

In the Land of the Rococo Marxists

Where was *I*? On the wrong page? The wrong channel? Outside the bandwidth? As building managers here in New York shut down the elevators at 11:30 p.m. on December 31, 1999, so that citizens would not be trapped between floors by Y2K microchip failures—and licensed pyrotechnicians launched EPA-sanctioned fireworks from cordoned-off Central Park “venues” at precisely 12:00:01 a.m., January 1, 2000, to mark the arrival of the twenty-first century and the third millennium—did a single solitary savant note that the First American Century had just come to an end and the Second American Century had begun?—and that there might well be five, six, eight more to come?—resulting in a Pax Americana lasting a thousand years? Or did I miss something?

Did a single historian mention that America now dominates the world to an extent that would have made Julius Caesar twitch with envy?—would have made Alexander the Great, who thought there were no more worlds to conquer, get down on all fours and beat his fists on the ground in despair because he was merely a warrior and had never heard of international mergers and acquisitions, rock and rap, fireball movies, TV, the NBA, the World Wide Web, and the “globalization” game?

Was a single bard bestirred to write a mighty anthem—along the lines of James Thomson’s “Rule, Britannia! Britannia rule the waves! Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!”—for America, the nation that in the century just concluded had vanquished two barbaric nationalistic brotherhoods, the German Nazis and the Russian Communists, two hordes of methodical slave-hunting predators who made the Huns and Magyars look whimsical by comparison? Or had the double A’s in my Discman died on me?

Did anybody high or low look for a Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi to create a new tribute on the order of the Statue of Liberty for the nation that in the twentieth century, even more so than in the nineteenth, opened her arms to people from all over the globe—to Vietnamese, Thais, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, Ethiopians, Albanians, Senegalese, Guyanese, Eritreans, Cubans, as well as everybody else—and made sure they enjoyed full civil rights, including the means to take political power in a city the size of Miami if they could muster the votes? Did anybody even wistfully envision such a monument to America the International Haven of Democracy? Or had my *Flash Art* subscription run out?

Did any of the America-at-century's-end network TV specials strike the exuberant note that Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee struck in 1897? All I remember are voice-overs saying that for better or worse ... hmm, hmm ... McCarthyism, racism, Vietnam, right-wing militias, Oklahoma City, Heaven's Gate, Doctor Death ... on balance, hmm, we're not entirely sure ... for better or worse, America had won the Cold War ... hmm, hmm, hmm ...

My impression was that one American Century rolled into another with all the pomp and circumstance of a mouse pad. America's great triumph inspired all the patriotism and pride (or, if you'd rather, chauvinism), all the yearning for glory and empire (or, if you'd rather, the spirit of Manifest Destiny), all the martial jubilee music of a mouse click.

Such was my impression; but it was only that, my impression. So I drew upon the University of Michigan's fabled public-opinion survey resources. They sent me the results of four studies, each approaching the matter from a different angle. Chauvinism? The spirit of Manifest Destiny? According to one survey, 74 percent of Americans don't want the United States to intervene abroad unless in cooperation with other nations, presumably so that we won't get all the blame. Excitement?

Americans have no strong feelings about their country's supremacy one way or the other. They are lacking in affect, as the clinical psychologists say.

There were seers who saw this coming even at the unabashedly pompous peak (June 22) of England's 1897 Jubilee. One of them was Rudyard Kipling, the empire's de facto poet laureate, who wrote a poem for the Jubilee, "Recessional," warning: "Lo, all our pomp of yesterday /Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!" He and many others had the uneasy feeling that the foundations of European civilization were already shifting beneath their feet, a feeling indicated by the much used adjectival compound *fin-de-siècle*. Literally, of course, it meant nothing more than "end-of-the-century," but it connoted something modern, baffling, and troubling in Europe. Both Nietzsche and Marx did their greatest work seeking to explain the mystery. Both used the term "decadence."

But if there was decadence, what was decaying? Religious faith and moral codes that had been in place since time was, said Nietzsche, who in 1882 made the most famous statement in modern philosophy—"God is dead"—and three startlingly accurate predictions for the twentieth century. He even estimated when they would begin to come true: about 1915. (1) The faith men formerly invested in God they would now invest in barbaric "brotherhoods with the aim of the robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers." Their names turned out, in due course, to be the German Nazis and the Russian Communists. (2) There would be "wars such as have never been waged on earth." Their names turned out to be World War I and World War II. (3) There no longer would be Truth but, rather, "truth" in quotation marks, depending upon which concoction of

eternal verities the modern barbarian found most useful at any given moment. The result would be universal skepticism, cynicism, irony, and contempt. World War I began in 1914 and ended in 1918. On cue, as if Nietzsche were still alive to direct the drama, an entirely new figure, with an entirely new name, arose in Europe: that embodiment of skepticism, cynicism, irony, and contempt, the Intellectual.

The word "intellectual," used as a noun referring to the "intellectual laborer" who assumes a political stance, did not exist until Georges Clemenceau used it in 1898 during the Dreyfus case, congratulating those "intellectuals," such as Marcel Proust and Anatole France, who had joined Dreyfus's great champion, Emile Zola. Zola was an entirely new form of political eminence, a popular novelist. His famous *J'accuse* was published on the front page of a daily newspaper, *L'Aurore* ("The Dawn"), which printed 300,000 copies and hired hundreds of extra newsboys, who sold virtually every last one by midafternoon.

Zola and Clemenceau provided a wholly unexpected leg up in life for the ordinary worker ants of "pure intellectual labor" (Clemenceau's term): your fiction writers, playwrights, poets, history and lit profs, that whole cottage industry of poor souls who scribble, scribble, scribble. Zola was an extraordinary reporter (or "documenter," as he called himself) who had devoured the details of the Dreyfus case to the point where he knew as much about it as any judge, prosecutor, or law clerk. But that inconvenient detail of Zola's biography was soon forgotten. The new hero, the intellectual, didn't need to burden himself with the irksome toil of reporting or research. For that matter, he needed no particular education, no scholarly training, no philosophical grounding, no conceptual

frameworks, no knowledge of academic or scientific developments other than the sort of stuff you might pick up in Section 9 of the Sunday newspaper. Indignation about the powers that be and the bourgeois fools who did their bidding—that was all you needed. Bango! You were an intellectual.

From the very outset the eminence of this new creature, the intellectual, who was to play such a tremendous role in the history of the twentieth century, was inseparable from his *necessary* indignation. It was his indignation that elevated him to a plateau of moral superiority. Once up there, he was in a position to look down at the rest of humanity. And it hadn't cost him any effort, intellectual or otherwise. As Marshall McLuhan would put it years later: "Moral indignation is a technique used to endow the idiot with dignity." Precisely which intellectuals of the twentieth century were or were not idiots is a debatable point, but it is hard to argue with the definition I once heard a French diplomat offer at a dinner party: "An intellectual is a person knowledgeable in one field who speaks out only in others."

After World War I, American writers and scholars had the chance to go to Europe in large numbers for the first time. They got an eyeful of the Intellectual up close. That sneer, that high-minded aloofness from the mob, those long immaculate alabaster forefingers with which he pointed down at the rubble of a botched civilization—it was irresistible. The only problem was that when our neophyte intellectuals came back to the United States to strike the pose, there was no rubble to point at. Far from being a civilization in ruins, the United States had emerged from the war as the new star occupying the center of the world stage. Far from reeking of decadence, the United States had the glow of a young giant: brave, robust, innocent, and unsophisticated.

But young scribblers roaring drunk (as Nietzsche had predicted) on

skepticism, cynicism, irony, and contempt were in no mood to let such ... circumstances ... stand in the way. From the very outset the attempt of this country cousin, the American intellectual, to catch up with his urbane European model was touching, as only the strivings of a colonial subject can be. Throughout the twentieth century, the picture would never change (and today, a hundred years later, the sweaty little colonial still trots along at the heels of ... sahib). In the 1920s the first job was to catch up with the European intellectuals' mockery of the "bourgeoisie," which had begun a full forty years earlier. H. L. Mencken, probably the most brilliant American essayist of the twentieth century, led the way by pie-ing the American version of same with his term "the booboisie." In fiction the solution was to pull back the covers from this apple-cheeked, mom's-cooking country of ours and say, "There! Take a good look at what's underneath! Get a whiff of the rot just below the surface!"—the way Sinclair Lewis did it in *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Arrowsmith*, for which he became the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, and Sherwood Anderson did it in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Anderson's specialty was exposing the Middle American hypocrite, such as the rigidly proper, sexually twisted Peeping Tom Midwestern preacher. He created a stock character and a stock plot that others have been laboriously cranking out ever since in books, TV, and movies, from *Peyton Place* to *American Beauty*.

The Great Depression of the 1930s gave our version of this new breed, the intellectual, plenty of material to get wholesomely indignant about. For a change, America did look dreadful. But even then things weren't as blissfully vile as they were in Europe, the birthplace of the intellectual. Europe, after all, now had the Depression plus fascism. The solution was what became the specialty of our colonial intellectuals: the adjectival catch-up. Europe had real fascism? Well, we had "social fascism." And

what was that? That was the name Left intellectuals gave to Roosevelt's New Deal. Roosevelt's "reforms" merely masked the fascism whose dark night would soon descend upon America.

"Fascism" was, in fact, a Marxist coinage. Marxists borrowed the name of Mussolini's Italian party, the Fascisti, and applied it to Hitler's Nazis, adroitly papering over the fact that the Nazis, like Marxism's standard-bearers, the Soviet Communists, were revolutionary socialists. In fact, "Nazi" was (most annoyingly) shorthand for the National Socialist German Workers' Party. European Marxists successfully put over the idea that Nazism was the brutal, decadent last gasp of "capitalism." Few of their colonial cousins in America became doctrinaire, catechism-drilled Marxists, but most were soon enveloped in a heavy Marxist mist. The Marxist fable of the "capitalists" and the "bourgeoisie" oppressing "the masses"—"the proletariat"—took hold even among intellectuals who were anti-Marxist. Prior to the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, the American Communist Party had great success mobilizing the colonials on behalf of "anti-fascist" causes, such as the Loyalists' battle against the "fascist" Franco in the Spanish Civil War. "Anti-fascism" became a universal ray gun, good for zapping anybody, anywhere, from up here ... on the intellectuals' Everest of Indignation.

After World War II, this mental atmosphere led to a curious anomaly. By objective standards, the United States quickly became the most powerful, prosperous, and popular nation of all time. Militarily we developed the power to blow the entire planet to smithereens by turning a couple of keys in a missile silo; but even if it all blew, we also developed the power to escape, breaking the bonds of Earth's gravity and flying to the moon in history's most amazing engineering feat. And there was something still more amazing. The country turned into what the utopian socialists of the nineteenth century, the Saint-Simons and Fourier, had

dreamed about: an El Dorado where the average workingman would have the political freedom, the personal freedom, the money, and the free time to fulfill his potential in any way he saw fit. It got to the point where if you couldn't reach your tile mason or your pool cleaner, it was because he was off on a Royal Caribbean cruise with his third wife. And as soon as American immigration restrictions were relaxed in the 1960s, people of every land, every color, every religion, people from Africa, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, began pouring into the United States.

But our intellectuals dug in like terriers. Just as they had after World War I, they refused to buckle under to ... circumstances. They saw *through* El Dorado and produced the most inspired adjectival catchups of the twentieth century. Real fascism and genocide were finished after World War II, but the intellectuals used the Rosenberg case, the Hiss case, McCarthyism—the whole Communist Witch Hunt—and, above all, the war in Vietnam to come up with ... “incipient fascism” (Herbert Marcuse, much prized as a bona-fide European “Frankfurt School” Marxist who had moved to our shores), “preventive fascism” (Marcuse again), “local fascism” (Walter Lippmann), “brink of” fascism (Charles Reich), “informal Fascism” (Philip Green), “latent fascism” (Dotson Rader), not to mention the most inspired catch-up of all: “cultural genocide.” Cultural genocide referred to the refusal of American universities to have open admissions policies, so that any minority applicant could enroll without regard to GPAs and SATs and other instruments of latent-incipient-brink-of-fascist repression.

“Cultural genocide” was inspired, but in this entire *opéra bouffe* of fascism, racism, and fascist-racist genocide, the truly high note was hit by one Susan Sontag. In a 1967 article for *Partisan Review* entitled “What’s Happening to America,” she wrote: “The white race is the cancer of human history; it is the white race and it alone—its ideologies and

inventions—which eradicates autonomous populations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself.”

The white race is the cancer of human history? Who *was* this woman? Who and what? An anthropological epidemiologist? A renowned authority on the history of cultures throughout the world, a synthesizer of the magnitude of a Max Weber, a Joachim Wach, a Sir James Frazer, an Arnold Toynbee? Actually, she was just another scribbler who spent her life signing up for protest meetings and lumbering to the podium encumbered by her prose style, which had a handicapped parking sticker valid at *Partisan Review*. Perhaps she was exceptionally hell-bent on illustrating McLuhan’s line about indignation endowing the idiot with dignity, but otherwise she was just a typical American intellectual of the post—World War II period.

After all, having the faintest notion of what you were talking about was irrelevant. Any scholar or scientist who merely possessed profound knowledge in his or her own field did not qualify as an intellectual. The prime example was Noam Chomsky, a brilliant linguist who on his own figured out that language is a structure built into the very central nervous system of *Homo sapiens*, a theory that neuroscientists, lacking the instruments to do so heretofore, have only recently begun to verify. But Chomsky was not known as an intellectual until he denounced the war in Vietnam, something he knew absolutely nothing about—thereby qualifying for his new eminence.

American intellectuals of the Adjectival Fascism phase had a terrible year in 1989. In June, Chinese students in Beijing rebelled against the *ancien*

Maoist *regime*, defied the tanks, and brought out into Tiananmen Square a plaster statue, the *Goddess of Democracy*, who, with her arms lifted to the heavens, looked suspiciously like the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Who among the intellectuals ever would have suspected that Chinese dissidents had been looking to America as their model of freedom all along? Then on November 9 the Berlin Wall came down, and in no time the Soviet Union collapsed and its Eastern European empire disintegrated.

It was a mess, all right—no two ways about that. It made it damned hard to express your skepticism, your cynicism, your contempt, in Marxist terms. “Capitalism,” “proletariat,” “the masses,” “the means of production,” “infantile leftism,” “the dark night of fascism,” or even “anti-fascism”—all these things suddenly sounded, well, not so much *wrong ... as old ...* “Vulgar Marxism” it came to be called, vulgar in the sense of ... unsophisticated.

The important thing was not to admit you were wrong in any fundamental way. You couldn't let anybody get away with the notion that just because the United States had triumphed, and just because some unfortunate things had come out after the Soviet archives were opened up—I mean, damn!—it looks like Hiss and the Rosenbergs actually were Soviet agents—and even the Witch Hunt, which was one of the bedrocks of our beliefs—damn again!—these books by Klehr and Haynes, in the Yale series on American Communism, and Radosh and Weinstein make it pretty clear that while Joe McCarthy was the despicable liar we always knew he was, the American Communist Party really was devoted primarily to Soviet propaganda and espionage, and their spies really did penetrate the U.S. government at high levels. Yale!—so respectable, too!—how could they give their imprimatur to these renegade right-wing scholars who do this kind of stuff? Not to mention the Spanish Civil

War—*archives!* Turns out the Loyalists secretly called in the Soviets at the very outset of hostilities—and if they'd won, Spain would have been the first Soviet puppet state!

And now Vietnam, our other bedrock, the holiest of all our causes—those damnable archives again! How could anybody be so perfidious as to open up secret records? They make it look like the Soviets and the Chinese, in concert with the North Vietnamese Communists, were manipulating the Vietcong all along! They make it look like America's intervention in Vietnam was some kind of idealistic crusade, fought solely to stop the onslaught of Communism's slave-hunting Magyar hordes in Southeast Asia!

The main thing is to make sure we don't let them use this stuff to invalidate the way we ascended the Olympian peaks of aloofness for seven decades, from November 11, 1918, the end of World War I, to November 9, 1989, the day the Wall fell. The fact that America won the Cold War does not wash away the stains America left during the Cold War, does it? We've still got the devil himself, the brute, Joe McCarthy, and Richard Nixon and the House Committee on Un-American Activities and all that crowd, who cost a lot of people in Hollywood and academia their jobs, don't we? And racism? The mere fact that the powers that be gave everybody all these so-called civil rights and voting rights doesn't mean that virulent and peculiarly American disease has been eliminated, does it? Not by any means!

This urge to expose the fallacy of "American triumphalism" has led to a poignant moment here in the year 2000. For eleven years now, ever since Tiananmen Square and the fall of the Wall, people in the former

empire of the Soviet Union have been looking to the United States for the very principles of living in a condition of freedom. East European college students will startle you with their knowledge of America's own struggle for freedom two and a quarter centuries ago. In 1993, in New York, I happened to meet a Hungarian student who knew speeches by the great orator of the American Revolution, Patrick Henry, by heart, and not just his famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech of 1775, either, but also his 1765 Stamp Act speech, the one before the colonial House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. He could recite it verbatim:

"Caesar had his Brutus; Charles the First, his Cromwell; and George the Third—'

"'Treason!' cried out the Speaker of the House. 'Treason!'

"—may profit by their example,' said Patrick Henry. 'If *this* be treason ... make the most of it!'"

Young people like him in Eastern Europe, where writers such as Solzhenitsyn and Václav Havel were the very keepers of the flame of freedom, have naturally sought out American literary figures to learn of the great democratic principles of the freest nation on earth. But almost without exception, American writers are ... intellectuals. If our young Hungarian were to walk up to an American intellectual and recite Patrick Henry's Stamp Act speech, he would receive in response only (in Thomas Mann's phrase) a hollow silence.

Where else can the millions recently freed from the late Soviet tyranny turn? To America's clergy? Alas, except for the rare brave Roman Catholic padre, America's clergy have become irrelevant to public opinion, unless they yield to the temptation—and many have—to become intellectuals themselves.

That leaves our academic philosophers, our year 2000 versions of

Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and David Hume. Here we come upon one of the choicest chapters in the human comedy. Today, at any leading American university, a Kant, with all his dithering about God, freedom, and immortality, or even a Hume, wouldn't survive a year in graduate school, much less get hired as an instructor. The philosophy departments, history departments, English and comparative literature departments, and, at many universities, anthropology, sociology, and even psychology departments are now divided, in John L'Heureux's delicious terminology (*The Handmaid of Desire*), into the Young Turks and the Fools. Most Fools are old, mid-fifties, early sixties, but a Fool can be any age, twenty-eight as easily as fifty-eight, if he is one of that minority on the faculty who still believe in the old nineteenth-century Germanic modes of so-called objective scholarship. Today the humanities faculties are hives of abstruse doctrines such as structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, reader-response theory, commodification theory ... The names vary, but the subtext is always the same: Marxism may be dead, and the proletariat has proved to be hopeless. They're all at sea with their third wives. But we can find new proletariats whose ideological benefactors we can be—women, non-whites, put-upon white ethnics, homosexuals, transsexuals, the polymorphously perverse, pornographers, prostitutes (sex workers), hardwood trees—which we can use to express our indignation toward the powers that be and our aloofness to their bourgeois stooges, to keep the flame of skepticism, cynicism, irony, and contempt burning. This will not be Vulgar Marxism; it will be ... Rococo Marxism, elegant as a Fragonard, sly as a Watteau. We won't get too hung up on political issues, which never seem to work out right anyway. Instead, we will expose the stooges' so-called truths, which the Fools ignorantly cultivate, and deconstruct their self-deluding concoctions of eternal verities. We will

show how the powers that be manipulate, with poisonous efficiency, the very language we speak in order to imprison us in an “invisible panopticon,” to use the late French “poststructuralist” Michel Foucault’s term.

Foucault and another Frenchman, Jacques Derrida, are the great idols of Rococo Marxism in America. Could it be otherwise? Today, as throughout the twentieth century, our intellectuals remain sweaty little colonials, desperately trotting along, trying to catch up, catch up, catch up with the way the idols do it in France, which is through Theory, Theory, Theory. In this pursuit, some colonials inevitably run faster than others, and leading the pack currently are two academicians, Stanley Fish and Judith Butler. Before the Wall came down, the archetypal American intellectual was a mere scribbler who joyfully hoisted himself up to the status of intellectual. Since the Wall came down, the archetypal American intellectual is the scholar who has joyfully lowered himself to the status of mere intellectual. If Nietzsche’s already fabulous powers of prophecy had been specific enough to dream up a couple of characters to dramatize the deconstruction of Truth with a capital T that he foresaw, he would have dreamed up Fish and Butler and thrust them into *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Fish is a sixty-one-year-old Milton scholar with a Ph.D. from Yale. Or a lapsed Milton scholar; he achieved stardom as the Rococo head of the English Department at Duke and now has been commissioned by the University of Illinois at Chicago, for \$230,000 a year plus perks (big-time stuff in academia), to assemble a stable of Rococo stars in para-proletariat studies, not excluding, he says, study of “body parts, excretory functions, the sex trade, dildos, bisexuality, transvestism, and lesbian pornography.” Fish says such things with a true Swiftian gusto, relishing the inevitable alarm that ensues. As colonial Rococovists go, he cuts a uniquely dashing figure, driving a vintage Jaguar, a long scarf

furled about his neck, à la Théophile Gautier. In his rakishness and mischievous gleam, he differs markedly from the cranky deconstruction crews who follow him. He does wear sweaters with no shirt visible underneath, however, just as nearly all Young Turks, male or female, affect some sort of Generation X garb—sweatshirts, T-shirts, jeans, sneakers, all-black Young Artists outfits—in order to out-casual and out-Young the Fools, who are still stuck back in the Tweedy Prof mode.

On the conceptual level, Fish is best known for his “reader-response theory,” which holds that literary texts mean nothing in themselves, that meaning is only a mental construct concocted by the reader. It is a short step from this premise to the argument that the powers that be have had a picnic loading the language with terminology calculated to make you concoct the mental constructs they want you to concoct in order to manipulate your mind.

May I offer an arch and perhaps familiar but clear example? Recently I came across a woman at one of our top universities who taught a course in Feminist Theory and gave her students F’s if they spelled the plural of the female of the species “women” on a test or in a paper. She insisted on “womyn,” since the powers that be, at some point far back in the mists of history, had built male primacy into the very language itself by making “women” 60 percent “men.” How did the students react? They shrugged. They have long since learned the futility of objecting to Rococo Marxism. They just write “womyn” and go about the business of grinding out a credit in the course.

One student told me the only problem was that when she wrote her papers on her word processor and used spell check, all hell broke loose. “You get these little wavy red lines all over the screen, under ‘womyn.’ Spell check doesn’t have ‘womyn.’” Then she shrugged. “Or at least mine doesn’t.”

The undisputed queen of feminist theory is Judith Butler, a forty-four-year-old Hegel scholar with (like Fish) a Ph.D. from Yale, who is also known as the diva of Queer Studies. She is small and not very prepossessing, but graduate students all over the country say “diva” at the mere mention of her name. A group of them put out a fan magazine called *Judy!* devoted to chronicling the way she rams home her “performativity” theory of speech and sexual behavior as forms of anarchy.

“All gender roles are an imitation for which there is no original,” runs her most famous paradox. She is even more famous for her convoluted Theoryses. In 1998 the journal *Philosophy and Literature* named her winner of their Bad Writing Contest for a sentence that began “The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation ...”—and went on for fifty-nine words more. Her zine fans love the insouciant yet erudite way she dismisses such attacks. “Ponderousness,” she says, referring to Hegel, “is part of the phenomenological challenge of his text.”

The battle of the Fools versus the Young Turks has escalated beyond words, however. In 1987 the traditionalists formed a self-defense organization called the National Association of Scholars; 1,000 joined. In a public statement, Fish, while at Duke, branded them with the R word, the S word, and the H word—racist, sexist, and homophobic—and sent a memo to Duke’s provost recommending that no member of the tainted organization be allowed on key university committees. The provost refused. The Scholars accused Fish of trying to blacklist them. At more than one major university, Young Turks roamed about in Gen X clothes, red ballpoint pens at the ready, sniffing out deviationists ... sexists ...

racists ... classists (*sic*) ... homophobes ... ethnophobes ... The stories of Young Turks nudging and whispering to keep graduate students away from Fool courses, to the point where some Fool ends up with zero students for the year, would make a fairly grisly chapter in a book.

In the face of such confidence and aggressiveness on the part of the Young Turks and such devotion on the part of their graduate-student T.A. followers, who is left to support a student in her misgivings about “womyn” or any other manifestation of Rococo Marxism? Her other teachers? Some dean? The university’s president? The most unlikely of all, believe me, is the president.

Recently I met a student who told me he was taking a cross-disciplinary course entitled Civilizations of North America. “Cross-disciplinary” is a fashionable term in academia just now, not to be confused with the old (Fool) term “interdisciplinary,” which refers to the use of concepts from two or more conventional scholarly disciplines to study a particular subject, such as using the concepts of sociology and economics to write history. No, “cross-disciplinary” refers to crossing all disciplines ... much the way a 747 crosses the North Pole at 40,000 feet above an impenetrable cloud cover ... on the way to a single destination: Rococo Marxism. So the instructor informs the class that while Americans might have more money, possessions, technological advantages, and conveniences than Mexicans or Canadians, when it comes to “social cleavages”—along the lines of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and regional imbalances—Americans are the primitives. On this subject—life’s fundamentals—we need to take lessons at the knees of the Mexicans and the Canadians.

The Canadians? The Mexicans? No kidding? ... Didn’t the French of Quebec province get so bitter about the British majority that they almost

seceded from Canada just five years ago? And just six years ago didn't the Indians in Mexico's southernmost province, Chiapas, rise up in an armed rebellion? And gender ... gosh ... isn't it an open secret that foreign corporations like to employ women on their assembly lines in Mexico because Mexican women are taught all their lives to submit to male authority? Or am I dreaming?

Shrugging: "Hey, I don't know. That's what he told us."

By now, in the year 2000, that's what anyone is apt to do ... shrug and go on about his business. For eighty-two years now, America's intellectuals, right on time, as Nietzsche predicted it, have expressed their skepticism toward American life. And, as the French say, "Skepticism soon hardens into contempt." As any Fool sociologist could tell you, there are only two objectively detectable social classes in America: people above the bachelor's-degree line—i.e., people who have graduated from four-year colleges—and people below it, who haven't. By now people above it have learned to shrug and acquiesce to "political correctness," to Rococo Marxism, because they know that to oppose it out loud is in poor taste. It is a ... breach of the etiquette you must observe to establish yourself as an educated person.

Meanwhile, in the ranks of people below that sheerly dividing line, the bachelor's degree, all those limo drivers and cable TV linesmen on the cruises, there are plenty who voice their opposition—at night, over cigarettes, in the ship's Palais Doré cocktail lounge ... muttering, grouching, grouching, muttering ... all the while doubting their own common sense. Is it any wonder, then, when survey after survey shows Americans entering the Second American Century, the Pax Americana, in a state of ... whatever ...

We are left, finally, with one question. What exactly do the intellectuals

want out of their Rococo Marxist mental acrobatics? Is it change they want, change for all the para-proletariats whose ideological benefactors they proclaim themselves to be? Of course not. Actual change would involve irksome toil. So what do they want?

It's a simple business, at bottom. All the intellectual wants, in his heart of hearts, is to hold on to what was magically given to him one shining moment a century ago. He asks for nothing more than to remain aloof, removed, as Revel once put it, from the mob, the philistines ... "the middle class."

Just think of the fun Nietzsche could have had, if only God were not dead! Think of what it would have been like for him if he could have lolled for the past hundred years—he died in 1900—on a king-size cloud in Heaven, with angels playing Richard Strauss (he had given up on Wagner) in harp quartets as he gazed down upon the creatures only he had been brilliant enough to foresee ... the barbaric brethren ... the world warriors ... the Truth demolition crews prowling about in children's clothes ... A prophet, I presume, enjoys seeing his prophecies come true, but I have the feeling Nietzsche would have become bored by a hundred years of ... "the intellectual" ... I can almost hear that hortatory and apostrophic voice of his: How could you writers and academics have settled for such an easy, indolent role—for so long! How could you have chosen a facile snobbery over the hard work, the endless work, the Herculean work of gaining knowledge? I think he would have shaken his head over their ponderous, amateurish theories of cognition and sexuality. I think he would have grown weary of their dogged skepticism, cynicism, irony, and contempt and would have said, Why don't you admit it to me (no one need know—after all, I'm dead): if you must rate nations, at this moment in history your "accursed" America is the very micrometer by which all others must be measured.

And he would have been right.

The Marxists of the Soviets' East European empire had their Havel; the Marxists of the Soviet Union itself, their Solzhenitsyn; and the Rococo Marxists of America—

“Chauvinism!” cry the intellectuals. “Patriotism!”

—may profit by their example. If *this* be patriotism ... make the most of it!