racism” and “[shift] power, privilege, and access” in American society.³⁸ According to whistleblower documents, the company has also instituted a mandatory training program for executives that denounces the United States as a racist society and teaches lower-income, white store employees that they are guilty of “white privilege” and “internalized racial superiority.”

The training manual, designed in partnership with a Greensboro, North

Carolina-based consulting company called the Racial Equity Institute, reads like the text of *Prairie Fire* transliterated into the language of the corporation. The program begins by explaining that the United States is a “white supremacy system” designed by white Europeans “for the purpose of assigning and maintaining white skin access to power and privilege.” Walmart frames American history as a long sequence of oppressions, from the “construction of a ‘white race’ by colonists in 1680 to President Barack Obama’s stimulus legislation in 2009, “another race neutral act that has disproportionately benefited white people.”

Following Erica Sherover-Marcuse’s “emancipatory consciousness” model, the program maintains that limitations in white consciousness uphold social oppressions. Therefore, according to Walmart, the objective is to create a psychological diagnosis of “whiteness,” which can then be treated through “white anti-racist development.” Whites, the manual explains, are inherently guilty of “white supremacy thinking,” which is based on the belief that “one’s comfort, wealth, privilege and success has been earned by merits and hard work,” rather than through the benefits of systemic racism. As a result, white Americans have been subjected to “racist conditioning” that indoctrinates them into “white supremacy,” which includes the racist values of “individualism,” “objectivity,” “paternalism,” “defensiveness,” “power hoarding,” “right to comfort,” and “worship of the written word.”

Racial minorities, on the other hand, are constantly suffering under the yoke of “constructed racist oppression” and “internalized racial inferiority.” Their internal psychology is considered shattered and broken, dominated by internal messages such as “we believe there is something wrong with being a person of color,” “we have lowered self-esteem,” “we have lowered expectations,” “we have very limited choices,” and “we have a sense of limited possibility.” Minorities, Walmart claims, thus begin to believe the “myths promoted by the racist system” and have feelings of “self-hate,” “anger,” “rage,” and “ethnocentrism,” and are forced to “forget,” “lie,” and “stop feeling” in order to secure basic survival.

The company’s proposed solution, again following the model of the old “consciousness groups,” is to encourage whites to participate in “white anti-racist development,” a psychological conditioning program that reorients white consciousness toward “anti-racism” and

cedes power to minorities inside and outside the corporation. To this end, white employees must accept their "guilt and shame" and the idea that "white is not right," acknowledge their complicity in racism, and finally, begin taking responsibility and moving toward "collective action," whereby "white can do right." The goal is for whites to climb the "ladder of empowerment for white people" and re-create themselves with a new "anti-racist identity."³⁹

On the surface, there is a glaring contradiction in such corporate DEI programs: the corporation is oriented toward the profit motive, while critical theory seeks to subvert it. However, as Marcuse understood a half century ago, the Establishment, represented in the purest form by the multinational corporation, has a tremendous capacity for folding the contradictions into its own machinery. Corporate executives, sensing the momentum of the critical theories in the universities and the necessity of protecting themselves from the federal civil rights bureaucracy, make concessions to the ideology with the intention of flattening it, co-opting it, and rendering it harmless.

Companies such as Walmart might condemn "objectivity," "individualism," and "power hoarding" as "white supremacy culture" while ruthlessly operating on those principles in the global market. They might lecture minimum-wage store employees about their "white privilege" while hauling in hundreds of millions of dollars in executive compensation.⁴⁰ They have paid the tax and believe they can continue on with business as usual.

The result, of course, is critical theory as farce: the ideology of the revolution passed through the human resources department.⁴¹ And while executives might be adopting these programs with cynical motives—to launder their reputations, to protect against frivolous lawsuits, to recast the corporation as an instrument of redemption—the simple fact of hypocrisy does not rule out the damage that can be done. Regardless of their intentions, when corporations submit to the dictates of DEI, the ideology gains power and, through constant repetition, makes an imprint on the mind. The language of the critical theories becomes the new language of access: those aspiring to enter the elite must become fluent in order to establish themselves in the institutions, even the corporation.

Whether they intend to or not, the managers, technicians, and operators become the new foot soldiers in the long march.

Marcuse did not live to see this revolution unfold.

As the drama surrounding his work receded, so did the scrutiny. The chancellor of UCSD, seeking to tamp down criticism, had dismissed Marcuse as a "paper revolutionary";⁴² in 1973, the FBI removed him from the active Administrative Index, concluding that Marcuse was "not considered dangerous at the present time."⁴³ When his students asked him about the height of the New Left, he expressed nostalgia. "That was the heroic age," he said. "You will never see another age like it."⁴⁴

But Marcuse was too modest. He had created an enormous body of work, from his first dissertation on German literature to his final book on Marxist aesthetics. He had built a cadre of intellectuals, activists, and revolutionaries. And, despite the disappointments during his own life, he had laid the ideological foundation for the revolution to come.⁴⁵

Today, his critical theory of society, which he developed in near obscurity, has embedded itself in every major institution, from the Ivy League universities to the Fortune 100 corporations. Marcuse's ideas, although they have often been flattened and euphemized, have risen to an astonishing prominence in public life.

In 1968, at the height of his notoriety, a French journalist accused Marcuse of agitating for a "Platonic dictatorship of the elite." He responded without hesitation: "To be perfectly frank, I don't know which is worse: a dictatorship of politicians, managers, and generals, or a dictatorship of intellectuals. Personally, if this is the choice, I would prefer the dictatorship of the intellectuals, if there is no possibility of a genuine free democracy. Unfortunately, this alternative does not exist at present."⁴⁶

This distinction has now vanished. The lines between academia, media, government, and business are no longer reliable lines of demarcation. The intellectuals have captured the tongues of the politicians, managers, and generals; the vocabulary of the university is now indistinguishable from the vocabulary of the state. The upper half of Marcuse's "new proletariat"—the white, affluent, educated class—now speaks the language of revolution on behalf of the poor, the minority, and the oppressed. The members of this class can move smoothly across geography and institution, secure that their symbolic sophistication, technical knowledge, and right opinion can find a position anywhere.

Marcuse's "dictatorship of the intellectuals" and "dictatorship of politicians, managers, and generals" have now converged. His critical theory has become the normative ideology of the universities and his "counter-institutions" have become, at least as a matter of public affirmation, the dominant institutions across every domain.

This represents a change in regime—a cultural revolution. The victory of the critical theories has displaced the original ends, or telos, of America's institutions. The university no longer exists to discover knowledge, but rather to awaken "critical consciousness." The corporation no longer exists to maximize profit, but to manage "diversity and inclusion." The state no longer exists to secure natural rights, but to achieve "social justice."

The means, too, have changed. As Marcuse predicted, the critical revolution could not win through the democratic process established in the Constitution; rather, it depended upon the mobilization of "extra-parliamentary" forces, the capture of elite institutions, and, when necessary, political violence to advance left-wing ideology "against the will and against the prevailing interests of the great majority of the people."⁴⁷

After the capture of the institutions, however, this method went through an inversion. The descendants of the New Left could use their position in the great bureaucracies to shift the culture from the top down and to exert authority over the "antirevolutionary" masses. They began to wield their own tools of repression. The intellectuals build political narratives at industrial scale. The DEI departments create new codes of speech and behavior. The bureaucrats invent and then punish dissenters for crimes of pure subjectivity, such as "microaggressions," "microassaults," and "microinequities."⁴⁸

Marcuse turned out to be a prophet. In the final months of his life, a young disciple asked him if "his life's project had been to prepare the theory for future revolutionary movements." Marcuse responded with pleasure: "Yes, you could say that."⁵¹

The triumph of the long march through the institutions, however, does not represent the ascension of rational, scientific government, nor the arival of Marcuse's "direct democracy." It represents the extension of bureaucratic power and the creation of a new one-dimensional society. As the activists moved from a position of negation to a position of authority, they slowly undermined their own legitimacy as a movement of subversion and their own rationale as a method for liberation.

The outcome is a revolt of the state against the people. The bureaucracy fortifies its own power and privilege while waging a taxpayer-financed revolution against the middle and lower classes. Liberation becomes the pretext for domination. The counterculture becomes the Establishment. The revolution solidifies into bureaucracy.

In the summer of 1979, while traveling in Germany for a conference, Marcuse suffered a stroke and, after a short struggle in the hospital, passed on. His friends and family organized a small funeral service in the woods near the town of Starnberg that was attended by close colleagues who had helped develop the critical theories; the activist Rudi Dutschke, who had designed the long march through the institutions; and Marcuse's third wife, Erica, who had created the model for modern "diversity and inclusion" programming.⁴⁹ Years later, at a ceremony to put his ashes to rest, Marcuse's graduate student Angela Davis commemorated him as the intellectual leader of the New Left's revolution.⁵⁰

In Seattle, the revolutionary mood has created a sense of danger. Building owners have tarred car lot blocks. Groups of vagrants have established legal tender drug markets. Dealers sell heroin, fentanyl, and methamphetamine in broad daylight. Addicts collect cash by emptying coin slots and shooting out windows. Meanwhile, the professional-class revolutionaries see the image of the oppressed so kindly dangers action and to wage their own symbolic war. They use their vast informational apparatus to change the perception of **Kali Yuga**.

The ultimate goal is to achieve the impossible: to bring the promise of heaven down to earth. "Karl Marx [once] said that religion is the wide dream of an oppressed humanity," Angela Davis once told her students. "Religious people [still] dream in this world; this is the perspective of an oppressed people. But what is important, what is crucial is that these dreams are always on the verge of reverting to their original status—the real wishes and needs here on earth. There is always the possibility of redirecting these wish dreams to the here-and-now."¹⁸

The fall of 1969, a Brazilian Marxist educator named Paulo Freire arrived on the Harvard University campus with a suitcase full of clothes and a Portuguese-language manuscript of a book he called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He arrived as an exile, forced out of Brazil following a right-wing military coup, and soon became enmeshed in radical political circles in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As the weather turned cold, Freire grew a beard and adopted the appearance of a guru—the Third World theorician with the keys to subversion.

During Freire's short stay at Harvard, where he served as a research associate at the Center for Studies in Education and Development, Freire and his colleagues translated the manuscript of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into English, which, over the subsequent decades, helped transform American education. The book sold more than one million copies¹ and is now the third-most-cited work in the social sciences.² It has become a foundational text in nearly all graduate schools of education and teacher training programs. Although Freire only spent six months in Cambridge, he departed as a prophet of the intellectual Left and identified the education system as a vehicle for the revolution.

As a book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a Rorschach test. At one level, it presents a simple, even uncontroversial lesson: children must be invested in their own education and engage in creative problem-solving, rather than be subjected to rote learning and top-down control. This insight is packaged in American schools today as "critical pedagogy" and "culturally responsive teaching," with Freire playing the role of the kindly, bearded teacher who wants to cultivate the spirit of social justice.

anti-narrative solidifies and stabilizes society and the market.

CHAPTER 10

Brazilian Activists and Their Advisors

Paulo Freire

Master of Subversion

Brazilian Activists and Their Advisors

But underneath the surface, there is a deeper, troubling current that runs all the way through *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire bases his pedagogy on the political belief that capitalism has enslaved the population and "anesthetized" the world's oppressed with a series of myths: "the myth that the oppressive order is a 'free society'"; "the myth that all persons are free to work where they wish"; "the myth that this order respects human rights"; "the myth of private property as fundamental to personal human development"; "the myth of the charity and generosity of the elites."¹³

Freire stands ready to offer the solution. Through his work, he reveals a vision of an ideal education system that deconstructs society's myths, unmasks its oppressors, and inspires students to "revolutionary consciousness."¹⁴ Freire's language—liberation, revolution, struggle—is not merely symbolic. The most-cited political figures in the *Pedagogy* are Lenin, Mao, Guevara, and Castro, all of whom mobilized violence to advance their political cause.

The revolution might begin in the classroom, Freire told his students, but it would end in the streets. He worshipped the decisive action of the Third World militants and saw the education system as the ideal recruiting ground for a cultural revolution that would overturn the world. "Cultural revolution" takes the total society to be reconstructed," he thundered. "As the cultural revolution deepens [critical consciousness] in the creative praxis of the new society, people will begin to perceive why mythical remnants of the old society survive in the new. And they will then be able to free themselves more rapidly of these specters."¹⁵

Paulo Freire imagined himself an oracle: a man who had demythologized the oppressions of his time. But he was, in truth, a man who would unleash unimaginable cruelties in the name of justice. "The ideal lies in punishing the perverse—the killers of popular leadership, of country folk, and forest people—here and now," he thundered.¹⁶

The smiling, bearded teacher was not so much a guru as a fanatic. Even as the Marxist-Leninist regimes revealed themselves as purveyors of great barbarism, he refused to abandon the faith. He clung to his idols—Che, Lenin, Mao—even as their own societies repudiated them. But despite the failure of his ideology everywhere it was attempted, his influence took root in an unlikely place: the United States of America.¹⁷ *surviving "radical" American educationalists of the 1960s*
That is where he would become a prophet.

* * *

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born in the fall of 1921 in the city of Recife, Brazil. The city, which was once the first slave port in the Americas, had remained poor, backward, and crowded onto the Atlantic shoreline. As other regions of Brazil began to industrialize, the Northeast remained stagnant: the economy persisted in the colonial mold, with sprawling farms and a primitive railroad system that supplied sugarcane to the world market.¹⁸ At the time of Freire's youth, the region had the lowest per capita income in Latin America and some of the highest rates of illiteracy, malnutrition, and tropical disease.¹⁹

The Freire family was suspended precariously between the middle and lower classes. Paulo's father, Joaquin, was an officer in the military police, but was forced into early retirement due to a heart condition and never managed to find steady work again. He eventually passed away when Paulo was a teenager, plunging the family into dire circumstances. Paulo's mother maintained some of the trappings of the middle class—clothes, neckties, a piano in the living room—but the children often went without food.²⁰

Freire traced the origins of his political thought to the deprivations of his childhood. "My lived experiences as a child and as a man took place socially within the history of a dependent society in whose terrible dramatic nature I participated early on," he recalled in his memoirs. "I should highlight that it was this terrible nature of society that fostered my increasing radicality."²¹ As an example of his political education, Freire recounts a story in which he and a group of friends, worn down and hungry, wandered into an orchard to steal papayas, only to be caught by the landowner. "I must have turned pale from surprise and shock. I did not know what to do with my shaking hands, from which the papaya fell to the ground," Freire wrote. "At that time, stealing the fruit was necessary but the man gave me a moralistic sermon that had little to do with my hunger."²²

This symbolic world of Freire's childhood—part recollection, part allegory—provided the human ground for the philosophy that emerged in Freire's adulthood. In a real sense, Freire's feelings of betrayal and outrage at the conditions in Recife were justified. The former colonial territory was structured into rigid hierarchies and countenanced immense suffering of the poor. The latifundia system, in which large landowners sent the mass of laborers into the sugar fields, still bore the stigma of feudalism. The

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peasants were bound to the land and worked to the bone; they were bound to the land and, as illiterates, barred from voting in democratic elections. They lived at the mercy of domestic plantation owners and foreign commodities markets, which had always been brutal masters.¹²

Politics provided a path out of this nightmare.

After finishing high school, Freire went to the University of Recife, earned a law degree, and joined the Social Service of Industry (SESI), where he started working as an educator for the region's poorest citizens. He began his career as a modernist and a reformist, believing that "progressive education" could bring literacy to the masses and incorporate their interests into the governing system. As a young man, he traveled through the city's slums and rural backwaters preaching the value of a "democratic education" and the "work of man with man."¹³

At SESI, he conceptualized the practice of "culture circles," in which participants engaged in an active dialogue with their instructors, seeking to understand their historical-political position as well as the mechanics of literacy. This was the period of Freire the humanist, driven by the conviction that "human beings, by making and remaking things and transforming the world, can transcend the situation in which their *state of being* is almost *a state of non-being*, and go on to a state of being, in search of *becoming more* fully human."¹⁴

Over time, however, Freire became disillusioned with this model. He came to see his work at SESI as serving the "interests of the dominant class," and criticized the institution for abandoning its utopian purpose and devolving into "a paternalistic, bureaucratic service."¹⁵ The institute, he believed, presented the values of humanism, but was ultimately designed "to ease class conflict and stop the development of a political and militant consciousness among workers." It was an attempt by the industrial powers to "domesticate" the men who populated the sugar fields and the factory floors.¹⁶

As a reaction, Freire sought out a new theory that would meet the radical nature of class conflict with an equally radical political philosophy. He immersed himself in the Marxist literature, which provided the utopian impulse and the vision of a classless society, as well the means for achieving it: revolution. Freire described this as a spiritual conversion that brought together Christian humanism with dialectical Marxism. "It was the woods

in Recife, refuge of slaves, and the ravines where the oppressed of Brazil live coupled with my love for Christ and hope that He is the light, that led me to Marx," he wrote. "The tragic reality of the ravines, woods, and marshes led me to Marx."¹⁷

Freire's conversion was fast and deep. By the mid-1960s, as Marxist revolutionaries had begun to seize power in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the "cultural revolution" that provided the intellectual basis for transforming the political, economic, and social order in the Third World. "Revolution is always cultural," he wrote, "whether it be in the phase of denouncing an oppressive society and proclaiming the advent of a just society, or in the phase of the new society inaugurated by the revolution."¹⁸

During this period, the reformist pedagogy of Freire's early years turned into a Marxist pedagogy aimed at nothing less than the complete transformation of society. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he describes this new method: "The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation."¹⁹

How should one interpret this new pedagogical approach? First, it must be recognized that, throughout his life, Freire played a double game: he used abstractions such as "liberation" that could be interpreted through the lens of humanism or radicalism. "Liberation" meant a personal process of attaining *conscientização*, or "critical consciousness," that frees the pupil from illiteracy, helplessness, and ignorance. But "liberation" also meant a revolutionary struggle to overthrow a given political regime and install Marxism-Leninism as the new state ideology.

In order to soften his image, Freire's disciples have consistently emphasized his humanist mission, portraying the man as a wise, peaceful presence. In a typical portrayal, Freire translator Donaldo Macedo and Freire's second wife, Ana Maria Araujo-Freire, declared that Freire "never spoke, nor was he even an advocate, of violence or of the taking of power through the force of arms. . . . He fought and had been fighting for a more just and

less perverse society, a truly democratic one, one where there are no repressors against the oppressed, where all can have a voice and a chance.”²⁰

But this softening, which attempts to make Freire’s work palatable to modern audiences, is preposterous.

Freire explicitly rationalized violence in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and defended violent revolutionaries such as Lenin, Stalin, Castro, and Mao,²¹ who left behind them a trail of up to 90 million dead.²² “Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized,” Freire wrote. “Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human.”²³

Even after the atrocities of Freire’s heroes were revealed, he continued to idealize them. In 1974, he called China’s Cultural Revolution—which led to the death, starvation, and persecution of millions of innocent people—“the most genial solution of the century.”²⁴ In 1985, he described Che Guevara as the incarnation of “the authentic revolutionary utopia” who “justified guerrilla warfare as an introduction to freedom.”²⁵ Revolutionary violence, Freire maintained, was best understood as “an act of love.”²⁶

The Brazilian military, however, took a different interpretation. In the 1960s, Freire had expanded his “culture circles” throughout Northeast Brazil and led a pilot program in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, with the support of left-wing president João Goulart, who had laid out an ambitious policy agenda called the Basic Reforms, including higher taxes on business, large-scale land redistribution, the extension of the franchise to illiterates, and investments in national education. Goulart attended a ceremony at one of Freire’s culture circles in Angicos, during which Freire proudly announced that the movement was creating “a people who decides, a people that is rising up, a people that has begun to become aware of its destiny and has begun to take part in the Brazilian historical process irreversibly.”²⁷

That same year, Goulart hired Freire to build out the federal

government’s national literacy campaign,²⁸ which, together with the Basic Reforms, they hoped would finally usher in the “Brazilian Revolution.”²⁹

The Brazilian Communist Party put its full weight behind the effort, convinced that Goulart’s “structural reforms of society” would provide “a link in the revolutionary process which will culminate with the advent and the construction of socialism.”³⁰

With such rhetoric, Goulart, Freire, and the communists put themselves directly in the crosshairs of the Brazilian military and the American presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. In 1963, American diplomats and Brazilian allies furiously exchanged messages warning of “an extremely grave process of institutional subversion” that “might require removal of threat through military action.” One message described Goulart and Freire’s literacy program as a “brainwashing” campaign that used the same techniques as the Chinese communists.³¹

In the spring of 1964, the Brazilian military pulled the trigger. The generals toppled Goulart, shut down the literacy programs, and jailed suspected communists and subversives. Military officials denounced the national literacy campaign as an attempt to “communize” Brazil and create “five million electoral robots for the populist parties, including the communists.”

Within months, the military had dismantled the structure of Freire’s campaign. Soldiers seized troves of documents, detained cultural circle leaders, and even set fire to some school buildings. The new regime accused Freire and his comrades of leading “the most subtle and efficient work of subversion yet realized in Brazil,” with the ultimate aim of transforming the “illiterate masses into an instrument of the peaceful conquest of power by the Communist Party.”³² By summer, the government had arrested Freire in his home and transferred him into a prison cell in Recife. “Another one for the cage,” said the security officer.³³

For the next seventy days, interrogators questioned Freire about his techniques of subversion, support for communist revolution, relationship with Cuba and the USSR, and an alleged weapons cache discovered in the headquarters of Freire’s popular culture movement.³⁴ Freire denied the charges, dismissing them as “hallucinations.”³⁵

Finally, the military released him. Freire, fearing that he might be arrested again, sought asylum in the Bolivian embassy and, from there, went into exile.

For the next sixteen years, Freire would wander around the globe, from the United States to Latin America to postcolonial Africa, seeking to turn his

theories of liberation into practice. The coup, Freire said, had radicalized him.³⁶ The mild-mannered humanist from Recife had transformed into the pedagogist for the global revolution. He had abandoned hope in reformist politics and, by the time he went into exile, had become a committed Marxist, believing that only the total transformation of society would be sufficient to end the dehumanization of the laboring classes.

Although his project had failed in Brazil, he believed it could succeed in the Third World nations where the communists had secured power, such as Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and a small country on the west coast of Africa: Guinea-Bissau.

* * *

The coastline of Guinea-Bissau cuts into the Atlantic Ocean like a set of shark's teeth. The series of islands, bays, and inlets once provided protected sailing for Portuguese colonial ships, which used Guinea-Bissau as a transit center for sending African slaves to their territories in Brazil. The Portuguese had dominated Guinea-Bissau for nearly five centuries, although they never ventured far into the territory, limiting their colonial enterprise to the coastline and small urban centers along the shores. Until late in the twentieth century, most of the nation's interior was untouched by the modern world.

When Freire arrived in the capital city, Bissau, in 1975, the colonial backwater had just won its independence from Portugal and had established a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist regime under the leadership of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, or PAIGC. Freire arrived at the invitation of President Luís Cabral, half brother of and successor to revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral, who had been assassinated at the tail end of the war. Luís Cabral and his state education commissioner, Mário Cabral, had invited Freire into the country with the hope that the Brazilian could use his pedagogical techniques to help carry the government from the stage of military revolution, which Freire described as "the taking of power," to cultural revolution, which he described as "inaugurating a society of women and men in the process of continuing liberation."³⁷

The task of educating the masses was a daunting one. The country had just emerged from a violent decade-long war and only 10 percent of Guinea-Bissauans were literate.³⁸

In a series of letters to education minister Mario Cabral, Freire lavished praise on the guerrilla fighters and conceptualized the national education program as an extension of the revolution, combining his literacy campaign with central economic planning, collectivist agricultural policy, and political indoctrination. "If the society, in remaking itself, moves toward socialism," Freire wrote, "it needs, on the one hand, to organize its methods of production with this objective in mind, and, on the other, to structure its education in close relation to production, both from the point of view of the understanding of the productive process and also the technical training of the learners."³⁹

The new regime, Freire argued, must "see literacy education of adults as a political act, coherent with the principles of PAIGC,"⁴⁰ which, in accordance with Marxist doctrine, would lead to a society in which "economic productivity will increase to the degree that the political consciousness of the popular masses becomes clarified."⁴¹

In practice, Freire and his colleagues designed a literacy campaign that can only be described as propaganda. The content of the program focused on eight "national themes," including production, defense, education, culture, and labor, weaving in Amílcar Cabral's revolutionary slogans and lessons aimed at instilling "political clarity" among the masses. Freire imagined transforming teachers into a cadre of "militants" through "a permanent revision of [their] ideological class conditioning."⁴²

Following the revolutionary theory of Amílcar Cabral, Freire argued that the nation's *assimilados*, urban residents, and tiny bourgeoisie should commit "class suicide" and go to the farms in order to transcend the boundaries of city and countryside, mind and body, rich and poor.⁴³ Freire's ambition was not only to build a Marxist-Leninist society, but to create "the new man and the new woman." He argued that Guinea-Bissau's native population might be "illiterate, in the literal sense of the term," but was "politically highly literate" because of their experience with the war of liberation.⁴⁴

But Freire and the regime made a series of fatal mistakes. First, they based their entire political and cultural project on a set of economic ideas that was bound to fail. At the first Popular National Assembly after the nation achieved independence, the PAIGC abolished private property, nationalized all land, mandated collectivized agriculture through Vil-

large Committees, and decreed a state monopoly on basic goods at Freire arrived in Guinea-Bissau, he still believed it was the key to government-run People's Stores.

The *Black Scholar*, one of the preeminent journals of black radicalism to become involved in a literacy campaign and in agrarian reform, the United States, described Guinea-Bissau's program in a 1980 diatribe. "A program linked to production that seeks to build such social forces and revolutionary classes, the ultimate goal of which is to change the economic base of society." For 9 percent of the population is engaged. The government is gradually humanizing its people to be remade in the process of reconstructing their society." For areas. It sees the key to economic progress through a collectivist, Mao's collective work program in Dazhai was proof that revolutionizing mechanized and diversified production in the traditional type to be applied directly to the situation in Guinea-Bissau.⁴⁹ The ultimate perspective of revolutionaries is that those who have been educated in the real possibility of radical

"Red years, used to wage their class struggle, the disease of capitalism, and the ultimate goal of revolutionaries is that those who have been educated in the real possibility of radical

Second, despite Amílcar Cabral's vision of a distinctly African Mzai, in reality, was a disaster. Chairman Mao had forced the peasants predicated on the "re-Africanization of minds," the education mzai, in reality, was a disaster. Chairman Mao had forced the peasants to be remade in the image of Marxists, and the government had fabricated the harvest numbers: where large farms abandoned by the Portuguese had existed.⁵⁰ In the "myths" of capitalist societies, he was seduced by the even the cooperative mode. State farms are operational wherever possible "the dynamic of transforming reality,"

Experimental farms have been established by the state; some in the jere was one problem: despite Freire's insistence that he could see the country could understand. At the time, only 5 percent of the. Meanwhile, Dazhai's great construction projects, leveling mountains, none led to greater prosperity or agricultural productivity.⁵⁰ As Amílcar Cabral had dreamed of the revolution as a campaign scholar of the Dazhai campaign concluded: "Rarely has there been but, more importantly, they were adopting a language that almost immune was not self-reliant, but received enormous subsidies from Bissauans could speak Portuguese; the rest of the country, meadow to the bedrock and filling ravines with earth, were economic spoke a mix of tribal and indigenous languages.⁴⁷

Amílcar Cabral had dreamed of the revolution as a campaign scholar of the Dazhai campaign concluded: "Rarely has there been nationally decolonize" the native population, but by selecting Portuguese as the national language, the regime extended the colonial language deejolotist vision of priorities and correct methods coincided to achieve the country than ever before.⁴⁸ And by inviting Freire, the regime concentrated attacks on nature, environmental destruction, and human another irony: the educator arrived in Africa as a self-described differing.⁵¹

Finally, Freire's vision for Guinea-Bissau was modeled on the Dazhai's collective agricultural system would be officially important colony.

Cultural Revolution, which would prove to be an economic and Freire was still under the spell of the Cultural Revolution. He disaster. As Freire explained in the memoir of his work in Guinean the horrors, brutalities, famines, slaughter, and mass deaths that had

Pedagogy in Process, his model was the Dazhai agriculture contumacious over the course of the revolution. He betrayed no skepticism Shanxi Province, China, which Chairman Mao heralded in the "Lehai's propaganda campaign and fantastical slogans, such as "move the Dazhai" campaign as having perfected communist economic development to make farm fields" and "change the sky and alter the land."⁵³ crop production, and mass education.

Although the Chinese Cultural Revolution was on the verge of now to the world, Freire refused to acknowledge his errors. He

lager Committees, and decreed a state monopoly on basic goods through government-run People's Stores.

The *Black Scholar*, one of the preeminent journals of black radicalism in the United States, described Guinea-Bissau's program in a 1980 dispatch: "The leaders have chosen to base the economy on agriculture in which 86 percent of the population is engaged. The government is gradually introducing mechanized and diversified production in the traditional farming areas. It sees the key to economic progress through a collectivist system of some type. The small land holding peasants are encouraged to adopt the cooperative mode. State farms are operational wherever possible. . . . Experimental farms have been established by the state; some in the interior where large farms abandoned by the Portuguese had existed."⁴⁵

Second, despite Amílcar Cabral's vision of a distinctly African Marxism predicated on the "the re-Africanization of minds," the education ministers chose Portuguese as the national language of instruction.⁴⁶ The decision was bewildering: they were adopting the language of the colonial power, but, more importantly, they were adopting a language that almost nobody in the country could understand. At the time, only 5 percent of Guineans could speak Portuguese; the rest of the country, meanwhile, spoke a mix of tribal and indigenous languages.⁴⁷

Amílcar Cabral had dreamed of the revolution as a campaign to "mentally decolonize" the native population, but by selecting Portuguese as the national language, the regime extended the colonial language deeper into the country than ever before.⁴⁸ And by inviting Freire, the regime layered in another irony: the educator arrived in Africa as a self-described liberator, but carried with him the tongue and the mind of a European—after all, he was the descendant of Portuguese settlers in the metropole's most important colony.

Finally, Freire's vision for Guinea-Bissau was modeled on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which would prove to be an economic and human disaster. As Freire explained in the memoir of his work in Guinea-Bissau, *Pedagogy in Process*, his model was the Dazhai agriculture commune in Shanxi Province, China, which Chairman Mao heralded in the "Learn from Dazhai" campaign as having perfected communist economic development, crop production, and mass education.

Although the Chinese Cultural Revolution was on the verge of collapse

when Freire arrived in Guinea-Bissau, he still believed it was the key to the country's future. "The new climate created by liberation enables the people to become involved in a literacy campaign and in agrarian reform," he wrote. "A program linked to production that seeks to build such social incentives as cooperative work and concern for the common good places its faith in human beings. It has a critical, not ingenuous, belief in the ability of people to be remade in the process of reconstructing their society." For Freire, Mao's collective work program in Dazhai was proof that revolutionary Marxism had made possible "the dynamic of transforming reality," which could be applied directly to the situation in Guinea-Bissau.⁴⁹

There was one problem: despite Freire's insistence that he could see through the "myths" of capitalist societies, he was seduced by the even more dangerous myths of communist societies.

Dazhai, in reality, was a disaster. Chairman Mao had forced the peasants through brutal work routines, laboring day and night to the point of exhaustion, and the government had fabricated the harvest numbers: the commune was not self-reliant, but received enormous subsidies from the state. Meanwhile, Dazhai's great construction projects, leveling mountains down to the bedrock and filling ravines with earth, were economic sinkholes; none led to greater prosperity or agricultural productivity.⁵⁰ As one scholar of the Dazhai campaign concluded: "Rarely has there been a historical moment in which political repression, misguided ideals, and an absolutist vision of priorities and correct methods coincided to achieve such concentrated attacks on nature, environmental destruction, and human suffering."⁵¹

Freire should have known better. In 1975, when he arrived in Guinea-Bissau, China's Cultural Revolution was less than a year away from total collapse—and Dazhai's collective agricultural system would be officially repudiated shortly thereafter.⁵²

But Freire was still under the spell of the Cultural Revolution. He ignored the horrors, brutalities, famines, slaughter, and mass deaths that had accumulated over the course of the revolution. He betrayed no skepticism of Dazhai's propaganda campaign and fantastical slogans, such as "move the mountains to make farm fields" and "change the sky and alter the land."⁵³ Even in 1985, when the violence and destruction of the Chinese revolution were known to the world, Freire refused to acknowledge his errors. He

continued to tout the "great merits" of the Cultural Revolution⁵⁴ and praised Chairman Mao as a model of "tolerance," "humility," and "patience."⁵⁵

This blindness—the denial of the old myths and the certainty in the new ones—doomed the efforts in Guinea-Bissau.

In 1977, the country's Third Party Congress enacted a national agricultural policy that was nearly identical to the old Soviet policy of "primitive socialist accumulation."⁵⁶ As a result, food production plummeted. Guinea-Bissau went from being a net exporter of rice to being dependent on foreign aid. Food shortages, hunger, smuggling, graft, and corruption were rampant. Freire's national education program devolved into pure illusion.

When the Brazilian lectured to young educators at Guinea-Bissau's Maxim Gorki Center for the Formation of Teachers, he insisted that any failure in education was a failure in politics. "Militancy teaches us that pedagogical problems are, first of all, political and ideological," he said.

"Therefore we insist increasingly, in the qualifying seminars, on analysis of national reality; on the political clarity of the educator, on the understanding of ideological conditioning, and on the perception of cultural differences. All this must begin long before discussion of literacy techniques and methods."⁵⁷

The results of Cabral's economic program and Freire's education program were identical: abject failure.

For years, Guinea-Bissau's official newspaper, *Nô Pintcha*, tried to prop up Freire's literacy campaign with optimistic headlines.⁵⁸ But in the most comprehensive study of Freire's program in Guinea-Bissau, scholar Linda Harasim discovered that, for all the fanfare, Freire's project was utterly fruitless.⁵⁹ According to official records, Guinea-Bissau's Department of Adult Education found that, of the 26,000 participants in Freire's program over three years, almost none had achieved basic literacy.⁶⁰

The pedagogy, the codifications, the pamphlets, the teachers college, the mass mobilization, the call for class suicide—none of it taught the Guineans how to read. "The activities envisioned and eventually implemented were inappropriate, unrealistic, and beyond the capacities of the country," Harasim concluded. "[Freire's] strategy was more concerned with orchestrating the 'class suicide' of the [literacy teachers] than with such concrete tasks as teaching the population to read and write."⁶¹

Freire concluded his work in Guinea-Bissau in 1977, leaving it, by almost any measure, worse off than when he arrived.

Over the next three decades, Guinea-Bissau ricocheted through a series of elections, coups, assassinations, and a civil war; the country's failed collectivist economic policies gave way to scattershot reforms, then to the rule of the black market and recurring bouts of inflation.⁶² In 1990, Pope John Paul II visited Guinea-Bissau and prayed for the nation to move beyond violence and corruption. The pope encouraged then-president João Bernardo Vieira to reform the national curriculum, which, according to Vaticano officials, was still shot through with Marxist propaganda. "I pray that educational programs enjoy full success, beginning with genuine literacy," he said, encouraging Guinean-Bissauans to resist "all that would seek to crush the individual or cancel him in an anonymous collectivity by institutions, structures, or a system."⁶³

Today, Guinea-Bissau is a failed state. South American drug cartels use the islands along the nation's coastline as a drug transit point, smuggling up to one thousand kilograms of cocaine into the territory each night. Guinea-Bissau's sprawling and corrupt military leases airstrips and naval facilities to the cartels, which paper their way through the bureaucracy with drug dollars.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the population suffers. Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest nations on earth: nearly 70 percent of residents live on less than two dollars per day and large swaths of the population depend on foreign aid for basic survival.⁶⁵ The territory is plagued by slavery, child labor, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and the torture of political opposition.⁶⁶ And, despite the regime's ambitions, Guinea-Bissau remains an illiterate society: 54 percent of adults cannot read, including 69 percent of all women.⁶⁷

In retrospect, Freire had made a tragic mistake. He had identified a constellation of monsters—colonialism, capitalism, ignorance, oppression—but put too much faith in the revolution. In Guinea-Bissau, Freire and Cabral had followed their theory to its limits, expelling the colonial power, dismantling the market economy, and establishing the one-party state that would, through *conscientização* alone, "transform reality."⁶⁸ But after they vanquished the old constellation of monsters, they unleashed another one: violence, barbarism, precarity, and disillusionment.

coastline, provided a convenient foil. But after their departure, the revolutionaries had to grapple with the complex tribal, economic, linguistic, and cultural realities in the country's tangled interior. For this task, Freire's theories proved insufficient. Wherever he went—Angola, Mozambique, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau—the system of colonialism gave way to a system of poverty, repression, illiteracy, mass murder, and civil war.

Yet, despite this string of failures, Freire's image as the wise, peripatetic guru persevered. His practical work might have been a supreme disappointment—he enabled tyranny more than he taught literacy—but his theoretical project would soon be resurrected in an unlikely place: the United States of America.

...neur to see no movement for peace or democracy among our indigenous Indian communities. I think it's important to establish a future in practice. "Nothing can be done without the people's participation. Our struggle is not only for what we want, but also for what we don't want. This is a difficult task, but it must be done."

"...and here we are, trying to learn from the experience of our brothers and sisters in Latin America, who are struggling against the same kind of oppression that we are. We are trying to learn from them how to struggle, how to live, how to work, how to organize, how to defend our rights, how to defend our culture, how to defend our language, how to defend our way of life."

For Paulo Freire, America was the ultimate oppressor—and for that reason, he accepted a position at Harvard University, in order to study the enemy from within. "I thought that it was very important for me as a Brazilian intellectual in exile to pass through, albeit rapidly, the center of capitalist power," he said. "I needed to see the animal close on its home territory."¹

Between 1969 and 1970, Freire spent six months as a research associate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, hosting seminars, writing articles, and haunting left-wing bookstores with other teachers and activists. His work, despite being anti-capitalist, was funded by two of the great titans of American industry: the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation. The months in Cambridge were extremely productive. He worked with a colleague to translate *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into English and wrote two essays for the *Harvard Education Review*, which, as the historian Isaac Gottesman has documented, helped introduce "critical Marxism" into the field of American education.²

More importantly, Freire established two crucial relationships—first, with the education reformer Jonathan Kozol, then, in subsequent trips, with the professor Henry Giroux—that would, over time, embed his ideas throughout the American public education system. Kozol became one of Freire's first American champions, publishing a letter in the *New York Review of Books* promoting the Brazilian's theories and making the argument that his ideas were "directly relevant to the struggles we face in the United States at the present time, and in areas far less mechanical and far more universal than basic literacy alone."³

CHAPTER 11

"We Must Punish Them"

Marxism Conquers the American Classroom

Our Now? Person