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Essay by Mark Bauerlein

## RADICAL PROPHET



IN 1987, NOT LONG AFTER DAVID HOROWITZ had completed his transition from '60s radical to '80s conservative, he received a letter from an ex-comrade. They'd just had a political argument over the phone, and she wanted to close the conversation with a summary of his renunciation of the hard Left. They had both been Red Diaper babies, classmates at the Sunnyside Progressive School, and children of members of a Communist enclave in Queens. Now, her companion of the barricades had decided to back "the vile policies of Ronald Reagan." Why?

She spends one paragraph clarifying her own position relative to Stalinism and socialism ("[T]here are classes and the rich are not on the same side as the rest of us. They exploit"). When she turns to Horowitz, however, we get a wholly different explanation. Horowitz hadn't yet written *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* (1997), a powerful account of his path from the anti-war movement and the Black Panthers to the Republican Party, but she already grasped the cause.

I can't help thinking that the views you now hold are psychological rather than intellectual in origin.... [Y]ou are operating from an emotional position which surpasses rational thinking. Also...you appear to be lacking a capacity to tolerate ambiguity.

Note the diagnostic turn. Horowitz had changed his politics, but not because he'd seen how the Left had abandoned South Vietnam once the U.S. Army had pulled out; or because the apocalyptic turn the Left had taken by 1970 (the Weathermen, etc.) frightened him; or because the "blame America first" attitude applied so poorly to places such as Cambodia, Cuba, and the Soviet Union circa 1985. (These were reasons Horowitz had given that year in a *Washington Post* column entitled "Goodbye to All That," written with Peter Collier). No, to Horowitz's old friend, the causes could only be pathological. A psychic defect—that's the root of his apostasy. He's too upset; he can't handle ambiguity; he's irrational. Socialists know the world is complicated, but his mind

has grown neurotically simplistic. That's why he joined the Right.

The allegation hurt, Horowitz admits. But it signified something important about his former companions, enough to lead him to reprint the letter in *Ruling Ideas*, the ninth and last volume of his personal-historical account of left-wing radicalism from the '50s forward. The name of the full project is *The Black Book of the American Left*. It echoes a powerful study from 20 years ago, *The Black Book of Communism* (first published in France in 1997 under the title *Le livre noir du communisme*), which used recently-opened archives from behind the Iron Curtain to estimate the casualties of 20th-century Communism at more than 90 million people. The book was a sensation in Europe, for many a decisive termination of leftist whitewashing. I once asked the Marxist historian Eugene Genovese how he could have remained a Communist through the '60s and '70s once evidence of the show trials and the Gulag had been confirmed. He replied, "We believed that if the workers' paradise was going to happen, one generation would have to be sacrificed." *The Black Book of Communism* showed how

far the utopians had underestimated the cost without delivering the benefit.

### Lifetime Achievement

**T**HE BLACK BOOK OF THE AMERICAN Left is intended to perform the same service, telling the truth about a political movement that still inspires flashy reappearances (such as Beyoncé's Black Panther-style Super Bowl show and those Che Guevara t-shirts). Most of the entries in the collection have already been published; they are compiled here as the lifetime achievement of a culture warrior—or, rather, half a life's achievement, for only the conservative works are included, not books and essays written by the socialist Horowitz in the '60s, and not his editorial work at *Ramparts* magazine, leading organ of the New Left until its closure in 1975. (He remembers one cover of the magazine printed during the 1972 presidential campaign, which showed a photograph of the My Lai atrocity with a sign posted amidst the corpses stating "Re-Elect the President.") John Fonte reviewed the first two volumes in the *CRB's* Summer 2014 issue, emphasizing their correction of the sentimental version of the Left that appears in high school textbooks and in popular media, particularly the re-framing of leftism as merely liberalism in a more aggressive mode. Since then, seven more volumes organized by theme have been published—*The Great Betrayal*, *Culture Wars*, *Progressive Racism*—each one an exposé of goals and methods of people whom Fonte termed "the Left's frauds and poseurs who have come to be lionized."

The aim is to de-romanticize the Left, to undercut idealized, softened versions of radical aims and deeds with Horowitz's own eyewitness accounts. He was there, he was one of them, a member of Huey Newton's circle, a community organizer in the Oakland ghetto, urging leftists to support Ronald Reagan for governor of California on the supposition that the election of a genuine fascist would help bring on the revolution. His argument against the radical Left stands on this testimony, what he saw and heard, especially outside the public space, where his former brethren spoke more honestly of their purposes.

The first volume, entitled *My Life and Times*, illustrated how the autobiographical critique works. We get, for instance, the tale of Ann Colloms. She was the mother of a childhood friend, outwardly a conscientious progressive American, inwardly an ardent partisan of Communism. Many years later, in the late '70s, she came to Horowitz to reveal something that had happened before the war. In 1940, the party selected her for a special

mission. She was to carry a sealed envelope to Mexico, meet an unnamed contact at an appointed place, hand him the paper, and return home—and be told nothing else about the job. Horowitz remembered her as a modest,

afterward did her role as a link in some sort of lethal communication chain become clear, when she learned that Leon Trotsky had been murdered in Mexico City.

She was old by the time she visited Horowitz, but the episode still troubled her. She had to confess to someone, choosing him, we presume, because she'd heard about his drift away from the Left. He presents her as a lesson in what the party demanded: you must depersonalize yourself. Anti-Stalinist socialists such as the young Horowitz idolized Trotsky, but he nonetheless treats her with sympathy. No analysis of ideology is needed to complete the story, only the emotional toll the ideology took.

### True Believers

**T**HE CURRENT VOLUME, *RULING IDEAS*, supplies more myth-busting reminiscences. We read about his mentor Isaac Deutscher, the historian of Communism who extolled Trotsky as a Romantic hero; Jessica Mitford, the renowned muckraker who tried to get a progressive journal that had accepted Horowitz and Collier's critical account of the Panthers to censor it before publication; Ellen Sparer, another childhood friend, party member, and Queens College instructor who was raped and murdered by a student she had refused to recognize as dangerous because of his belonging to "the oppressed"; and Christopher Hitchens, who doesn't fit the category of naïve believer or unrepentant radical (more on this below).

Horowitz's own father is the saddest case. A decisive event in his life took place in 1953, a few short years after the passage of a New York state law that barred Communists from serving as public schoolteachers. For 29 years, the elder Horowitz had taught at Seward Park High School in the Lower East Side. He had a family to support, and he needed the job, but "[h]e was ready to stand up to his inquisitors...[t]o defend his Party and its cause." As Horowitz recalls it, the interrogation would allow his father to enter "the drama of history" and prove his loyalty.

But he didn't do it. The party decided that it would be better if Mr. Horowitz declared himself the victim of anti-Semitism. It was a dodge, humiliating because he had always been proud of having "left his Jewish ghetto behind." One man's conscience didn't matter, though. "When his moment came," Horowitz continues, "my father followed the Party line as he always had done." He was fired for his Communism and couldn't even walk away with the dignity of having upheld it.

Mr. Horowitz and Ms. Colloms are the tragic figures in Horowitz's drama of the

#### Books by David Horowitz discussed in this essay:

*Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* (1996). Free Press, 480 pages, \$29.95 (paper)

*The Black Book of the American Left: The Collected Conservative Writings of David Horowitz:*

*Volume I: My Life and Times* (2013). Encounter Books, 416 pages, \$17.99 (paper)

*Volume II: Progressives* (2014). Second Thought Books, 343 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume III: The Great Betrayal* (2014). Second Thought Books, 256 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume IV: Islamo-Fascism and the War Against the Jews* (2015). Second Thought Books, 354 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume V: Culture Wars* (2015). Second Thought Books, 256 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume VI: Progressive Racism* (2016). Encounter Books, 320 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume VII: The Left in Power: Clinton to Obama* (2016). Second Thought Books, 256 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume VIII: The Left in the University* (2017). Second Thought Books, 256 pages, \$27.99 (cloth)

*Volume IX: Ruling Ideas* (2018). Second Thoughts Books, 338 pages, \$27.99

middle-class woman in all other affairs, with a baby to feed and a household to run. But this duty transcended all that. "It was the Party that spoke, but it was History that called," Horowitz explains, "and she answered." Only

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American Left, true believers who had nowhere to go once the god had failed. Their faith was genuine, and they never relinquished it. But it grew ever more detached from immediate realities (Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin, Soviet repression in Hungary and Prague, the endurance of capitalism in the United States, etc.), not to mention requiring personal sacrifices that contradicted the humanitarian ideals of the faith, and they sank into despondency. Though the lies they told and the damage they did are long past, their broken condition is worth remembering because it reveals the individual suffering and moral bankruptcy of an ideology that is easily soft-pedaled because it never produced mass killing in America.

When Horowitz started writing against the Left in the 1980s, Norman Podhoretz advised him to switch subjects. Why bother with fringe characters who have no political clout anymore?

Podhoretz might have chosen Elaine Brown as an example. Horowitz had extensive contact with her during the mid-'70s, during which time she chaired the Panthers in Huey Newton's absence (he had fled to Cuba after murdering an Oakland prostitute). She had considerable local power, nearly winning a seat on the Oakland City Council, serving as a Jerry Brown delegate at the 1976 Democratic Convention, and conspiring with Tony Kline—former Panthers lawyer and member of Brown's Cabinet—to fill vacant judgeships in California.

Rumor had it that she collected a \$450,000 advance for her memoir, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. And after it was published in 1992, writes Horowitz in Volume I, she was accompanied on her book tour by "Huey's old gunman, Flores Forbes, who had served his four years on a second degree murder charge." Horowitz also remembers her screaming into the phone at a local TV host, "I will kill you motherf---er," if he proceeded with plans to interview Bobby Seale, who'd been run out of the Panther Party a few months earlier. When Horowitz asked her about Betty Van Patter, a woman whom the Panthers had hired (on his recommendation) as a bookkeeper prior to her disappearance and murder, she told him, "If you were to get run over by a car or something, David, I would be very upset, because people would say I did it." (Brown came to Emory University many years ago during Martin Luther King, Jr., week, and the deference showed her every second was something to behold.) To expend energy on her or on washed-up radicals such as Tom Hayden and dozens of lesser-known figures who pop up in the *Black Book* was to overlook a more potent adversary—the liberals, not the leftists, Podhoretz

said. Horowitz doesn't name names, but we may presume Podhoretz meant people such as Jimmy Carter and Garry Wills who were soft on foreign policy and hard on Reagan. They held real power in politics and culture; Stokely Carmichael and Abbie Hoffman didn't. Two years after his conversation with Podhoretz, Huey Newton was shot dead on an Oakland sidewalk by an angry drug dealer.

True, Horowitz concedes, they're marginal now, but the ideas and tactics of the radical Left haven't faded along with them. The sublime visions of equality and happiness that are assumed by conservatives as well as liberals to lie behind the strong-arm tactics of the Left have become orthodoxy in the cultural, intellectual, and professional zones of American society—and, of course, in the Democratic Party. In the Introduction to *Ruling Ideas*, Horowitz says, "When I began the project of describing this movement in the 1980s, the emergence of the left as a mainstream force in America's political life was fairly recent and inadequately understood." Its triumph in the 21st century was demonstrated perfectly by soon-to-be-president Barack Obama in 2008, when he

## The Horowitz of 20 or 30 years ago looks all-too-prescient.

spoke of "fundamentally transforming the United States of America" (Volume VII is entitled *The Left in Power: Clinton to Obama*). President Obama didn't look and sound like a '60s radical—no bad behavior, a bourgeois family life—but he readily politicized the IRS and other agencies, inserted gender identity into regulations never intended for it, and was entirely comfortable with rappers in the White House. There you see the liberal accommodation of the Left, the same beliefs and goals but with a lighter touch. When CEOs of corporate America join the White House in pushing diversity initiatives and transgender policies that mirror forms of radical social engineering, we know that the Left didn't die on Election Day 1980 or on November 9, 1989, when East Germans poured over the Berlin Wall and soldiers held their fire.

### Insanity Defense

LEFTIST MANEUVERS, TOO, HAVE BECOME commonplace. The judgment Horowitz's childhood friend leveled at him in the letter she wrote after their disputa-

tious phone call is a good example. She labels him psychologically disturbed, but Horowitz knows well enough not to get involved in the hopeless task of proving his innocence, i.e., his sanity. To judge a dissenter mentally unbalanced is an old Communist procedure. In Volume VIII of the series, *The Left in the University*, Horowitz notes that academics have thoroughly adopted it in their Cold War historiography, the "consensus" version, in the words of an approving professor whom Horowitz quotes, starting with the premise that "an exaggerated, irrational fear of communism...created an atmosphere of persecution and hysteria." It is sometimes difficult to realize how drastic is this sweeping thesis of conservative irrationality, perhaps because of its long legacy, running from *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), an influential sociological study led by Theodor Adorno that aligned fascist leanings with right-wing beliefs, to President Obama's infamous remark about working-class whites: "[T]hey get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."

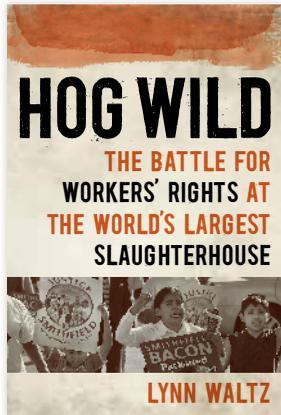
Many liberal columnists and hosts now take conservatism-as-pathology as a starting point, and establishment conservatives haven't responded effectively. This is another instance in which the Right has failed to understand how the Left operates, Horowitz believes. In the letter cited above, we have a leftist friend offering to fathom a renegade's error by probing his psyche, an act that could be taken as a mode of sympathy, or at least as a wider awareness of him than his politics alone. But that would only repeat a foolish mistake by the Right, the one, Horowitz writes, whereby "conservatives imprudently accepted the left's deceptive claims to be 'liberal' and 'progressive,' ascribing to it idealistic intentions." To take the psychological query at face value is to miss how it alters the debate, insidiously so, and not in the way conservatives have come to expect. For a long time, conservatives have charged leftists with politicizing everything and everyone, but the diagnostic move does the opposite. It de-politicizes the conservative. Whatever political opinions he holds dissipate once we view him as a fragile, deluded ego. Conservatism, then, is no longer a political outlook which must be opposed by democratic means. It's a psychosocial condition, and that's not something you debate. Instead, you confine the sufferer.

It doesn't take much arrogance to sustain that diagnostic approach when a settled community of liberals reinforces it, and condescension is their default mode of handling conservatives. Besides, Horowitz notes, a pleasing self-

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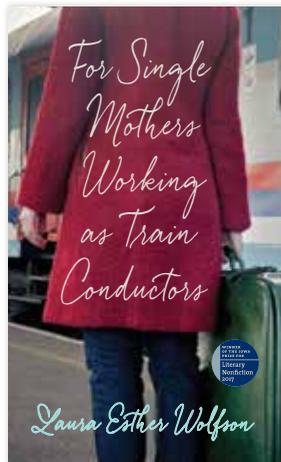


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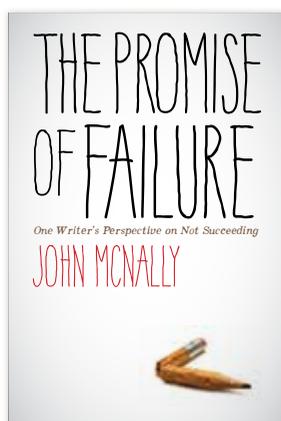
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opinion accompanies it: "People who identify with the left often ask the following question: How is it possible for decent human beings *not* to be progressive like us?" If that's your primary judgment of people who differ from you politically, then you cannot recognize their differences as political. They must be pathological, yes, or just stupid or venal. And what are you? Compassionate and informed.

### Radical Superficiality

A 47-PAGE REFLECTION ON CHRISTOPHER Hitchens is the last piece of Horowitz's writing in the present volume, and it is the longest sustained discussion of any one figure in the entire project. At first it isn't clear why he includes it. They met once in 1970 in Berkeley, but not again until 1982, and Hitchens was never part of the American Left from which Horowitz escaped over the course of those intervening years. True, Hitchens never relinquished his admiration of old radicals, and his hatred of all religions didn't flag, either. But he also renounced the anti-patriotism of the Left after the 9/11 attacks, and he often acknowledged the obsolescence of socialist thinking in the 21st century. He doesn't resemble the other figures in this history. Hitchens was, famously, a contrarian, a man of "unruly contradictions," Horowitz notes, who opposed the Vietnam war but approved the invasion of Iraq, a pro-lifer and a dogmatic feminist. Indeed, this independent streak, expressed with "roguish charm and sparkling literacy," accounts for his high station in the intellectual world from the time he became the *Nation's* most popular columnist in the '80s to his death from esophageal cancer in 2011.

Horowitz attributes his eminent contrariness to something else, though, not to independence but to a certain kind of superficiality. The occasion for Horowitz's profile is the publication of Hitchens' memoir, *Hitch-22* (2010), which he lauds for its entertaining wit and enfant terrible persona. But, he states, a crucial factor is missing. In this account of an eventful life and personal struggles, Horowitz writes, we get no real "introspective curiosity integral to such a task or the interior probing that would unwrap his mysteries both for himself and others." Hitchens terms the death of his mother, who killed herself in Athens in a suicide pact with the clergyman with whom she had run off, a "lacerating, howling moment in my life." It happened four decades before, when Hitchens was only 24, and he remembers her as a vibrant, cosmopolitan woman, the sweetness and light of his childhood. But the remembrance never turns too far inward onto himself. Hitchens doesn't explore how her suicide affected him.

Instead, he composes "A Coda on the Question of Self-Slaughter," which, Horowitz says, reads like "an academic paper on the psychology and sociology of suicide."

The habit of stopping short of introspection is repeated over and over. Hitchens mentions, for instance, "the experience of feeling that you are hooked to the great steam engine of history," and we expect to hear why it appealed to him, individually and at a certain time and place. But "Christopher makes no attempt to provide answers, nor does it seem likely that he even asked himself the questions."

Horowitz contrasts this reluctance with his own memoir, *Radical Son*, an odyssey of relentless self-confrontation that includes portraits of the interior lives of his parents and fellow revolutionaries. We anticipate a similar effort from Hitchens after he learns he has cancer and thinks about his children living on without their father. But he digs no deeper than this: "I'd have to say, not to be a hypocrite, that my life is my writing before it is anything. Because that's who I am and my children come later and that's what they've had to put up with."

This indisposition to look inside, to assess elemental motives and specific wrongs—"that's who I am"—is in Horowitz's opinion a characteristic trait of the exuberant progressive. Hitchens talks at length about himself, but not too deeply. That indicates why he was able to bounce from one position to another, inconsistent one. Excess self-consciousness would paralyze him. Introspection slows a man's judgments and narrows them to a linear path. A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds! In not examining himself, his past beliefs and words, Hitchens could occupy a conflictual middle ground, taking half-steps away from radical ideas that he acknowledged were misguided, but without submitting them and himself to full analysis and regret. Radicals don't like to scrutinize themselves except to make sure they remain true to the radical faith. If they did, they'd no longer be radicals. Hitchens deserves to be the capstone profile of *The Black Book of the American Left* for this very reason.

### War Without End

FOR MANY YEARS, DAVID HOROWITZ was deemed unseemly by establishment conservative intellectuals, editors, and journalists. He's too blunt and confrontational, they worried. One heard that he had changed his politics for the better, but the style was still Berkeley, 1966. In 2003 when he initiated his Academic Bill of Rights campaign (recorded in Volume VIII), Republicans held the presidency and both houses of



Congress, and they might get three openings on the Supreme Court. Why stir up trouble on campus, where everyone despises us? He published *Hating Whitey and Other Progressive Causes* in 1999, and mounted a war on the reparations movement soon after, inserting editorials in newspapers listing reasons why African Americans were lucky to live in the United States, not in Africa. This was just the kind of racial controversy Republican politicians wanted to avoid. Didn't Horowitz know that race issues are a loser for conservatives?

Yes, Horowitz struck people in 2003—including those on the Right—as an exaggerator and dramatizer. Oh, they acknowledged, a few wild leftists may be found in academic “studies” departments and advocacy organizations such as BAMN (By Any Means Necessary) and ACT UP, a gay advocacy group popular in the '90s, but they have no impact on the country at large. We've got a Texas Christian in the White House!

Fifteen years later, everything looks different. We hear more talk about white supremacy than we've heard since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, and it issues from the high rungs of the Democratic Party. Mainstream news outlets echo the contentions of the leftist hate monitor Southern Poverty Law Center, as if it were the nation's racial conscience. The mayor

of New York City wants to block Chick-fil-A from the boroughs because its CEO espouses a biblical conception of marriage, while the cast of the most popular Broadway show of our time steps out of character to chastise the vice president in the audience for his backward views. Corporate America trembles in fear of leftist boycotts and knows that a mob is ready to form should an incident take place that can be fitted to a victim narrative.

Most of all, a good portion of the population, goaded by media, academia, the arts and entertainment worlds, and other zones dominated by leftist views, refuses to accept the results of the recent election. The Ideal Man was supposed to be succeeded by the First Woman, not an alpha-male throwback. November 8, 2016, was a trauma, and they can't get over it. The ordinary machinery of democratic conflict and resolution doesn't interest them. Two hundred feet down the street from my residence, a large banner hangs from the second story windows, a white “RESIST” on a black background. Nothing more, just the one word.

Summer 2018 makes the Horowitz of 20 or 30 years ago look all-too-prescient. He warned conservatives in alarming terms of what was to come; he reminded leftists of their embarrassing misdeeds; he refused to glorify the good old days of agitation, and instead tallied the dam-

age they did and continue to do; he chose the most sensitive issues of race, free speech, and the meaning of America, telling conservatives that they could not run from them. Irving Kristol announced in 2001 that conservatives had lost the culture wars (though he reserved religion as a force the Left hadn't quite vanquished). Horowitz disagrees—not, however, because he thinks that the Left hasn't scored victory after victory; he disagrees that the Left thinks the war is over. It's never over, not for them. In the progressive mind, Horowitz insists, there is always so much more to do.

Conservatives who believe that capitulating on same-sex marriage or any other hot progressive desire will bring calm are naïve. That's Horowitz's lesson today. As long as the Left has influence in American politics, we'll be caught in a culture war whether we like it or not. To be a conservative culture warrior; to see the Left not as one segment of a pluralistic American *polis*, but as an illiberal, not-so-secret Fifth Column eager to monopolize civic life and private affairs; to regard the 2016 election as a Flight 93 situation—these are not alarmist reactions. They are sensible responses to a zealous adversary.

*Mark Bauerlein is professor of English at Emory University and a senior editor of First Things.*



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