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Influences of the post-World War II era on the American political theater, 1968–1972

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City University of New York, 1990

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INFLUENCES OF THE POST-WORLD WAR II ERA ON THE AMERICAN POLITICAL THEATER, 1968-1972

by

Lydia Alix Gerson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1990

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Introduction

From 1968 to 1972, years which many historians have determined as encompassing the most focussed characteristics of the sixties as a whole, the United States underwent enormous political upheaval which affected every one of its major institutions. A list of the many events from the period would produce a litany of social unrest, from the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., to the Chicago Convention riots in 1968; from the formation of the Black Panther Party to the exposure of Watergate and the Kent State riot. The list would include also the general strike by four hundred colleges and universities in response to the Kent State killings; the 1968 burning of draft records by a group, soon to be known as the Catonsville Nine; the 1971 Attica uprisings; the dispatch from Phu Bai which revealed that in 1972 fifty out of 172 GIs refused to go out on patrol.[1] Much of the agenda of Gay Rights activists was articulated in the latter part of this period, as was that of various feminist groups which voiced their objections to the confining restraints of women's roles in

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mid-century America. And everywhere there was evidence of the alienation of thousands of the young from a lifestyle they found sterile.

Anti-establishment activists coalesced into a nexus of forces generally known as the Movement.[2] The movement is defined here generally--underneath its rubric were subsumed groups with interests as varied as withdrawal from Vietnam to Gay Lib--as a confederation of special interest groups who perceived a disparity in America's promise of equality and justice for all and her practice and resolved to combine forces to effect social change.

From New York to Los Angeles both mainstream and alternative theater reflected movement concerns. Indeed, a great many of the personnel of political theater of the period were derived from the movement and considered themselves politicos, first. On many an occasion, political theater troupes, such as the San Francisco Mime, the East Bay Sharks, or the Bread and Puppet lent their skills to movement activities.[3] Newspapers from the period are peppered with notes concerning _ad hoc_ groups organized to perform an agit-prop or skit on one occasion or another. For this study, over four hundred plays and scenarios were unearthed, dealing with such subjects as war, fascism, racism, imperialism and sexism.

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Yet the ideology of New Left theater is given short shrift in the literature.[4] The content of these plays is either uncriticially embraced, summarily addressed or disregarded, altogether. Serious consideration of the political rationale of New Left drama is rejected, generally, in favor of an examination of its performance aesthetics. To overlook the political content is to misinterpret the creators' intentions: that the works are more important as an expression of their politics than of their artistry. The political rather than the artistic was the impetus behind most Sixties political theater. As their ancestors had done in 1930s, Sixties theater politicos were to use drama as a weapon.[5]

Less doctrinaire is the political theater produced in the mainstream. Working alone, under conditions quite different from those experienced by the creators of New Left theater, and often with significant literary or theatrical track records, the motivations of these writers were probably not unalloyed by either artistic or commercial considerations. However, their plays are included in this study because their work, too, reflects the foment of the times and provides a contrast with the Black theater and the New Left theater produced during the same period. Indeed, consideration of all three types yields important insights

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not available in studies which restrict themselves to examination of only one category of political theater.

All three perspectives are informed by the ideological legacy of World War II which points up another deficiency in the literature examining political theater in this period: it does not refer to the experience of World War II as an important ideological context. Reference is made to Surrealism and to Artaud;[6] the Civil Rights movement of the early Sixties is cited as signally contributory to an atmosphere of dissent; the guerrilla tactics of Cuban revolutionaries is proffered as a key factor in the development of agit-prop theater in the United States.[7] World War II is almost totally disregarded as a significant factor in the development of this theater.

Yet a whole range of conceptual categories derived from the war informs these dramas. Political reality in the United States is classified according to categories derived from totalitarianism, not only in agit-prop produced by SDS' Radical Arts Troupes, but by mainstream playwrights, such as A. R. Gurney, Jr., writing for production on Broadway. World War II challenged all *a priori* notions concerning the nature of man and the state. As Hannah Arendt notes in *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), there were unprecedented moral, political and technological realities for the postwar generation which had

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> inherited from their parents' generation the experience of a massive intrusion of a criminal violence into politics; they learned in high school and in college about concentration and extermination camps, about genocide and torture, about the wholesale slaughter of civilians in war without which modern military operations are no longer possible even if restricted to 'conventional' weapons. (P. 14)

For the generation which matured postwar, the war had fractured the context of the older world of their parents. Arendt posits a significant rupture between the present and the prewar worlds due to the unprecedented capacity of our technology for total destruction which makes any suppositions of theatrical lineage based on an uninterrupted European cultural tradition mere assertion, at best. (P.28) This study, however, is not intended as a refutation of previous studies; it is undertaken to furnish an equally important factor in the genesis of sixties political theater--the experience of the war.

At this point, it is important to offer a definition of what is meant by the phrase, political theater, as employed in this thesis: Political theater is that which deals with the arrangements men make as to how they will be governed, the ramifications of which are the patterns of distribution of power and resources in society. In addition,

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any play that offers a perspective which refers both psychological and domestic dynamics to these larger socio-political forces is also political.[8] The slogan, "The Personal is Political," which declared that the domestic power balance between the sexes was an extension of the power structure in society as a whole, was a contribution of the Women's Movement, and the ringing title of one of the feminist tracts. The slogan resonated throughout the era, recasting what had once been thought to be matters of purely personal choice, such as lifestyle, dress, sexual orientation, as issues of political significance.[9]

Yet not all such political plays are included in this study--only those that are critical of the <u>status quo</u>. Plays such as the musical <u>1776</u> (produced at the 46th Street Theatre in 1969) and <u>The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail</u> by Lawrence & Lee (produced in 1971) are by the aforementioned criteria, political, but they are largely celebratory in tone. Consequently, they are not evaluated in this study. In keeping with the characteristic tone of dissent of the period, only political plays expressive of that critical sentiment are eligible for inclusion in this study.

For pragmatic reasons, not all political plays of dissent are included for evaluation; the sheer numbers of plays available would make of any such study a laundry list of items. Furthermore, not all of the productions of political

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theater used scripted material. Contemporary newspapers such as Distant Drummer and the Village Voice announce performances of plays which were either not written down or are simply unavailable; therefore, many productions do not offer scripts for analysis.[10] Finally, to review every political play would be redundant. Any play that is evaluated in this study is an exemplar of a body of works that deals with the same subject or shares the same concerns.

Aesthetic judgment of the plays is withheld in this thesis. It is unfortunate, but nonetheless true, that most political drama retains little appeal for posterity. Many times their authors, submitting to the passions of the present, sacrifice aesthetic considerations for expedience. However, no excuses are given by the creators, for poor construction, simplistic characterization or propaganda in these plays--some of this is required by the aesthetics of the genre, anyway. Overwhelmingly, they are not documents of eternal artistic merit; they were not meant to be. They are expressions of an optimism that hoped to enlist the arsenal of theater in the struggle for change and because of this passion they did endow the American theater--for the first time since the Thirties--with a relevance and a ubiquity that it has yet to regain.

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Chapter 1

American Political Theater in Historical Perspective

Attempts to produce any sort of theater in this country were charged politically from the beginning, even when the content of the drama was not. The earliest recorded theater production in America took place in 1665 in Accomac, Virginia. The participants were charged with the act and brought to court. They were acquitted, being found "not guilty of fault," a verdict some scholars have facetiously claimed to be one of the earliest favorable reviews in the Colonies.[1] This was only the beginning of the struggle to establish theater in America.

The South of the country would be easier to persuade. Cavalier sentiments would prevail, reflecting the predominantly aristocratic character of the original settlements. The Northeast, stronghold of Puritans and Quakers, put up the most prolonged and obdurate resistance to the theater. Between the Governor's Council of New York which passed a law in 1709 forbidding the practice of theater to a 1750 ban issued by Boston authorities, a succession of

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edicts was passed which threatened severe sanctions against anyone who performed or attended such events. The establishment of theater in this area was characterized by subterfuge and outright evasion of these laws.

To perform theater under such circumstances was to engage in politics, willy-nilly. For the Puritans' proscription against it was integral to their theocratic charter, erosion of any part of which was construed as a threat to the whole edifice of their governance.

As the country approached its great contest with England the theater became a focus for anti-British feeling. The main reason for this was that the American stage was staffed overwhelmingly by British personnel, and it was at these unofficial (and probably unwilling) representatives of imperial power that many Americans vented their frustration. Indeed, one such incident resulted in the destruction of the Beekman theater in New York.[2] To complicate matters, the mother country interfered with the interdiction placed on theater in the colonies. Three laws prohibiting plays passed by the Assembly of Pennsylvania between 1700 and 1711 were repealed by British fiat, one by one.[3]

Notwithstanding, the sporadic protection afforded it by the British crown, the major American theater troupe, the American Company, realized the inevitable. In 1774, when

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American leadership issued orders to suspend theatrical activities during the war effort, David Douglas, the head of the company, and several of its members went to the West Indies in voluntary exile.[4]

This did not spell the end of British hegemony in the American theater--or, at least, British theater on American soil. For despite the injunction to cease production, the British military men at odds as to how to occupy themselves while occupying American territory, continued to make theater in Philadelphia, New York and Boston. In Boston, for instance, they turned Faneuil Hall into a Theatre Royal and launched their enterprise right in the heart of the most adamantly anti-theater city in the country.

The dominance of foreign, particularly British drama in the American theater has led some scholars to contest the very notion of an indigenous American drama before the appearance of Eugene O'Neill.[5] Recent scholarship, however, reveals a much higher incidence of American authorship of plays. In his <u>An Emerging Entertainment</u>, Walter Meserve lists almost five hundred plays written by Americans from 1665 through 1829, fully twenty per cent of which are political according to the criteria listed above.[6]

Due to the exigencies of the political situation in early America, almost every play, no matter what its princi-

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pal aim, allowed the writer some vent for political observation. As Meserve notes, "the theatre is always a mirror of society, but the immediacy of that reflection in eighteenth and nineteenth century American drama is startling. Let an action in Congress, a border war, or a social event occur--anything that stirred the public--and the chances for a play on the subject within a short time were reasonably good. And the play was an opportunity for commentary, satirical or otherwise."7

In early America, most dramatic political commentary was presented in satire. One of the earliest examples is Robert Hunter's Androborus, printed in 1714. Governor of New York and New Jersey, and in his final years of Jamaica, Hunter intended the play as a political invective. Hunter mercilessly lampooned the professional and moral deportment of both the political and religious establishments in New York, employing both wit and scatology in order to do so.

The vein of satire remains trenchant in American theater. The Blockheads; Or, The Affrighted Officers (1776) is a salient example. Its inspiration was supposedly derived from the occasion of the production of British General Burgoyne's play, The Blockade of Boston (1775). During this performance--the only production of the play for which we have record--news came through of an attack on Bunker Hill by rebel forces. Alarmed, the actors/soldiers decamped as

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the audience scattered in pandemonium. Although the authorship of the play is in some doubt, some scholars have attributed the play to Mrs. Mercy Warren.[8] If it is hers, it would not be the first time she had criticized royalist forces or sympathizers in play form. She had done so in her The Adulateur (published in 1772) and would do so again in The Group (Published in 1775).

Mrs. Warren's plays, though, were not intended for performance. They were produced for that peculiar literary forum so popular in England and America during the eighteenth century--the pamphlet. Hundreds of pamphlets were produced from 1764 to 1783.[9] Though a minuscule proportion of the total--thirteen pamphlets for which we have archival record--the pamphlet play offers us one of the first examples of American dramaturgy about native issues.[10]

The issue of most concern was the conflict with England; the pamphlet play reflected the varying moods of the colonists as the crisis loomed, from the pro-British sentiments expressed by a wife in A Dialogue between a Southern Delegate, and His Spouse, on his Return from the Grand Continental Congress (1774) to the rabid Anglophobia of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's The Battle of Bunker's [sic]-Hill (1776). In his play, The Patriots(1778), Robert Munford sought to strike a balance between the philosophical poles of Whig and Tory; although his play, The Candidates (1770-

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1), a work that deals with the chicanery of contemporary electioneering, is a more politically oriented play according to the criteria outlined above.

The lack of production records for the overwhelming majority of these plays makes their inclusion within the ranks of theatrical lineage tenuous, although it is by no means a foregone conclusion that only a few were produced. There is circumstantial evidence that at least three of the plays of this type may have seen production. Certainly Brackenridge's two plays <u>The Battle of Bunker's [sic]-Hill</u> and <u>The Death of General Montgomery in Storming the City of Quebec</u> (1777) were likely candidates. Brackenridge was a teacher, and he stated that he had written the above plays expressly for his students to perform.[11] According to Abbé Robin, a Chaplain in the French army, <u>Battle</u> was performed at Harvard in 1781; so, too, was <u>The Fall of British Tyranny; or, American Liberty Triumphant</u> (1776), attributed to John Leacock.[12]

That the pamphlet play started no vogue for protest theater after the Revolution is attested to by the contemporary repertory. The British theater troupes that returned from their self-imposed exile bring back with them their European repertoire, consisting of--among others, Shakespeare and Kotzebue. By and large, American plays do not play in American theaters; as Walter Meserve notes,

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native drama "occupied an exceedingly small part of the offerings in any theatre."[13]

Yet, as noted above, of the American plays written, political drama comprised a substantial percentage. Samuel Low's play, The Politician Outwitted, published in 1789, is one of several that appeared after the war; its focus is the controversy over ratification of the constitution. Though ostensibly an even-handed consideration of the pros and cons of the document, the arguments given to the forces opposed to ratification are so silly that one suspects Low to be a partisan of approval. William Dunlap's Major Andre, performed at the Park Theatre in 1798, outlines the efforts of individuals to intercede for the life of a young major, and in so doing the playwright attempts to represent the "Federalist point of view in 1798, the desire to be fair to England and yet not to underestimate the worth of our national heroes."[14]

Patriotic pageants, celebrating and forging a popular mythology for the nascent country, were popular. One example of this type is Americana;or, A New Tale of the Genii, performed in Charleston, South Carolina in 1798.[15] The author is unknown. An allegory, Americana recounts the efforts of Galiana (Genius of France) and Fulmenifer (Benjamin Franklin) to transfer Elutheria (Genius of Liberty) from England to America. Columbia & Britannia (1787) is

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another play of the period, "commonplace in its nationalism."[16] The author is again unknown and the play was probably not produced. Yet in its use of myth and symbol to celebrate the American struggle to wrest her autonomy from England, it is another exemplar of the contemporary dramatic trend.

Susannah Rowson also contributed plays of patriotic sentiment. They are, Slaves in Algiers, or A Struggle for freedom (1795); Volunteers (1795); and The Female Patriot (1795). The latter play is unavailable for evaluation, but may exhibit Mrs. Rowson's feminist bent.[17] The story of Slaves allows Mrs. Rowson some vent for patriotic as well as feminist sentiment. She imputes both virtues to the young country in this tale of captured Americans and Europeans. Fetnah, an Algerian slave speaks of a captured woman who has become her mentor; she identifies her as one who has come "from that land where virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority--she was an American."[18] Volunteers the last of Mrs. Rowson's plays to deal with a political subject focuses on that struggle between state's rights and Federalism, the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.[19]

Mrs. Rowson's plays, Americana;or, A New Tale of the Genii, and Columbia & Britannia are unabashed paeans of praise to the American system. In that they are deeply partisan and obviously meant to function as channels of a

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political faith, they are propaganda. The pre-revolutionary dramas outlined above are also propaganda, but the dogma differs in political orientation from that of Mrs. Rowson's plays or the two political pageants discussed above. These defend the status quo; plays such as Hugh Brackenridge's The Battle of Bunker's-Hill attack it.

In his book on the subject of propaganda, Jacques Ellul outlines several different varieties.[20] However, since not all the types defined by Ellul are useful as a diagnostic tool in a study of the genre of political theater, only two of Ellul's several categories will be defined here: agitprop and integration propaganda.

Agitprop is the more familiar term and the more obvious. It aims its shots at the consensual idols. It focuses hate by erecting enemies. It points up the irreconcilable contradictions in society. Its main goal--as indeed it is the main goal of all propaganda according to Ellul--is to produce a specific type of behavior. It differs in its methodology from the other types of propaganda in that since its aim is overthrow of the establishment; it seeks short term and even immediate effects, to create a rush of energy proportionate to the task. Its course entails whipping up violent anti-establishment sentiment which will justify any sacrifice on the part of its adherents.

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On the other hand, integration propaganda has a long-range goal, producing behavior that is conducive to the stability and welfare of the state. Its methods, more subtle, range from press release to subliminal suggestion and association. Unlike agitprop, the techniques of integration propaganda are bolstered by a phenomenon of accrual: one tactic of persuasion may support or ramify the effects of a prior one. The result is a network of information that relies on this interdependence between its parts and its whole for credibility and influence.

Ellul's types are not always discrete. Some plays will prove difficult to categorize neatly. A play's political message may provide both agitprop and integrative propaganda. However, Ellul's system has not been adopted for this study because it provides too neat a taxonomy system. His system is useful because it helps to determine the coordinates of a piece of theater in relation to its political axes; in other words, does it support establishment doctrine? Does it oppose it? This is part of the task of evaluating content. Obviously, the author's political orientation will determine, to a great extent, the substance of a play.

However, this study will not attempt to classify all plays according to Ellul's typology. Rather, various characteristics of agitprop and integration propaganda will be

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referred to if they illuminate content. A rigorous effort to categorize according to Ellul would reveal more about his system than about the plays under evaluation. Furthermore, not all of Ellul's system is applicable to the entire scope of this survey. Integration propaganda, for instance, is a product of the twentieth century and cannot be used as a classificatory device for the nineteenth.[21]

Several of the problems that mitigated the production of native drama in the eighteenth century persist well into the nineteenth century: the inability of the American playwright to protect his work, prejudice against the native product, and the abundance of foreign scripts through most of the nineteenth century

> . . . the new and growing urban lower-class audience, from New York to Cincinnatti and St. Louis, wanted entertainment and . . . [they] weren't finding it in American plays with the exception of the 'American Comedy' as it was labeled, and a few isolated serious pieces that had borrowed English-Gothic and the romance of melodrama.[22]

The American theater-goer wanted tear-jerkers and spectacle, and by and large, this is what he got. The beginning of the long run in mid-nineteenth century America further inhibited

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new plays that saw production in favor of those with mass appeal.

Even though the rise of Jacksonian democracy had emboldened the native confidence required for an indigenous theater, this was a brief spurt of sentiment. It was stopped by westward expansion and increasing urbanization in the East.[23] Both trends undermined the chances for an homogeneous culture, a prerequisite to the establishment of a vital native theater.[24]

Yet of the American plays, either published or performed, hundreds touched upon political issues and politics in general in the nineteenth century. In fact, as David Grimsted observes in Melodrama Unveiled; American Theater and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, reissued 1987), the integration propaganda of native dramaturgy was "the only peculiarly American intellectual trait emphasized by native dramatists. . . . (P. 157) Overwhelmingly, most political comment was presented as a side issue to the major action of the play; most playwrights "contented themselves with fitting democratic political bias into the framework of the conventional European heroic or domestic drama." (P. 160)

Yet some dramatists chose to write drama which was political in theme. One of the first of the new century was

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The Essex Junto (1802) written by J. Horatio Nichols and published in Salem, Massachusetts. In the play, Nichols provides a political allegory whose story follows the attempt of several individuals--thinly disguised well-known political personages of the day--to capture Virginia, the spirit of America, and murder old Patriot, alias George Washington, exploring the fear that some Americans felt that too much power was being arrogated by the Federal government. That same years saw the production of Leonard Chester's Federalism Triumphant in the Steady Habits of Connecticut alone, in the Turnpike Road to a Fortune. A near hysterical attack on state officials, even the normally indulgent Arthur Hobson Quinn considers this a polemic into whose "purlieus it is not profitable to wander."[25] Elections in a rural district in Virginia furnish the subject matter for J. E. Heath's Whigs and Democrats, or Love of not Politics (1839); in which a powerful individual subverts democratic processes through influence. The Politicians (1840) by Cornelius Matthews is another satirical treatment of contemporary electioneering.

Anti-slavery sentiment was generally reserved for melodrama, the most famous of which was George L. Aiken's adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853). Another adaptation of a Stowe Novel, Dred

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(1856), also dealt with the topic of slavery. Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon (1859) was yet another. The author of The Gladiator (1881), Robert Montgomery Bird, worried about the obvious anti-slavery sentiments of his play.[26] William Wells Brown, an ex-slave, offered a trenchant expose of the institution in The Escape (1858); in it, he outlined the brutality and sang-froid of this trade in human bodies. Savagely satirical in technique, the play contains several poignant moments, such as the reflection of Glen, a runaway slave, on his plight:

> Oh, pity the poor outraged slave! Thou, who canst rend the veil of centuries, speak, oh, speak, and put a stop to this persecution! What is death, compared to slavery? Oh, heavy curse to have thoughts, reason, taste, judgment, conscience and passions like another man, and not have equal liberty to use them! Why was I born with a wish to be free, and still be a slave? Why should I call another man master?[27]

Unfortunately, the play was denied production. Brown was forced to arrange for private readings around the country--he assures us it was always well-received.[28]

All of these plays deal with slavery, but, more importantly, all are melodramas, the genre that dominated the stages of both America and England for most of the nine-

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teenth century. Patriotic, anti-slavery, pro-labor and pro-American Indian sentiments were expressed in this genre. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, melodrama provided a sense of integrity and dignity for the lower and working-classes who comprised the vast majority of its audiences, previously denied them in the drama.[29] The heroes and heroines of the genre were derived from these two classes while the villains were predominantly derived from the upper classes--in itself, a significant political statement.[30] Melodrama could and did provide a psychological outlet for the lower classes of the nineteenth century who suffered the consequences of rapid and merciless industrialization.

Even though by the turn-of-century, melodrama remained dominant, the seeds of realism were beginning to sprout in American drama. Concern for accuracy in costume, setting and dialect, although still used as "local color" flourishes, indicated a greater concern for the relationship between character and environment.

In his history of the American drama, Arthur Hobson Quinn devotes a chapter to William Dean Howells entitled "William Dean Howells and the Approach to Realism," pointing out the error of overlooking the relationship between the drama and contemporary literary trends. Modern scholarship concurs. In Brenda Murphy's <u>American Realism and American</u>

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Drama, 1880--1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), a section is also devoted to Howells' impact on Edward Harrigan, James A. Herne, Augustus Thomas and Clyde Fitch. Murphy notes that Howells "exerted a strong, native aesthetic influence on an American theater that tended otherwise to function very much in the shadow of European ideas. Howells's influence, needless to say, was always toward the establishment of a more thoroughgoing realism in drama." (Pp. 7--11)

James A. Herne attempted that "more thoroughgoing realism" with his realistic play, Margaret Fleming (1890) in an American theater that was not yet ready for it, even though by this time the American public had already been exposed to the work of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw. The play offered a real shocker (for the times): a wife offering to nurse the offspring of her husband's adulterous dalliance. The play became a cause celebre. Though this did help it financially, Herne was still obliged to drop the play from his repertoire.[31]

Another "consciously realistic" play was Hamlin Garland's Under the Wheel (1890).[32] Never produced, the play has been criticized for being less dramatic than didactic. The play evaluates both urban and rural poverty by following the fortunes of one family. Yet despite Garland's conscious agenda to write realistic drama, he created conventionalized

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characters whose dialogue was a mixture of "slang and broad dialect with stilted stage English." 33

Nascent American realism turned to politics, this interest, according to Murphy, amounting to a fad in the drama of the turn-of-century. (P. 95) Augustus Thomas wrote The Capital (1895) which focuses on the chicanery and anti-catholicism of the ruling elite. Edward Sheldon's The Nigger (1909) is another political play; it deals with the hidden black ancestry of a Southern governor. Another play by Sheldon, The Boss (1911), deals with the stranglehold of one man over the entire economy of one town.

The nature of the political commentary in these plays was conservative; as Murphy notes, "although it might point out flaws in the reigning social order and suggest that action was needed to remedy them, this drama did not advocate fundamental change." (P. 101) It would not be until the Twenties that the drama would reflect the radicalism of leftist intelligentsia. Among the earliest examples would be Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine (1923), John Howard Lawson's Processional (1925), and Strike! (1927) by Mike Gold. By the Thirties, this trend would attain its fullest expression. However, such is the importance of this era to the history of the American political theater that a fuller discussion of its dynamics is reserved for a special section below.

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The agit-prop tenor of American theater in the Thirties waned by the end of the decade.[34] American playwrights felt menaced by the Fascist onslaught in Europe and their plays reflected it. "Fascism was their major preoccupation, juxtaposed to democracy and freedom, and playwrights who had been professing pacifism and leftist politics and attacking American government as corrupt, elitist, and ineffectual during the twenties found themselves in the thirties writing patriotic plays urging their countrymen to go to war to protect democracy."[35] There were dozens of plays relating to World War II.[36] In There Shall Be No Night (1940), Robert Sherwood emphasized the necessity of war to head off the Fascist threat. Lillian Hellman contributed two: Watch on the Rhine (1941) and The Searching Wind (1944). The first play demonstrated the apocalyptic nature of the combative forces in Europe; in it, Hellman managed to bring the war home, setting the European conflict within the confines of an American livingroom. In the second, Hellman makes a case for earlier intervention by America which would have stopped Hitler's momentum. Common Ground (1945) by Edward Chodorov focussed on the racism of the Nazi creed. The political plays of this period stand in sharp contrast to those of the prior decade, informed as the latter were by a leftist ideology which presented the classes as natural adversaries. Now, the enemy was without and for the time being, at least,

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one class in America no longer perceived another as its adversary.

With the flush of a postwar prosperity and the provision of another enemy without--now, the Soviet Union--the alliance between the classes held. Prosperity was good for the country but a decided deterrent to political theater. Even though in his book, Politics in the American Drama (Catholic University of America Press, 1960), Caspar Nannes draws up a list of twenty plays from this period which he labels political, in the majority of these the political world is only a background for conflicts of a personal or individual nature, such as Dore Schary's Sunrise at Campobello (1958) which deals with Roosevelt's struggles with polio; or Jerome Weidman and George Abbott's Fiorello! (1959) which makes dramatic capital out of the colorful personality of the mayor.

The opportunity for native political comment in the rise of off-Broadway was not exploited. Its infrequent political dramas were mainly foreign, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's The Respectful Prostitute, staged in New York City in 1948 by New Stages; or Bertolt Brecht's The Threepenny Opera, co-produced and directed by Carmen Capalbo in 1954.[37] The only exception to this unimpressive record of political plays was the production of Arthur Miller's The Crucible in 1953 which dramatized the Salem witchcraft trials. Contemporary

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critics interpreted the play to be an attack on McCarthyism. Miller denied it although he did observe that McCarthyism had suppressed the urge to write political drama.[38]

Whatever the reasons for the unimpressive output, better economic conditions, the Cold War, the inhibitory effect of McCarthyism, the production of protest theater was as unimpressive as it had been before the Thirties. What was unique about that decade that the theater should respond to it with such urgency and fervor?

The socio-political climate of the Thirties must be sought in the historical record, the archaeological remains, the personal bank of reminiscences of those who lived through the era. The search provides graphic images of deprivation through descriptions of breadlines, Hoover-villes, and the desperate migrations of tenant framers across the face of this country. Some data illuminate the conditions leading to the massive bank failures of the period. Accounts of the repercussions of the terrible drought of the time reveal how they multiplied exponentially the woes of the people. The record reveals the great impression the Russian experiment was making on Americans. Newspapers supply a chronicle of the attacks on the sanctity of private property as the misery of the Depression deepened. At this critical juncture for the political

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orientation of this country, utter deprivation was poised against the forces of conservative privilege.

The confluence of this profound social upheaval and a newly emergent native theater whose personnel had seen from the example in Europe how drama could be charged politically produced the new American Theater of the Thirties. It was a theater dedicated to an alternative view of America, a more equitable distribution of resources, more control for the worker over the fruits of his labor--and revolution.

For the majority of the practitioners of this theater, the way to revolution avoided the precincts of the bourgeois theater. John Bonn, head of the ProletBühne Theatre, was most succinct on this point: "Workers Theatre is for the exploited, bourgeois theatre is for the exploiters."[39] The directors of such revolutionary theatre--Jack and Hyram Shapiro, Mike Gold, John Bonn--deplored the titillation of the older theater. They objected to the architecture of its stage which they believed estranged the audience from the performers and left the former apathetic. They wished to spread the gospel of a new order, and they sought a hortatory form by which to do so. That form was agit-prop.[40]

A product of European influence and the exigencies of the new radical stage, this short, focussed piece dominated

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the political theater until 1933 when a revised form of realism would supplant it. The audience for agit-prop was to be the working-class, an audience that had been disaffected by the pricing and subject matter of the commercial theater. Small, highly mobile companies, unencumbered by the scenery and technical apparatus required by mainstream productions, went to where the working-class would be--at work. They offered the American proletariat pieces that would relate to their lives, constructed in accordance with a dramaturgy which eschewed the plot convolution and precious characterization of bourgeois drama. From European expressionism, agit-prop borrowed a dramaturgy that was episodic and stylized; its character portrayal, abstract and symbolic. It directly addressed spectators to encourage their involvement; minimal scenery and props allowed mobility and concentrated on the lesson of the play; and native forms of popular entertainment, such as vaudeville, circus, musical comedy, and burlesque enhanced the appeal to an American audience.[41]

The message was inevitable class conflict. Again, John Bonn issued the most compelling statement on the goals of such a theater:

> Workers' theatre today is the theatre of the class struggle. Its only purpose is reflecting (dramatizing) the class struggle, and promoting (propagandizing) the

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> class struggle. Its only audiences are the masses of the workers.[42]

The masses of workers, deprived of a formal education, and ignorant of the true mechanics of suppression were to be educated through this theater.

This goal was never achieved by the agit-prop. Its preference as a vehicle for political sentiment declined in the mid-1930s. One reason for the decline was the shift in Soviet policy concerning the West. As it temporarily put aside revolutionary plans to ally with the West, Moscow adopted a program of detente. This was the era of the Popular Front, and the polarization inspired by agit-prop was not in keeping with the political temper of the time.

There were aesthetic objections, too. The detractors of agit-prop pointed out that its productions were frequently slipshod and that only the already committed would overlook this handicap. It was objected that agit-prop was _too_ hortatory and its technique so inflexible as to allow for only the most strident sloganeering. Stephen Karnot observed that, by and large, the symbolism of agit-prop was not accessible to its targeted audience.[43]

At least one example of the type rose above these criticisms to become a paragon of the genre and that was _Newsboy_ (1933) created by the Workers' Laboratory Theatre.[44]

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It won an award for the company, and became a seminal piece of leftist theater, both in America and abroad. Newsboy focuses on the tendency of the newspaper industry to bury politically sensitive material under a flurry of tabloid scandal. Announcing headlines which reveal the discovery of secret love trysts, and the amount of insurance on Marlene Dietrich's legs, the newsboy is soon surrounded by other actors who chant the real news of the day, "Seventeen million men and women. . . starving in mines--sweating in mills--tortured in flop joints with hymns about saviors."[45]

Strike! (1926) an agit-prop by Mike Gold was the first production of the short-lived Workers' Drama League. Described as an "antiphonal chant" it recites a litany of worker grievances and ends with their call to strike for better pay.[46]

The ProletBühne, a German agit-prop troupe, produced Tempo, Tempo (1930), one of their most successful works. Its subject was the ever-increasing speed demanded in industrial production; and although it was in German, its point was amply made to its English-speaking audiences through the use of mime, dance, and chant.[47]

The disaffection of the Left with agit-prop characterizes the second stage in the development of political theater in this period, that of realism--but it is not the

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precise bourgeois form of a few years prior.[48] In realism's earlier permutation, the world seemed obdurate, impervious to change; its protagonists, buffeted by forces that were unchallengeable. The new realism posited a dynamic relationship between protagonists and environment. The new heroes could and would effect change in their social and political world. They did so according to the conversion or "pendulum" ending, whereby the protagonist gradually becomes aware of the political realities governing his condition--and acts to change them.

Clifford Odets' _Waiting for Lefty_ (1935) is a hybrid between the agit-prop form and revolutionary realism, for which it was valued at a time when the Left-wing theater was attempting a self-conscious shift from one type to the other. _Waiting_ also ends with a call to strike. The play effectively combines hortatory elements with realistic episodes that chart the course of the characters' path to radicalism. _Waiting_, in true agit-prop style, ends with a strident and repetitive cry to strike.

Odets offers a more fully realized revolutionary realism with the play, _Awake and Sing!_ (1935) which describes the degenerative effects of capitalism on a lower-middle class family living in the Bronx. The son of the family, determined to work towards the establishment of a more just society will--as a first step--try to enlist his co-workers

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in a protest for steam heat in his factor. So ends the play. It was an ending roundly criticized by both the Marxist and establishment press: by the former, for the insincere quality of the son's conversion, and by the latter, for the inorganic pastiche it made of the drama.

A more integral play of the new type was John Wexley's They Shall Not Die (1934), inspired by the Scottsboro case of 1931. The play dramatizes the incarceration and subsequent trial of nine black youths accused of having raped two white women. In the drama, the lawyer who agrees to defend them is confident that he can get the men a fair trial, but he is soon disabused of the notion as he confronts the entrenched racism in Scottsboro. Believing in the innocence of the young men, the play ends with the lawyer's proclamation that "they shall not die."

Racism is also a theme in Stevedore (1934), although, it is by no means the only topic discussed. This play, written by Paul Peters and George Sklar, recounts the story of Lonnie Thompson, a black dockworker who is--like the nine youths in Scottsboro--charged with the rape of a white woman. Thompson is cleared of the charges. However, when he attempts to organize his fellow black dockworkers, the charges are revived. Violence ensues as the black and white segments of the population are polarized over the alleged rape. The day is saved by the arrival of white dock workers

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who join in fraternity with the black workers, finally realizing--and this is a major point of the piece--their common interest.

Plays such as Newsboy and Stevedore did not confine their inquiry of social conditions to one or two factors. They had issued thoroughgoing indictments of a system whose every component operated in concert to create oppression and injustice. Overthrow of such a system was never far from the argument. Now, with the onset of the Popular Front (1936--1939), an ideological shift would produce political theater with a theoretical difference. Because the philosophy of the era dictated a spirit of cooperation between the Left and liberal democracy in the face of the growing fascist menace, the drive to incite revolution was abandoned. Liberal democracy was to be preserved, not replaced. What was wrong with the system could be cured by reform. It is not surprising that the several political productions of the Federal Theatre project, an agency of the government, should reflect this philosophy but doctrinaire Marxists like Mike Gold and George Sklar also shifted the needle on their political compass and wrote plays "largely indistinguishable in theme from the works of such non-communist anti-fascists as Rice and Sherwood."[49] Battle Hymn (1936) written by Mike Gold and Michael Blankfort was a production of the Federal Theatre. The subject of the play

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was John Brown and his legendary fight against slavery. And although revolutionary in implication, Brown's battle was presented as consistent with the deepest strains of American justice. George Sklar's Life and Death of an American (1939) while scarcely a paean to American virtues, nevertheless refrained from a systemic indictment.

Americanism was a useful expedient to rally forces against the present danger. Once that menace was overcome, those voices of internal dissent in all hues of the political spectrum could have re-emerged, but they did not. As Rabkin notes, no "themes of revolutionary Marxism were . . . [ever] revived."[50] A resurgence of protest theater as vehement as that of the Thirties would have to await the Sixties.

Two traditions of theater, satire, as represented in some of the earliest American drama, and agit-prop, as explored in the theater of the thirties, are both represented in the political theater of the Sixties. As the following chapters will explore, the tradition of agit-prop found its most natural habitat in the theater of the New Left; whereas, satire was well-represented on Broadway in the works of Joseph Heller, Art Buchwald and Jules Feiffer.

Though black protest theater "declared the black theatre's autonomy"[51], its practitioners were also aware

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that "the stage is dominated by the assumptions and expectations of white culture."[52] Some of its work does represent the two traditions of political theater outlined above. Yet its most characteristic and compelling work derives from the particular institutions and personages of Afro-American life. The following chapter explores the development of black protest theater in the critical period from 1968 through 1972.

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Chapter 2

Black Protest Theater: "We Shall Have Our Manhood"

In 1955, an unassuming black woman named Rosa Lewis refused to give up her seat in an area of a bus normally reserved for whites, an act which launched the Civil Rights movement of the nineteen-sixties. This simple gesture of non-violent defiance against the institutional racism of American society inspired a generation in a methodology of protest characterized by a philosophical adherence to passivism. However, despite the many gains of this movement, the urban ghetto of Watts was to explode in violence ten years later, signalling a drastic shift in the mood informing black activism.

These two events, so polar in temperament, dramatically illustrate the dual tenor of black protest in the second half of the twentieth century: one of non-violent, peaceful gesture informed by ideological doctrine; and the other of anguished, impatient, incendiary retaliation. The prophet

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of the latter mood was Malcolm X; of the former, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Deeply influenced by Gandhi and Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr. preached a doctrine of passive resistance and love. He expounded on a dream of an integrated society, one in which both blacks and whites would be judged not "by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."[1] But with mounting black violence and the increase in white backlash, characteristic of the second part of the decade, King was to live long enough to see his hopes dashed for installation of such a society. At the time of his death, he had been abandoned by the establishment for his denunciation of the Vietnam War and denounced by the Young Turks of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) for ever having been ingratiated with the powers that be.

For the more militant, King's conciliatory posture towards the establishment was unacceptable; it appeared to be accommodation and tokenism. His message of non-violence and love was especially intolerable after the multiple murders of three Civil Rights workers in 1964. David Dennis' eulogy delivered at the funeral of James Chaney, the only black man of the slain trio, inaugurated the new mood of militancy:

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> I'm not going to stand here and ask anyone not to be angry, not to be bitter tonight. We've defended our country. To do what? To live like slaves?. . . . I've got vengeance in my heart tonight.[2]

After this event, the theme and tone of black activism were to be derived from the more strident black leadership--most notably, Malcolm X, the prophet of black rage and retaliation.

Issuing jeremiads to a society he characterized as structurally racist, Malcolm propounded the principle of justified retaliation which won him an immediate audience among those blacks who had been most disaffected by King's more ameliorative approach, the black underclass. To a people deprived of their own sense of racial identity and pride, Malcolm X stressed the glories of the African heritage. For this reason, he eschewed integration as a goal. He saw it as an acceptance of European values and an abandonment of the newly founded racial identity he was trying so hard to inculcate in his people.

Furthermore, he interpreted integration as a method of assimilation into the white power structure, enabling some members of the black race to reject other members, pitting black against black. Finally, integration was a losing gambit because according to him the white man was hopelessly

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racist and was constitutionally incapable of ever living with another racial group in conditions of parity.[3]

It was Malcolm X's philosophy of Black Nationalism, derived both from his affiliation with the Nation of Islam and his own observations, which provided the seed for so many of the ideas of the nationalists who were to succeed him, such as Huey Newton, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. Through his brilliant oratory, Malcolm X provided the American black with a radically revisionist iconography of his situation in America. It amounted to nothing less than a revolutionary semiology of the black experience, and its influence is detected in virtually every play in the black dramatic canon of the period.

The Sixties boom in black artistic expression witnessed the development of a new black theater, the chief characteristic of which was that it was produced by blacks for blacks. Previous drama and theater which had portrayed the Black experience in American had either been written by whites for blacks, or had been written by blacks to explain themselves to a white establishment. Even Lorraine Hansberry's Raisin in the Sun (1959), though a landmark in the Black theatrical corpus, was criticized as both appealing to and reflecting the middle-class values of white American society. Now, inspired by the rhetoric from the radical contingent in the black communities, and funded by such

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sources as the Ford Foundation and the Office of Economic Opportunity, a grassroots black theater took over from a "white art in black face."[4]

The movement produced two genres: Revolutionary Black theater and the Theater of Black Experience. The drama from the former, "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black power concept," will be the major focus of this chapter because it makes most obvious the connections between the black man's experience and his overall social and political context.[5]. Yet it would not be an exaggeration to say that all black theater is political, in that it recognizes the influence of the hegemonic culture in matters as apparently apolitical as standards of beauty or interpersonal relationships. Such an insight was not relegated to the black radical movement, as noted above, but nowhere was the freedom of choice in matters of identity, lifestyle, personal taste judged to be as severely delimited by the prevailing culture as in the black theater. Playwrights wrote diatribes concerning cultural assimilation which rivalled in _angst_ their outrage over their original conditions in America.

There is scholarly debate as to the exact beginning of the Black Theater movement. Some date it from the production of Genet's _The Blacks_ (1959), but it is unacceptable to most black scholars to settle on a white writer as the progenitor of a black art form.[6] To them, the production

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of Leroi Jones'(a.k.a. Imamu Amiri Baraka--hereafter referred to as Baraka) Dutchman (1964) and The Slave (1964) are the seminal theater events of the Black Arts movement. In Dutchman, the destruction of Clay, the young black man, by the white woman, Lula, was a symbolic castration that conveyed powerfully the American black's sense that his manhood had been stolen. Walker Evans in The Slave broods on the raging revolution that he has helped to bring about, knowing full well that it will only change "the color of tyranny."7

In consideration of his plays, his manifesto concerning the Revolutionary Black Theater, and his establishment of the Harlem Black Arts Repertory Theater School in 1965 in Harlem, there is no denying Baraka's importance in the movement. His work inspired other writers, most notably, Ed Bullins, the second most important writer of the movement, as well as several lesser luminaries, such as Robert Macbeth, Ron Milner and Marvin X.

Yet if Baraka profoundly influenced the development of Revolutionary Black Theater, it was Malcolm X who influenced Baraka and, indeed, the entire course of Black activism. With stunning clarity, Malcolm X explained the black man's position in America to the black man. Through his oratory, Malcolm X provided a generation with image, symbol and metaphor to accomplish a radical reorientation of the black

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man's perspective and self-image; this, coupled with the new insights engendered after the war about the possible outcome of societal racism, crystallized the creative vision of the writers of this movement.

One of Malcolm X's most influential images, the prison, one that repeatedly appears in black protest theater of the period. offers a clarification of the black man's existential position in America. As ex-con, Malcolm X made no attempt to hide the fact of his own imprisonment; indeed, it helped to form his perspective of America, as he related to an audience,". . . --don't be shocked when I say I was in prison--you still in prison. That's what America means, prison. All black people in prison."[8]

The Breakout (1969) by Charles Oyamo Gordon opens up on a stage set that reveals the urban ghetto as a disguised prison. It serves as a metaphor for the socio-political circumstance of the black man. For Gordon, as for Malcolm X, the black man is a prisoner in American with only the illusion of freedom. In reality, he is behind bars that are, even if not tangible, just as confining as those made of steel. They are unemployment, inferior schooling, and inadequate housing. Even the black man who enjoys the trappings of prosperity, is still imprisoned, albeit, in a luxury cell. The opening stage directions illustrate this:

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> The jail. There is a suggestion of two jail cells across the corridor [street] from each other. One cell is plushly furnished and decorated like an expensive, prestige apartment. The other cell has two beds, a battered chest of drawers, and a toilet and sink. Structurally, both cells are made of brick walls and steel bars, but there are no actual bars blocking the entrances. Near the cells is a typical street sign like that on any corner in any large black urban center. There are also billboard advertisements slanted to capture the black market. There are garbage cans, litter, empty bamboo packets, wine bottles, and all the other items that we see in the so-called ghetto slums of America (P. 307)

Two leading characters of the play, Feet and Slam, inhabit this place. Stereotypes of the inner city black, unemployed, poorly educated and without goals, they are disgusted with themselves. Embittered by frustrated ambition, they indulge in mutual self-degradation, "cracking," or ridiculing each other:

> What else kin we do? Dig it, we in jail. Them hacks fuck ova us like we dogs, we git our ass beat if we look like we might do wrong, our women hate us, our children don't listen to us, and da help treat us like shit. What else kin we do now besides crak on each other? (P.

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40)

And what is the crime for which they have been imprisoned? The crime of having been born black in a racist country; as Slam says, "ah cracked mah mamma's legs and crawled out. Eva since then ah been in jail." (P. 412)

There is no escape from this prison. Wealth and position do not assure the acquisition of freedom. This is illustrated by the case of Reverend Jackson, who occupies the swank cell across from Feet and Slam.[9] Lionized and quoted by the press, he is, nonetheless, manipulated by the establishment, and is as monitored in his movements as his less fortunate brethren across the way.

Geographical distance is no escape, either. Feet looks to Africa as an escape from incarceration, but Slam destroys this hope. He asserts that there is no Africa, for what used to be that continent is now "Southern Europe." (P. 410) Even there the white man rules and "jail is wherever white people run black people's lives." (P. 411)

Yet as degraded as these two are, as embedded as they are in the nexus of racist oppression, they manage to summon up a spirit of revolt. Through magic, the two men are able to peer in the Reverend's dream, and they discover that their wealthy jail mate across the way is the assassin of Malcolm X. The latter also gives a speech in the dream

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which, among other things, illustrates the nature of the true revolutionary: implacable and without ultimate concern for the sanctity of familial relationships. Malcolm tells the story of a little Chinese girl enlisted within the ranks of Mao's revolution who is able to dispatch her own father without compunction.

Inspired by such revolutionary resolve and moved by the story to personal epiphany, Feet and Slam are ready to enlist in the cause. But there is no cause, no organized movement on the horizon. They are alone. There is no element in the white power structure that will aid them, and they cannot even hope for help from their own community. However, they realize this and realize, too, that somewhere a start has to be made. If they wait for someone else to revolt, they will wait forever. So, somehow--and we are not given the specific details--they break out of prison, ostensibly to begin the revolution.

Baraka also sees the American black as prisoner, indeed, a slave, in circumstances which differ only in their outward manifestations from the situation of the afro-American pre-Civil War. Slave Ship (1969) a passionate, intense dramatization of the passage of a cargo of slaves to North America also manages to become a metaphor of the black man's experience in the United States.[10] Indeed, even though the play moves on to the contemporary period, the omnipresent

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sounds of the ship--the screams of pain, the rattling of chains, the shouts of oaths and imprecations--provide a constant contextual background for the proceedings. As the play moves through history, the ship remains a visual and audible reality. The message is clear: the surface details of the black man's servitude in North America have changed, but the essential truth of his incarceration has not.

In Marvin X's The Black Bird (1969), the metaphor for imprisonment is a caged bird.[11] A charming, intelligent creature that sings and makes money for its owner, the bird is content to please his master and live off his crumbs. The latter, nonetheless, has nothing but contempt for the creature. For even though he has left the door to his cage ajar, the bird does not wish to escape. Even when the house catches fire, the bird refuses to leave. His master, laboring under no such moral compunction, escapes without attempting to save the bird. A parable of the black experience in America, the black man who will not reach for his freedom, and blinded by a misguided loyalty to the white man--the keeper of the prison--betrays his own self-interest.

The story is included as part of an overall catechism of Islamic belief offered in the play to highlight this truth. When the study of a Black Muslim is invaded by two little girls, he attempts to reveal their kinship to them: to

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explain that all black people are children of Allah; to emphasize that "Black is Best"; and to expose the white man as devil:

> 2nd Sister. I thought the devil was red?
>
> Brother. Naw, sister, the devil is white--when he gets mad, he turns red.
>
> 1st sister. White people is the devil?
>
> Brother. Yeah, Sister. (P. 114)

The devil has the power to assume many incarnations:

> Brother. Your teacher is the devil.
>
> 1st Sister. She is????????? I ain't goin to dat old school no mo. Shoot!
>
> Brother. Is the man at the grocery store white?
>
> 2nd Sister. Yeah.
>
> 1st Sister. He's the devil.
>
> Brother. Right. Is the policeman white?
>
> 1st Sister. He's the devil.
>
> Brother. Right. (P. 114)

The image of the world projected to the children is a demonic one in which every one of its official representatives partakes of a quality of evil. Individual whites do not exist. They are nameless, faceless ministers of an establishment whose disinterested purpose is to bedevil the black man. The end result is the administration of a hell

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on earth, as the Brother counsels the little girls, "we in hell now, little sisters. . . ." (P. 115)

The image of the white man as demonic and subhuman (he is frequently referred to as "the beast" in this literature) appears with depressing frequency throughout the corpus of black protest theater. As mentioned above, for the most part, the character of the white man is deprived of the humanizing effect of idiosyncratic traits; he is presented as a composite of generalized features derived from the generic role he occupies _vis-a-vis_ the black community. He is, for instance, the policeman, the schoolteacher, the elected official, the banker--but never an individual, never a human being.

In Baraka's _Junkies are Full of SHHH_ (1971) the white establishment in conjunction with unsavory ethnic forces--here Jews and Italians--maintain the south ward of Chicago in a state of drug-induced stupor.[12] Frankie, a dealer and Cosa Nostra official, complains to a politician of increased political activity by blacks in his territory. He blames the agitation on the lax drug dealing of his pusher in the area, a black named Bigtime. Bigtime, he believes, has not been flooding the community with enough drugs. At a meeting with him, Frankie exhorts Bigtime to " . . . get them niggers high!" (P. 13)

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The impact of Bigtime's increased effort is immediately felt in the community, as the next scene of the play boldly dramatizes; a young boy, feeling the effects of the dope in his system, begins to nod in the street; a junkie robs a woman to support his habit. Chumu and Damu, two black nationalists, view the social degradation and determine to do something to halt it. They find Bigtime and offer him a scheme to propose to this Italian supplier: they will make addicts of all the black radicals in the community for a share in the profits. Bigtime duly reports this to Frankie who is excited by the prospect, "Hey, Yeh. This cd [sic] be the openin' we need. The feds'll back us kid. We can get the whole black power crowd outta their heads blind." (P. 20) Baraka's point is obvious: the federal government will collaborate with illegal forces to induce a state of political quiescence in the black community. In light of the decimating impact that drugs have on the inner cities this amounts to an indictment of the establishment for intent to commit genocide.

Although genocidal conspiracy is treated overwhelmingly with gravity in the black protest theater of the period, at least one black playwright, Ben Caldwell, treats the subject with scathing satire. In two of his plays, Top Secret, Or a Few Million After B.C. (1968) and Mission Accomplished

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(1968) he offers both a quasi-historical evaluation and a hypothetical projection of black/white relationships.[13]

Mission Accomplished is set in a late nineteenth century African idyll, peaceful until the white man arrives as missionary. Hilarious repartee, a mix between gibberish and English, reveals that the missionaries are doing their best to inculcate concepts of Christian sin and forgiveness. The King answers every entreaty of the Europeans with a pseudo-African patois which is a scrambling of English, the effect of which is to leave the reader in no doubt as to what the latter's perspective is on the intruders.

> Priest: in a loud Billy Graham Voice: I bring the word of God! To this savage wilderness!
>
> Interpreter: Mgoon mwan ngold nresources nland! Mgive Ugoda!
>
> King: Mwha sisi mfool twa! (P. 51)

Religion is indicted here as merely one item in the invaders' arsenal with which to divest the Africans of their land and property. When this fails, the missionaries resort to seduction, offering their nuns as whores to the natives. As a last resort, they mug the King, removing his jewels and valuables to send to Rome.

Caldwell's idiosyncratic history of relations between the Europeans and Africans continues into the projected

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future with Top Secret, Or a Few Million After B.C.. In this play, the president addresses "The Nigger Problem": there are too many of them. During a roundtable discussion, several methods are suggested for diminishing their numbers. Most of the solutions focus on outright murder. When one participant in the discussion objects to a mass murder of all blacks because of the bad press it would engender, an Air Force general responds that video could be stored, "we could put enough niggers on film for a hundred years of T.V. shows." (P. 48) Nonetheless, the idea lacks subtlety, and is rejected.

Suddenly, one of the participants, a McNack, observes that:

> Niggers like to fuck, but they don't like to have babies cause we don't allow them to make enough money to support them. Hardship is what makes the nigger man and woman hate to have a baby. Now, we give them a way to fuck more than they ever did, without the fear of pregnancies. No babies! No increase in nigger population! No control problem! (P. 49)

The degree of cynicism imputed to the white man renders him less human than demon in this play. McNack reveals that he is aware of the social inequities that make it hard for black people to survive, but he goes on to exploit these

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very conditions which contribute even further to their destruction. Reference is made to the Hiroshima bombing as a prior revelation of the genocidal proclivities of the white man. The only difference between the white man then and the white man today, is that now he is a bit more subtle about the execution of a "Final Solution."

No white man is to be trusted; that is the lesson of Caldwell's plays. Christian doctrines and social welfare programs are mere expedients; the former exploit the black man wherever he is; the latter exert a more stringent control over the black populace here in the United States. The friendship of the white man is a mask for ulterior and malignant motive.

Baraka's play, The Death of Malcolm X (1969) pierces this facade to offer its audience a treatise on the true motives and aims of the establishment.[14] As in Junkies discussed above, he outlines a fraternity of forces responsible for the murder of Malcolm X.

Obviously, Baraka intended this piece to be amenable to either film, video, or stage treatment because it provides for a continually shifting focus of action and simultaneous event. The stage is divided into an upper and a lower level and then subdivided into specific acting areas. Part of the upper level is to represent a place described as the "Inner

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<u>chambers of Uncle Sam Central</u>" (P.2) Baraka describes this as a para-military staging area, where men dressed as Uncle Sam bustle to and fro. In an area of the stage designated an operating room "drugged Negroes are lying almost at random around the room, strapped to tables." (P. 2) They are being prepped for a terrifying procedure that will erase their racial consciousness by "taking out [their] mindsoul, replacing it "; and, not so incidentally, by having their black brains supplanted by white ones. (P.2) A classroom is depicted populated by blacks with glazed eyes who repeat mindlessly after the white instructor, "White is Right."(P. 3)

The purpose of this training is to ready the men for their part in the assassination plan identified as Operation Sambo, a plot which is being coordinated on every rung of the social and political ladder. The president of the country, referred to as Hippy President, confers with a Klansman. He is worried about the interference of a prominent black leader. The Klansman assures the president that he has the "ol' nigger under control." (P.4) A banker sits in his office, a portrait of Uncle Sam above his head, and plans a party to take place after the murder.

Throughout the play, images drawn from Baraka's revisionist iconology are thrown together in an impressionistic pastiche--and with cinematic rapidity--: a

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"tall lump faced man in a white 100 stetson, twirling rope in rodeo fashion"; a sign which proclaims " 'We want a lasting piece,' dollar bills surrounding the lettering" (P. 5); a president speaks with a cowboy accent, assuring his electorate that "America is a beautiful country . . . a beautiful idea . . . America will exist forever." (P. 11) An integrated march for civil rights is peopled with rich ladies and Bohemians. The individuals who line the streets are garbed either as policemen or Uncle Sam. In his stage directions, Baraka informs us that "some of the marchers we recognize from the classroom or the operating room." (P. 10) The sky, overall, is " a monstrous American flag, illuminated as if in neon." (P. 12)

The play culminates in the assassination of Malcolm X. An event of more than national impact, as at the moment of the murder, " . . . Africans and Asians and Latinoamericans clutch . . their breasts, as if shot, at the same time." (P. 19) Whites, however, dance.

> Last image is of all the featured ofays [whites] together at a party in USam suits, celebrating and making jokes, later going through weird historic ritual, with the Viking, Conquistador, Caveman, Roman, Greek . . . (P. 19)

The play points up the culpability of blacks who have, through ignorance of historical relations between the races

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or pure venality, sought to cooperate with the establishment. An angry denunciation of the civil rights movement, The Death of Malcolm X accuses it of collaboration with an establishment whose ultimate goal is the extermination of Malcolm X. Thus, black men brainwashed in white classrooms are manipulated into executing "Operation Sambo." Blacks march alongside of whites who are surreptitiously invested in the former's destruction. In an interchange which echoes Malcolm X's indictment of the 1965 March on Washington as a "sell-out," the Klansman assures the president of the cooperation of one of the leaders of the peace march, a black man obviously in his pay.

Such black men who strive to accommodate the system are labelled by radicals in the black community as Negroes, or Uncle Toms. Like the little black bird in Marvin X's parable, they have confused their self-interest with that of their oppressors. In Gordon's The Breakout, Malcolm X speaks out in the Reverend's dream and draws metaphors from the history of black Americans:

> There were two kinds of slaves. There was the house Negro and the field Negro. The house Negro, they lived in the house with the master. They dressed pretty good; they ate good 'cause they ate his food--what he left. They lived in the attic or the basement, but still they lived near the master. They loved their master more

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> than the master loved himself. They would give their life to save their master's house quicker than the master would. . . If the master got sick, the house Negro would say, "whatsa matta, boss? We sick?" And if you came to the house Negro and said, "Let's run away, let's escape; let's separate; let's break out," that house Negro would look at you and say, "Man, you crazy. What you mean break out? Where is there a better house than this? Where can I wear better clothes than this? Where can I eat better food than this?" That was a house Negro. In those days he was called a house nigga. And that's what we call him today cause we still got some house niggas running around today. (P. 427)

It is the "House Nigga," or Negro or Uncle Tom who is presented in this theater as the single greatest impediment to realization of black revolt in this country, and it is upon his head that these radical playwrights heap their greatest scorn. For those blacks who would espouse the goals of integration, those who would take their place within the system, those who would preach non-violence are doing so in their own self-interest. They are cooperating with the enemy and turning their backs on their own people. In a situation regarded as a civil war by most black writers, such cooperation is seen as collaboration with the enemy and deserves the most severe punishment, execution, a fate meted

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out to the Reverend Jackson in The Breakout. In Junkies, Bigtime, the dope peddler, is the collaborator. And Baraka reserves a specially symbolic death for him at the end of the play: Bigtime is to be force-fed his own dope until he suffers an overdose. His body is to hang alongside of his supplier's, in a public place: the latter's body is to be labelled with a sign which reads, "Master,"; the former's with one that is titled, "Slave."

The extermination of such individuals is to proceed with vigor and implacability. Death List by Ed Bullins, a brief two-character play, continues the metaphor of war for race relations in late twentieth century American.[15] An incantatory recital of the names of those considered enemies of the black revolution provides the structure of the piece. The list is read by characters who are generically identified as Blackman and Blackwoman. As Blackman reads, Blackwoman interpolates commentary. She refers to an urban war of terror which had to be conducted after a series of executions of leaders of their movement. "Bombings, assassinations, espionage. Our targets were the pigs of course. . . .counter-revolutionary Negro tools and slaves." (P. 41) In some respects these "negroes" are more of an obstacle to the black man in his struggle for liberation than the white man; for "there's no one on earth more vicious to a Blackman than a nigger who is threatened by the Blackman of losing

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his imaginary place beside the whiteman." (P. 43)

Though Blackwoman agrees with Blackman as to the status of these individuals, she is ardently engaged in a dialectic to keep him from his implacable revenge; pragmatically, because "[these enemies of the revolution] have the black police on their sides as well as the whiteman." (P. 43):

> Are you [Blackman] not the true enemy of the Black people? Think hard now. Are you not the white created demon that we were all warned about? Is it far more than superstition that you accuse me of to so say that you are the greatest threat to survival now, in these times? (P. 43)

The Black Terror (1971) by Richard Wesley pursues the question of the cannibalistic revolution.[16] Following the fortunes of a terrorist organization dedicated to violent overthrow of the establishment, the play dramatizes Blackman's type of doctrinal rigidity on the lives of two individuals: M'Balia, a hardened female revolutionary, and Keusi, an initiate.

The plays opens with Keusi's initiation ceremony into the organization, and moves quickly to the next scene in which he gets his first assignment: along with M'balia, he is to assassinate Police Commissioner Charles Savage of the mad-dog Night Rangers "an avowed enemy of the Revolution. .

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. an oppressor [who therefore] must die."(P.73) He is unhappy with this plan. He feels it is dangerous and poorly thought out. M'balia disagrees. She feels no hesitation, and no compunction about her prospective target, whom she refers to as a "zero." Despite Keusi's reservations, he carries out the execution, dispatching his target with a bow and arrow.

Plan follows plan, and Keusi grows increasingly restive with the gratuitous violence of the group. After a brutal shoot out with the police by the American Liberation Front, another revolutionary organization, occasioned by the former's attempts to discern the ownership of a double parked Volkswagen, Keusi becomes highly critical of revolutionary tactics. He says as much to M'Balia, who by now has become his lover, and the two argue about the groups' penchant for violence. Their discussions provide the play's dialectic. M'balia's argument is rhetorical, and more an article of faith than a carefully reasoned position: she will eradicate the oppressor wherever he is found, regardless of the consequences. Keusi points out to her that blacks are a minority in the United States and a highly visible one. "All the beast gotta do," he warns her, "is cage us in, surround us, and exterminate us, or, if he chooses, to activate the McCarran Act." (P. 95) He cannot convince her, even though

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he tries to persuade her in consideration of their mutual affection.

His next assignment is even more offensive than the first: he is to kill a black man, Dr. Chauncey Radcliffe, because of the latter's "tomming," or critiquing of the revolution. He deplores the idea of killing his own people: " . . .I hate to be the one to set the precedent for killing our own people. Fratricide oughta always be avoided 'cause it's the one kinda killin' that always gets outa hand." (P.88) Keusi also points out the doctor's esteemed status in the black community. He feels the murder will alienate the people and no revolution can succeed without a base of popular support.

His outspoken critiques of the organization result in his suspension. He decides to quit, repudiating the group for ideas that are "revolutionary bullshit that came from the minds of crazy ass Europeans." (P. 94) Predicting a holocaust of the black people if such tactics of confrontation are pursued, Keusi leaves.

The holocaust occur at the end of the play. It serves as a background to M'Balia's assassination of Radcliffe, who happens to be her father. Although she hesitates at the moment of patricide, she accomplishes the deed. The murder is a symbol of the autogenocide that Wesley obviously feels

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will attend the black revolution, if it continues to be conducted in the same reckless manner.

Historical precedent for a massive retaliation by the government against black radicals had been set in 1969. In December of that year, Chicago police burst into an apartment which they knew from FBI reports to be inhabited by Black Panthers. They fired between eighty-eight to two hundred rounds, killing Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, as they lay sleeping.[17] The character of Keusi obviously reflects Wesley's understanding of the vulnerabilities of the black man in a country where he is outnumbered four to one; as Keusi observes: "All we been doin' is killin' cops, gangsters, and a few bullshit politicians, an' all that is doing is getting the cracker in a mood to make a big bust."(P. 96)

As in The Black Terror, We Righteous Bombers (1968) by Kingsly Bass, Jr., follows the fortunes of a terrorist organization.[18] In this play, the revolution has come and has not resulted--as yet--in a genocide of the black race in America, but in a protracted war of attrition. The protagonists in the play spend a great deal of time debating how expedient the war effort can afford to be in dispensing with lives. The time is not the present but the future, a time when the Sixties are a remote memory. America is embroiled in a civil war. Blacks and whites are fighting

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each other. Under a regime of American apartheid, Blacks live apart from whites in barricaded sectors or concentration camps.

We learn all this from film projections. Images of gutted buildings, overturned trains, crowds herded into wire-enclosed compounds give us a picture of the "social and political chaos" the playwright requires. (P. 22) On one of the screens the image of a black man in a military outfit appears; speaking in the "voice of a whiteman" he explains why the civil rights of blacks have been suspended. (P. 23)

Bonnie, a female terrorist, narrates that these harsh measures were imposed because of the racial disturbances of the Sixties, uprisings which resulted in the burning of Washington and the destruction of the White House. After this, she explains, blacks were rounded up and herded into the camps.

The organization of terrorists is dedicated to eradicating the white man, "the beast," as he is referred to, wherever he may be found. But their especial outrage is reserved for one of their own race, the Grand Prefect. The long arm of the white military establishment, the Grand Prefect, is another incarnation of the collaborator, the Uncle Tom, or the _Negro_, so reviled by the radical black establishment. Murray Jackson, one of the terrorists, is

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assigned the task of assassinating the Prefect. The play, working through flashback, opens as Jackson sits in jail, awaiting disposition of his case. It then moves backward in time to dramatize the events leading to this act.

Throughout the play, the assassins discuss their plans for the murder, their readiness, even their eagerness for the act. They speak with _sang-froid_ of their own deaths in perpetuation of their careers. They vie with one another over who is to actually accomplish the dangerous mission. Although Murray Jackson gains the privilege, at the decisive moment he is unable to detonate his bomb: he has noticed two children in the Prefect's car.

His inability to kill them engenders a debate which provides the dialectic of the piece. Harrison reasons that the childrens' lives are expendable in the face of the greater good that the Prefect's death will secure. Bonnie objects vehemently to this line of reasoning. She could not destroy life that she herself might have created. Harrison returns:

> Sorry, but I don't have your tender heart; that kind of shit cuts no ice with _me_ . . . Not until the day comes when we stop sentimentalizing about children will the revolution triumph. Yeah, they're black kids but they

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> are on the other side. On the side of the whiteman. (P. 56)

Bonnie protests that children are not capable of choosing sides in such an issue for, "they are born into what they are born into." (P. 56) Harrison insists that if it takes the murder of children to install blacks as rulers, than that is the price he is prepared to pay. But, as Bonnie rejoins, this may be a price that the Black masses refuse to pay:

> And what if the Black people at large don't want the revolution? Suppose our people for whom you are fighting won't stand for the killing of their children, however wrong or lazy or Uncle Tomish they are. All Black people recognize black children, whatever their father's allegiances. What then if they include you among the Mississippi sheriffs, and the Alabama highway patrol and the white citizens councils of Alabama? What if they held your power of terror in awe second only to the Grand Prefect's himself, or, of course, his successor. What then, my brave Black brother? Would you turn on the Black people themselves then? (P. 57)

Jackson ends the dispute by asserting that it is a crime against one's honor to kill children, and he prophesies,

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too, that an organization that operates without honor will presage only a greater species of oppression.

For Bass, it is not only the killing of black children which signifies the cannibalism of such a revolution but the very murder of black men by black men. In this play all the characters--both establishment and anti-establishment--are blacks. Oppression is administered by blacks and it is redressed by blacks.

Jackson does manage to murder a man he believes to be the Prefect. In jail, however, he is paid a visit by the Prefect. The man he killed was an actor. The children he had seen in the car the first time he attempted the assassination were hired out by their parents for a little extra cash. Jackson has murdered an innocent man.

The play closes with savage irony, for in order to keep a horrible fate from befalling his fellow black terrorists, Jackson is forced to kill other black men--again, and again. Reciting lurid tales of retaliation, the Prefect manages to convince Jackson that he has no choice but to comply, and he is forced to become the new executioner in the jail. Instead of being executed himself, he executes.

The other members of his organization watch his supposed execution on television, and are deluded as to the significance of the event. They believe it is a Jackson who

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dies, a Jackson secure in his belief about the integrity of his cause, staunch in his faith in its future, a righteous bomber.

In black protest theater both collaborator and revolutionary are confronted with the same existential conundrum. Both adopt a code of values and ethics not derived from their racial heritage. The collaborator Reverend Jackson in The Breakout does so and identifies himself with his jailers. The revolutionary Blackman does so in Death List and intends a rampage of violence which Blackwoman labels autogenocide. Because of their distorted perspectives, both the Reverend and Blackman pose a threat to themselves and their people. The solution to this is a repossession of their history. Not the history of the white establishment as disseminated by its major institutions, but an alternative interpretation of the past arrived at by the oppressed.

The presentation of history in Black protest theater of the Sixties debunks both historic and contemporary heroes and icons to provide the black man with a true self-image and to redirect allegiances within the black community.

In writing history, the black playwright consciously operates as artist as well as political activist. To a people denied the truthful record of their tenure in the American continent, who have seen themselves only in the

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shadow of their oppressors, he offers a corrective. He revises the official past imposed on them through establishment institutions, school, media, church--and clarifies their position within it. Liberated from the manacles of officially received dogma which presents a self-image to him as an inferior and subjugated being, the black man can question and possibly overturn the system.

Revisionist history is what Baraka offers in Slave Ship discussed above, but he does so through an impressionistic melange of fact and fiction. Ododo (1970) by Joseph Walker attempts a point-by-point critique of history as described by the establishment.[19]

Replete with Afrogenic dance, ritual and movement, Ododo--a word which means truth in Yoruban--outlines the history of the African-American from a time "before the beginning of time "to the contemporary period. (P. 349) The play offers an historical overview which indicts America not only for her domestic governance but for her conduct overseas. From her treatment of the black and red man, to her venture in Vietnam with the yellow man, America's political modus operandi is described as the technique of exploitation and repression:

> Actor G: In New Haven, right after the riots, in the dingy green walls of a tavern bathroom was scribbled: "What you got in Vietnam is . .

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Company: Is the white man. . .

Actor G: Using the black man. . .

Company: To fight the yellow man. . .

Actor G: To protect what he stole. . .

Company: From the red man. (P. 381)

The play opens on an idyll--Africa and Africans before the arrival of the Europeans. After a brief recounting of African cosmogony, the actors narrate the coming of the Europeans:

> Actor A: (Walking towards audience): We lay down to rest; strangers come amongst us . . .(actors sit upright, startled. The MEN move up left as if to protect their WOMEN. The MEN then move center stage as if to confer) seeking food for the night. And since our hearts--in our lack of culture--have always been open; and since our homes, in our lack of culture--have always been open--we took them into our hearts and our homes. (P. 357)

As they sleep, preparations are made for their bondage.

The scenes which follow contrast drastically with the prosaic opening. The blacks, wrenched brutally from this primeval environment, are herded onto ships and subjected to barbaric treatment. As in Slave Ship, an on-board revolt quickly culminates in defeat. Several of the Africans,

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unable to endure such abuse, kill themselves. The most horrifying of the suicides is that of a woman who gives birth in the hold and then kills both herself and the infant.

Narration, spoken by the company, provides a transition backwards in time to nineteenth century America and the story of little Jimmy, a slave child; so hungry is he that he sits down in the middle of a watermelon patch and stuffs himself with the fruit until its juice dribbles down the sides of his mouth. Nearby, a slaveowner, Master John, watches the spectacle and thinks it very amusing. He tells his wife and company, and they all find the child's near-starvation a great joke.

Obviously, the stereotypical association of the black with the watermelon is herein excoriated. But the point is not the black man's love for a particular fruit, nor the origin of that affinity, but as Actress M recounts:

> Everybody laughed at the fact that Little Jimmy,--four-and-a-half-year-old Little Jimmy who had never seen his real mother--Little Jimmy who had been fed one cup of cornmeal mush once a day since arriving at Master John's plantation three months before: everybody laughed at the fact that Little Jimmy was just about starving to death. (P. 362)

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In the story of Little Jimmy, apocryphal or not, the playwright suggests that the stigmata ascribed to any underclass--not just poor blacks--have their roots in social conditions. Actress M's final observation on the crude racist association of blacks with watermelons underscores the cruelty of the stereotype, as she speculates, "Who knows, Little Jimmy, you just might have started something. You just might be the reason why they say: 'All black people just love watermelon.'" (P. 362) To blame a particular for the strategies it has developed in order to cope with circumstances is a grotesque species of cruelty, a retrograde tactic described in contemporary parlance as "blaming the victim."

In Ododo, the symbolic content of actual historical events and personages such as Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War and Reconstruction is revised. Conventionally associated with the emancipation of the black from slavery, they are now debunked. Lincoln in particular is anathematized as a 'honkey hero', who would have "put you in your grave/ To give this country peace and unity/ It's dumb to say he gave you your liberty." (P. 366) The narration asserts that the Emancipation Proclamation was used as bait to lure the blacks into the war effort:

Emancipation?

So you could help secure the nation?

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> He knew that you would help fight the Civil War. That's what that fancy phony document was for. (P. 366)

The conventional representation of the war as one waged primarily in the interest of high-minded ideals is refuted by the play:

> The Civil War was fought by plan, Had nothing to do with the rights of Man. The Liberty they gave to me Forgot about my dignity. (P. 366)

Ododo also attacks the conduct of contemporary America from her treatment of the black to her treatment of the native American; from the pollution of her environment to her destruction in Vietnam; from her educational establishment, condemned for turning out graduates who cannot read, to the police characterized as:

> An occupation army
> That's all dressed in blue
> To guard the racketeers
> From the likes of me and you. (P. 377)

The image of America proposed by the play is that of a country riddled by internal contradiction, oppressive both domestically and internationally, and doomed to destruction by her own children, a form of self destruction: . . . today's children know--the flower children know

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That you are obsolete.

Who cares about America, who cares about a Hollywood set

Manned by soulless technicians

Technicians with vacant eyes, with no beat, no vibra-

tion,

No glory in their rhythmless hearts,

Bloodless you waste away still crying,

"I am."

. . . .

. . .

Dead before you die.

Suffer your death without consolation.

Here at last is a reality you must face. (P. 383-4)

Reviled as a "cesspool of undigested lies," America, referred to as Uncle Tom, is warned of her death. (P. 382) The company repeats the ditty twice:

Sing a song of laughter,

Uncle told a lie,

And because he told it

Uncle's going to die. (P. 384)

The image of the docile, compliant, shuffling Uncle Tom is to be replaced by a martial model of black manhood. Malcolm X was the prophet of that new mood. His philosophy of determined self-assertion and racial pride appealed to the

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black community in the late Sixties. The new militant doctrine proposes black self-confidence and dignity and an ideal black man, a black superman:

> Oh, Malcolm!
> Cry for Malcolm!
> He lived the answer!
> Fierce as a panther!
> Black Superman! (P. 382)

The figure of Malcolm X resonates with all the force of myth in black protest theater, for "to virtually all Blacks, . . . Malcolm X stood as an influential symbol of resistance and a champion of liberation."[20] He was a prototype of the new black. His personal traits refuted the typical characterization of the American black. To the assimilative goals of the "negro," as deplored by B'alia in The Black Terror black playwrights opposed the separatist doctrine of a Malcolm X; to the scraping, shuffling gait of the underclass black, mercilessly depicted by Gordon in The Breakout, they contrasted the buoyancy and stridency of a Malcolm X.

For revolution's sake, the spirit of this new black man had to be invoked. The new black man was self-determining and assertive, a man who did not beg for rights but demanded them. Black drama would present this paradigm to encourage its appearance. A martial ideal of black manhood would be

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the first stage. Sonia Sanchez' Sister Son/ji (1969), an allegorical journey of the black woman from assimilator into white culture to black mater familias of warrior sons, rhapsodizes the martial aspect of both Malcolm X and his ideology.[21]

> Listen,. listen. did u hear those blk/words of that beautiful/blk/warrior/prince--Did u see his flashing eyes and did u hear his dagger/words. cuz if u did then u will know as i hav come to know. u will change--u will pick up yr/roots and become yr/self again--u will come to blk/ness for he has looked blk/people in the eye and said welcome home. yr/beautiful/blkness/awaits here's my hand brother/sister--welcome. Home (P. 102)

This martial ideal, pictured in the words "Warrior," "Dagger," and "Prince," will win the "Home" that Sanchez envisions, a physical as well as spiritual locale.

The war that is so frequently exhorted, prayed for, threatened in the corpus of Black protest theater materializes, making this as one scholar terms it, "a revolutionary fantasy."[22] Sister Son/ji sacrifices her sons to the efforts. It is a war fought not to earn the right to integrate but to separate; securing land for "blk/children to run" to allow "their bodies [to] explode with the sheer joy of living." (P. 106) At the end of the play, Sister

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Son/ji turns to the audience and urges them to make the revolution come true.

However, there is more than one type of revolution. The emergence of a black persona undistorted by a self-effacing identification with the white man is a conceptual revolution in itself and a prerequisite to the political revolution to come. More than a military paradigm is needed for the task of instilling racial pride in a people.

The ostensible task of Ododo is to assist in the construction of a new persona of the black American, one that is capable of visiting the threatened destruction upon America. Ododo furnishes a mythology based on African culture. But in addition to an appreciation of the mother culture, the play also insists on an alternative aesthetic of physical beauty, one based on Afrogenic qualities. Citing as its authority a dubious interpretation of the morphological features of the lower order of mammals, the play proclaims negroid features as indices of superior evolution:

> Actor A: remove the hair from most higher mammals, you will find that the skin underneath is pink or white. Black skin is therefore:
>
> Company: SUPRAHUMAN!
>
> Actress A: White skin?
>
> Company: SUBHUMAN! (P. 376)

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This affirmation is suffixed with that much recited phrase of the Sixties, "Black is Beautiful."

However facile a correlation, the degree to which a black American expressed satisfaction with his racial characteristics became a gauge of his level of revolutionary black consciousness. In other words, rejecting hair straighteners, skin bleach creams, and other items of cosmetic alteration signalled the individual's celebration of his racial identity.

In his autobiography, Malcolm X writes about the practice of straightening or "conking" the hair, something he did himself, as a young man. Years later, as a national spokesman, he would make it a practice to point out such alterations of Afrogenic features as definite signs of a lack of self-acceptance in the individual. This is the subject of Salimu's Growin' Into Blackness.[23] The play chronicles the laments of three young girls over their mothers' continual drive to make them conform to white standards of beauty. All three wish to retain their "naturals"--hair which has not been processed in any way--against their mothers' wishes. The adoption of the new more natural "Do" is a sign of their growing politicization, and they go on to discuss racism, warfare and childbirth. The play ends as the girls vow to help the revolution by supporting their men and having babies to ensure the propagation of the race.

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Sexism, as evident in this play, appears in much black revolutionary drama, and figures in Robert Macbeth's A Black Ritual.

For a populace long indoctrinated with white standards of beauty, general acceptance of the maxim, "Black is Beautiful" would take a long time. The difficulty is simplistically dramatized by China Clark in her short play, Perfection In Black (1972), a parable with several allegorical characters: the People; Perfection, a black woman; Dickblack, an unenlightened black man; and Blackpride, imbued with the right consciousness.[24] Dickblack is unable to find Perfection's charms as appealing as those of a white woman. The former is quite candid about this. He is also aware of exhibiting counterrevolutionary sentiments: "I love white woman. . . but . . . I must pretend that I do not . . . It's just not right for me to have this feeling. . .Black is beautiful now." (P. 83) In steps Blackpride whose sole dramatic function is to assure Perfection of her beauty and desirability.

Although the black man was to experience difficulty in freeing himself from prejudice against his own race in these plays, the black woman as illustrated here was not to be so hindered. Indeed, the paeans of praise rendered unto the black male revolutionary often result in a sexism which is truly retrograde in an era which saw so much feminist

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foment. In Robert MacBeth's A Black Ritual (1969), the priority granted to rehabilitating the black man's ego in lieu of the black woman's is egregiously illustrated.[25] As an alternative genre in black theater it is indeed a ritual, replete with incantation and stylized movement. The goal of the event is to muster the necessary strength to overcome the white man and conduct the war of liberation. The ritual praises the black man but correspondingly diminishes the black woman's autonomy. Kneeling besides him her head inclined towards him in an attitude of entreaty, she intones:

> Beautiful Black and Righteous
> brother/husband/father/warrior. Black and righteous god of my universe who I stand beside, who I bear Him Black warriors and young sisters
> . . . .
> I, a Blackwoman, stand beside you.
> . . . .
> I humble myself to you as only a queen can be for her King, her god, her righteous Blackman. (P. 9)

In a further stage direction the black man lifts his woman onto an altar. After she removes herself from this exalted plateau, Macbeth's stage directions instruct her to walk "a step or so behind him, her head slightly bowed." (P. 9)

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If Macbeth was aware of the extreme sexism of this play, he does not admit it anywhere in print. In setting up this archetype of the new black man, Macbeth elevated the black man's estimation of himself, not only in his own eyes, but in the eyes of those who surround him. Feet and Slam in The Breakout protest that nobody accords them respect, neither the society at large, nor members of their own families. Obviously, the task of rehabilitation of the black man's ego was more important to Macbeth than any possible errors of sexism he might commit.

These plays share with the middle-class drama of eighteenth century England and Tokugawa Japan (1615--1868) the goal of providing validation of an emerging, self-conscious group. Each group wished to see its members portrayed on stage as capable of noble sentiment and gesture, and as individuals who adhered to defined codes of behavior. But the Japanese and English theaters are not, in a reference intended only in the case of the former theater but applicable to both, "an expression of protest against the social and political system. . . .Both the history and domestic dramas assume inevitable capitulation to the ethical code which governed society."[26] In this, they are essentially species of integration propaganda, as defined by Ellul: they provide myths or fables which support the establishment. Black protest drama differs from these historic theaters in

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that it does not offer models of conventionally acceptable behavior. Black protest drama perpetuates role models of blacks who are profoundly iconoclastic and rebellious. In that the goals of this theater are to challenge the authority of the state and promote revolution, its drama is agit-prop.

Ed Bullins' play, _It Bees That Way_ (1970) is agit-prop; in fact, it hopes to begin the revolution, right now, in the process of performance of the play. _It Bees That Way_ opened at the Ambiance Lunch-Hour Theatre Club in London in 1970. (There is no record of an American production of this play.) Bullins outlines some specifications: it is to be performed in a "location that is frequented by a white audience."[27] Only twenty-five persons are to be admitted to a single performance which will be improvised in response to the audience. The actors and audience are to interact; there is to be no division between playing and audience areas. In their physical actions, the actors are directed to go counter to the mood of the spectator, for example, if a spectator is pleased, play anger; or if angry, caress him. Physical abuse is permitted; "shuffling, rape, strongarming and beating the audience" are suggested. (P. 6)

There is no story line. The play merely presents a situation. As it opens, several subculture blacks are loitering, both individually and severally on a street

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corner; though not specified, it is assumed to be somewhere in one of the vast urban ghettos of America. The actors accost the audience. One actor sexually assaults a white man; a black woman feels the face and crotch of a white man; a bag is snatched. After allowing the actors to vent their rage at the captive audience, Corny, a character in the play, steps forward and advises the other characters to seek out their real enemy--the United States government. The white audience members, he announces, do not control the system; they are only its henchmen. Therefore, he advises the other characters, "Shoot your government. . . .; Shoot Southern Congressmen. Shoot your president." (P. 15) The play climaxes with the sounds of sirens. The whites are advised to take cover. Presumably, the great contest is about to begin.

The slightest contingency may provoke revolt, no matter how slight. Even the banal event of a government guided tour through one of its office buildings can become the pretext for revolutionary violence. In Bullins' State Office Building Curse (1970), he describes just such a tour: "Black folks checking out the cement tomb, Black folks on pig-guided tours. . ."[28] Soon after the blacks are led out of the building, an explosion rips through it. The event is celebrated as the opening salvo in the coming insurrection,

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and the black crowd "begins a festival to celebrate the emerging Black Nation of Harlem." (P.93)

If the revolution is so inevitable that any pretext may trigger it, it is also unstoppable. In Ododo, the metaphor for revolution is a speeding train:

> Actress J: So look up, look out, then get off the track.
> Actress D: 'Cause a train is coming, and that train is black.
> Actress E: And it's hard to stop a train.
> Actress L: And they don't turn back.
> Actress J: Ain't nobody worried 'bout all your might.
> Actress M: You dealing with a cat who's out-of-sight.
> Actress Y: I know you gonna worry as you plan your invasion.
> Actress D: But we're gonna be preparing for a festive occasion. (P. 386)

The image of a train for the spirit of black readiness makes the revolutionary confrontation seem irresistible. In her study of revolution (On Revolution, New York: Viking Press, 1963), Hannah Arendt includes this notion as one of the definitive connotations of the term, revolution. Reviewing the etymological evolution of the word from a purely astronomical term whose partial meaning defined a lawful physical rotation of the spheres, she arrives at its

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contemporary implications, that of "novelty, beginning and violence" and also, irresistibility. (P. 40) The political notion of revolution equally defines an action that is prescribed within the nature of things, as unavoidable as the movement of the heavens.

Surely, that is the sense that black protest theater conveys in dealing with the apocalyptic revolution in almost every work in its repertoire, but it went further and attempted to instill in its target audience the sense that it was equal to this task. By presenting a revisionist history of the black man's sojourn in this "wilderness of North America," as so many of the black literati described this country, and conveying to him the nobility of his ethnic heritage, black playwrights attempted to imbue the black community, long debilitated by its feelings of inferiority and impotence, with a sense of its potential for power which was to be gained by any means necessary, even violence.

Repeatedly, Malcolm X had made the point that power, which the white man had, was no respecter of persons. Power respects power. Generally, those forces that hold power will not relinquish it without violence. Furthermore, to speak of a nonviolent revolution, as did prominent civil rights leaders, was to be guilty of a contradiction in terms;

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> The only revolution in which the goal is loving you enemy is the negro revolution. It's the only revolution in which the goal is a . . . desegregated public toilet; you can sit down next to white folks--on the toilet. That's no revolution.[29]

The struggle would have to be fought with blood. A revolutionary such as B'alia or Blackman had to be willing to fight and die--and kill. To meet such a contingency, black playwrights, as noted above, would furnish their icons of black manhood with martial attributes. Lovingly, their women refer to them as warriors, knights, black panthers. Women, themselves, such as Sister Son/ji would strap their babies on the backs and join in battle for equality was not to be waged in the ballot booth, but on the battlefield.

But even without the sanction of necessity, violence is an important aspect of Black Nationalism. It is an antidote to the degradation suffered by the black man at the hands of the white man; for as Frantz Fanon wrote in The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1963), his psychoanalytical study of Third World revolution, "between oppressors and oppressed everything can be solved by force." (P. 56)

In the drama, this panacea is offered to the lower and underclass black, a population long disaffected from the passivism and middle-class orientation of the earlier Civil

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Rights movement. This is understandable because it is this class that was most vulnerable to assault by the establishment. Just as Malcolm X had addressed his message to that underclass as the true potential revolutionaries of the movement; playwrights such as Charles Oyamo Gordon and Ed Bullins invested in them their profoundest hopes for a resurrection into the new martial persona of the black man so constructed by their drama, as demonstrated above in The Breakout and as is also the case in Ed Bullins' play The Gentleman Caller (1969).[30]

In the play, America is warned how close nemesis resides--in her own home. Set in the bastion of upper-class society, it depicts the visit of a black man to an aged white woman, Madame (directed by the playwright to be a black actor or an effeminate white male in drag). This decadent woman is presented in context: she sits against a wall, decorated with head mounts of a "blackman, an American Indian, a Vietnamese, and a Chinese" and talks incessantly about her background and lineage. (P. 371) She hopes to seduce the young man, and attempts to do so with a tirade that is a mixture of both flattery and degradation, referring to him as "Sir, Boy Sir? Sir boy?" (P. 377), abuse he accepts without comment. However, the maid, Mamie, a domestic with an exaggerated servile drawl, shuffling gait and stupid manner, retaliates. In the middle of a

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monologue, in which Madame compares Mamie to a mountain, and eulogizes the domestic as her source of strength and inspiration, the latter takes revenge. She shoots her mistress.

From this personification of the most degrading stereotype the new Black revolutionary emerges, fist poised and full of rhetoric,

> Yes, father. . .the time is now. It is time for Black people to rise from their knees and come together in unity, brotherhood and Black spirituality to form a nation that will rise from our enslaved mass and meet the oppressor . . .meet the devil and conquer and destroy him.
>
> . . . .
>
> We Black people are preparing for the future. We are getting ready for the long war ahead of us. DEATH TO THE ENEMIES OF THE BLACK PEOPLE! All praises is due to the Blackman. (P.380)

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Chapter 3

Theater of the New Left

New Left theater was staffed predominantly by white, middle-class students who had come to maturity during the post-World War II era, a context most to any consideration of the theatre that they produced. Through film and television, the experience of the war was communicated to them--over and over again. The high-stepping parade of Nazi troops, the emaciated figures interned within the concentration camps, the detonation of the A-bomb over Hiroshima, Adolf Eichmann on trial, all were chimeras presented to this young, images which acquired the force of myth. The goose-stepping storm troopers and the glass-encased Eichmann symbolized the predicament of an advanced technology which required dehumanized automatons carrying out rigidly prescribed duties without question and without reflection. The camp inmates and the characteristic mushroom cloud of the exploded A-bomb were metaphors for the destructive genius in man. Content analysis of the most representative plays of the New Left reveals that its creators borrowed symbol and

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concept from the war to explain the political reality of contemporary America, from the Vietnam War to racism, from poverty to sexism. The insistent argument of the New Left corpus was that far from being governed through democratic franchise, America was administered from the top down by an unelected, authoritarian elite.

Mindful of the dangers inherent in an authoritarian state with powers of coercion much ramified by the advances of technology--nuclear weapons, sophisticated conventional weaponry, subtle surveillance equipment--the postwar generation would fight to make the agencies of the American state more responsive to community. Taking their cue from Civil Rights activists who had penetrated the deep South to reach potential black voters where they lived, student activists from SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) founded ERAP (Economic Research and Action Project) and went into nine inner cities to organize the poor. With varying degrees of success, they tackled problems that ranged from tenants' rights, and unemployment to campaigns to expand food stamp programs.[1] Later on, the emphasis would be on decentralization of government, with activists struggling to win autonomy in decisions which affected individuals at the community level, such as the fight to decentralize the New York City Board of Education, and make area residents responsible for development of curriculum and administrative policies.

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The problem was in making activists out of the poor. For the most part, they were inarticulate, and worse, not able to view their problems within a sociopolitical context. They were equally disinclined to question the government in which they vested absolute moral authority; therefore, they would subscribe to the state and follow its prescription.

These radicals saw such passivity as not only characteristic of the poor, but of all Americans. Glutted by material success and manipulated by media to accept an official view of reality, Americans were uncritical upholders of the status quo. Moreover, many were apathetic, neglecting to participate in the system at its most basic level, voting. Ruefully, C. Wright Mills noted that if the Ancient Greek definition of an idiot was a nonpolitical person, than most contemporary Americans would have to be classified as idiots.[2]

This generation refused to be idiots. They would act. Docile obedience to tyranny was unacceptable, recalling as it did the argument of an Eichmann who when confronted with his crimes replied that he had merely been following orders. Bob Ross, a member of SDS, would impute his decision to embrace activism to "the Jewish thing. If you're silent, you're complicit."[3]

Many of the young would get their first taste of activism through participation in the Civil Rights movement

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down south. Tom Hayden, destined to be one of the most visible members of SDS, paired ideology with physical commitment when he went down South. Reporting from the battlefield of McComb, Missisipi, he extolled the bravery and commitment of the young black activists. He urged his readership, the SDS membership and its sympathizers, to see the battle as significant. "Does it become more real in recognizing that those Negroes are down there, digging in and in more danger than nearly any student in this American generation has faced? What does it take? When do we begin to see it all not as remote but as breathing urgency into our beings and meaning into our ideals?"[4] Their battle for human freedom, he emphasized, was a battle waged for every American.

Civil Rights, however, was not the issue that would mobilize the young and galvanize the left in this country--that would be Vietnam. Yet Civil Rights would provide the pretext for an unprecedented student protest which was to be known as the Free Speech Movement.

It began when Jack Weinberg set up his Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) table on the Berkeley campus of the University of California to recruit Civil Rights activists and raise money for the cause. He had been warned by the college administration of Berkeley that he would be arrested by campus police if he did not leave. He did not leave and

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he was arrested.[5] The protest which followed, and which almost closed the university was unprecedented and alerted SDS to the potential for a mass student movement. More importantly, the Berkeley protest began the articulation of an ideology which saw all members of society, black or white as oppressed by both a political and economic elite. For SDS, it made of this vast population of students a potential source of manpower for revolutionary change. It did so by declaring these comparatively affluent young white Americans victims of this power elite, as much so as the urban poor, even if the oppression was more ethical, aesthetic and spiritual than material.

The concept of such an elite was borrowed from C. Wright Mills' The Power Elite (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), described by one high ranking member of SDS as the "bible" of the nascent New Left.[6] In it, Mills examines the background and purview of the men who staff the highest ranking positions in the military, business and government. In a later article, he describes a fraternal nexus of power and influence, little affected by the democratic franchise. Declares Mills, "Not the party politician, but the corporation executive, is now more likely to sit with the military to answer the question: what is to be done?"[7] The purely political man is increasingly left out of the really important decisions, and consequently, the American public.

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Even when the public does participate, it is likely to make choices that have been cultivated by establishment agency. Mills uses the term "manipulated consent" to describe the process whereby " . . .the mass public becomes the passive object of intensive efforts to control, manage, manipulate." Mills laments the disappearance of the "public," that small circle of citizens who meet and debate the large and small issues of polity, face to face. This interchange represents the purest spirit of democracy to Mills.

The Port Huron Statement, written in 1962 to provide an ideological base for a student movement, developed this idea. Port Huron pointed up the increasing disaffection of the general public from politics. The document stressed that the American political system confused "the individual citizen, paralyzing policy discussion and consolidating the irresponsible power of military business interests."[8] The document offered an alternative to such political passivity: participatory democracy. Although " a catchword. . . .a theoretical muddle,"it was a stick of conceptual dynamite."[9] Basically, it suggests a community of individuals engaged in debate over the issues that concern them as a society and primed to take action upon decision.

Participatory democracy presumes a citizenry capable of and willing to undertake the responsibility of participation

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in their own government. This was an _a priori_ principle for the Port Huron generation.

> Men have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity. It is this potential that we regard as crucial and to which we appeal, not to the human potentiality for violence, unreason, and submission to authority. The goal of man and society should be human independence: . . . a quality of mind not compulsively driven by a sense of powerlessness, nor one which unthinkingly adopts status values, nor one which represses all threats to its habits, but one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved; one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn.[10]

According to Port Huron, the kind of world that would develop this human potential did not exist. Only a revolution would install it. Labor, benefiting from its association with the upper classes, could not be counted on to lead the battle. Only youth, and specifically the student population, had the freedom and flexibility to both envision and fight for a new world.

Tom Hayden, chiefly responsible for the writing of the Port Huron statement, saw the student population as

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"anointed" by C. Wright Mills to wage the battle for a more democratic government from the campuses.[11] The college campus was the appropriate arena for two reasons. Firstly, Port Huron understood one role of the university to be that of social critic, measuring up the real America to her professed ethos. Secondly, protest in the precincts of academe came to be viewed as both practical and symbolic because the administration of the university was a reflection of the power structure of society writ small,

> . . a microcosmic reproduction of all the characteristics of the society and its power structures, which, whether it was a question of war or racism, of the capitalist system or the controlling apparatus, always had their counterparts within the university.[12]

The university's reliance on government contracts dictated an emphasis on research and development of high technology hardware. In the early sixties, for example, the University of Michigan boasted more contracts with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration than any other major university in the country.[13] The presence of Reserve Officer Training Corps all over college campuses reminded students of the university's alliance with the military. Racism revealed itself in the disparity between liberal ideology and racist practice. At Columbia University, a proposed gym in the Morningside Heights area was to have a

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separate entrance for blacks.[14] To the critic Eric Bentley, the reality of extensive corporate funding of secondary education would make a question such as "Who owns Columbia?" very naive. As Ferdinand Lundberg points out in his The Rich and the Super-Rich (Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1968), foundations such as that of the Du Ponts and the Carnegies supply funds "destined primarily for the support of the corporate world." (P. 428) Reliance on these funds would necessarily require producing curricula that were, at the very least, not inimical to the interests of Big Business.

None of these issues, however, would provide the momentum for a broad-based student movement. The undeclared war in Vietnam would do that, making of SDS, after many efforts to avoid it, a one-issue organization.

Cynically, perhaps, some scholars have determined the New Left's adoption of the antiwar cause as a booby prize for the loss of that of Civil Rights. After black activists expelled their white sympathizers, the latter had no cause sufficient to focus their reformist zeal or enlist mass allegiance--until Vietnam. Yet as a cause for this generation, the war was compelling. First, the young had to fight it. They might enjoy a respite from serving in it if they had a student deferment but after graduation they were eligible for the draft. Secondly, the war pointed up the inconsistencies between American rhetoric and American prac-

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tice. As Eric Bentley wrote at the time, "What 'Vietnam' has meant to the young generation is a radical disjunction between word and deed, profession and fact, education and life, culture and history." [15] If the government preached the doctrine of self-determination, it was actively engaged in suppressing it in Vietnam. If the government spoke about the virtues of democracy, it was busy installing a puppet government under American control in South Vietnam. If the government extolled the value of human life, it was engineering a war effort in Indo-China whose technology could make no distinction between military target and civilian population.

Hypocrisy, however, was not only confined to the American government. Women within SDS would begin to levy the same charges against the movement men. Men in SDS were sensitive to racial oppression and imperialist predation, but they could not recognize the subjugation they imposed on their wives, lovers and daughters. For many women, the bitter irony was that the domination exercised by a predominantly white male elite in the society at large was being practiced by male revolutionaries who were theoretically opposed to the exercise of such power. Yet these radicals were white men and

> white men are most responsible for the destruction of human life and environment on the planet today," wrote

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[Robin] Morgan, a poet who had been active in the antiwar movement. "Yet who is controlling the supposed revolution to change all that?"

....

It seems obvious that a legitimate revolution must be led by, made by those who have been most oppressed: black, brown, and white women ....[16]

Promoting an acrimonious debate, Shulamith Firestone and Marilyn Salzmen Webb raised feminist issues on the 1969 antiwar National Mobilization Campaign platform.[17] They were effectively kept from speaking by constant disruption from the auditorium and miscellaneous cries of "Take her off the stage and fuck her!" "Take her down a dark alley!" "Take it off!"[18] Afterwards, several women repaired to Salzmen's apartment to compare notes. Angered and shaken over past disregard and the outrage they had just endured, they would articulate their rage. The outcome would be the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement.

All of these issues would comprise the subject matter of theater of the New Left. Yet not only would the subject matter reflect the political orientation of the left, but the very aesthetics of the theater as well. The conditions of the performance, the playing space, the style of production and performance can all politicize the theatrical

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event, as The Living Theater's production of The Brig (1963) was to prove.

The Living Theater was founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in 1946, and was the first of the avant-garde theater groups of the period. It was the Living Theater that first demonstrated the political potential of the theatrical event for the era. The opportunity to politicize their theater was at hand when the Internal Revenue Service padlocked their space on 14th Street for non-payment of taxes in 1963. Reasoning that only a producing theater could make money, the Becks appealed to the Federal agents to allow them to present their current play, Kenneth Brown's The Brig. When their request met with adamant refusal, the Becks determined to have a bootleg production on the premises of the impounded theater. It was "an act of civil disobedience," said Julian Beck later. "It was not a message play, not a play of protest, . . . "; it was the conditions of performance that made the play an act of civil disobedience.[19] In order to see the show, the audience was required to enter through a window or two emergency exits--and, thus, break the law.

As Beck says of the contraband performance of The Brig a play may be politically charged by the situation. It does not have to have political subject matter. Where and when a

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play is presented will determine the political quotient of a piece.

For example, the San Francisco Mime Troupe was enjoined not to play its Il Candelaio by Giordano Bruno in Lafayette Park in 1965. It was denied permission to present the play because of the objection to the material by the San Franciscan Park Commission. The decision to go ahead and play anyway was based on a desire to symbolize resistance to such censorship. The " . . . parks were owned by the people; and . . . the Park Commission could not act as a censor."[20] Ronnie Davis, then head of the troupe, was arrested but upon appeal won the right to play in the parks. The courts agreed with the Mime that such interdiction was censorship and, therefore, unconstitutional.

The combative nature of such theater is well conveyed by the term affixed to it, guerrilla. Peter Berg, a member of the Diggers, a countercultural organization which did not believe in private property, was responsible for the label, according to Davis.[21] The term's military derivation hints at an aim of sabotage, rather than of direct confrontation with an enemy of superior strength. Davis advised such theaters "never [to] engage the enemy head on. Choose your fighting ground."22

The fighting ground could be anywhere. The Pageant Players, a New York Street theater troupe, performed at Fort

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Dix.[23] Teatro Campesino, an agit prop troupe, began its career performing on picket lines for Cesar Chavez' farm-workers' strike in 1965. WITCH, a radical feminist organization, performed a street theater skit on Chestnut street, in front of a bridal shop.[24] In shopping malls, on thoroughfares, in prisons, in parks, in front of major corporations, New Left theater was presented anywhere an audience could be found. Such performances were political for they were played in forbidden places and meant to confront the power structure.

But political street theater was not only within the domain of the nominal theater troops. Groups which considered themselves political or countercultural organs resorted to theater and there was an interchange of personnel and ideas between the movement and the theater it inspired. Teatro Campesino was born out of the Delano Grapeworkers strike of 1965; Bread and Puppet lent its allegorical pageantry to almost every major antiwar protest of the era, as well as to other issues. Ronnie Davis advised Jerry Rubin of the Yippies on the virtues of costuming.

The Youth International Party or Yippies is the classic example of a countercultural organization that was not a theater troupe, yet choose the theatrical gesture as a metaphor for its politics. New Left politics came to be described in metaphors derived from theater because it

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relied so heavily on its techniques.[25] Leaders of the group, men such as Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, were keenly aware of its value. The two were "impresarios of the new symbolic politics."[26] Unable to confront the system physically, the Yippies would engage in symbolic actions that presumed the alternative world had arrived. In other words, they would "act as if the State were falling apart and it would fall apart."[27] Acting as if the new world of participatory democracy had already arrived might actually accomplish it in reality. This was the generation which believed that "oppression is caused by square perception."[28] The conviction of the counterculture was that once the proper information was offered, the englightened individual would follow automatically a "politically correct" path to freedom. However naive such a belief may seem, it was a real motivating principle for revolutionaries both in and outside the precincts of the theater proper.

The challenge was to create symbol and imagery which could compete with that churned out by the establishment and motivate the masses to embrace an alternate lifestyle. The New Left would be criticized for its conscious cultivation of symbol, charged with manipulation of a public susceptible to image and impulse and little given to introspective thinking.[29] Yet these were sensibilities already within the public attitude. The New Left had not created them. If

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Fifth Avenue and its industries of mass persuasion had not created them, they had honed them--the better to sell products. Why not exploit these tendencies to promote an alternative world? If a photogenic action could skyrocket a John Doe to celebrity, transform a trivial event into one of global significance, determine the outcome of a presidential election, then it could promote a revolution. Jerry Rubin was being less facetious than accurate when he described the coverage of the 1967 March on the Pentagon as "commercials for the Revolution."[30]

Thus, attacks on the system were metaphoric: Abbie Hoffman's cascade of dollars to the floor of the New York Stock Exchange; the mailing of Marijuana plants to people selected at random from the telephone directory; the "attempt" to levitate the pentagon and exorcise it. The images created were designed to be instantaneous revelations of the rationale of the establishment."[31] The media exploited the audience potential of the stunts and the counterculture was televised to an audience of millions.

The actor in these Yippie dramas was a lineal descendent of the Wild West outlaw, he was a vigilante, a cultural revolutionary,

> a stoned politico . . . A streetfighting freek [sic], a dropout who carries a gun at his hip. So ugly that middle-class society is frightened by how he looks. A

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> longhaired bearded, hairy crazy motherfucker whose life is theater, every moment creating the new society as he destroys the old.[32]

Through some machinations of his own psycho-spiritual development, quite unimpeded by the material and social circumstances of his birth, he becomes a paragon of an enlightened social being.

It was on precisely these grounds that RAT (Radical Arts troupe), the theatrical adjunct of SDS, choose to differentiate itself from the rank and file of New Left theaters, such as The Living Theater, The Performance Group, or the Bread and Puppet theater. RAT declared itself indifferent to the evolution of the individual psyche. According to RAT theory, much of New Left counterculture and the drama it produced placed far too much emphasis on the ability of the individual to surmount the material circumstances of his class by "right consciousness," or adoption of the correct political or cultural line.[33] The influence of Port Huron was evident in such optimism: the belief that man is equipped with an instinct to recognize the wisdom of a philosophical or political proposition and the courage to act on it. Such a belief betrayed the middle-class background of movement personnel in its adoption of the mythology of the "transcendent role of the individual."[34] According to such a philosophy, the new world would be

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attainable through simple assertion of the individual will. To SDS such theater "reflected a general inability to recognize social forces in history."[35] It also revealed a disrespect for the reality of the objective world which quickly changed "after Watts and Detroit, after Washington and Chicago," when it was evident that ". . .there was to be no hope of changing the social function of those who presently held power through a change in mass consciousness or an appeal to conscience."[36]

Because of its tendency to address itself to metaphysical man, rather than political man, analyses of the drama produced by such countercultural theater troupes as The Living Theater, The Performance Group, The Open Theater, and many others too numerous to mention individually, will not be offered in this essay. The brief consideration given above to the uses to which theater was put by such groups of the countercultural Left as the Yippies is enough introduction to its logic: its aim is to not to explicate the social and political conditions that dictate the individual's life but to reject them in favor of cultivation of his subjective world. The appeal was not to man as a member of a specific class but to man as an individual inhabitant of a universe specific to himself.

RAT ideology stands in sharp contrast to this metaphysical approach. It was the objective world that SDS RAT

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troupes would attempt to explicate for their audiences. The first task was to encourage its audiences to see its problems in a broader socio-political context. The tendency in American society was to see all personal discontents as a failure of the individual to adjust to the larger society. SDS, influenced by C. Wright Mills in this, would argue that "the personal is political," a phrase which became something of a rallying cry for the Sixties, and which would become an important tenet of the Women's Liberation Movement. Society could be held responsible for the malaise, alienation or frustration of its individual citizens.

Once it had accomplished the task of redefining the origin of personal discontents, it was no great ideological jump for the audience to see itself in terms of its membership in one class or another, i.e., upper class, working-class, lower-class, middle-class, underclass. RAT would appeal to this new found identification by making its characterization allegorical, based on class types.

Most importantly, RAT had to participate in the movement for social change by producing activists. They did so by assuming the function of a grassroots _vox populi_, a prototype of a working participatory democracy. Consequently, each theatrical event had to make its audience an _ad hoc_ community whose sense of shared identity, reciprocal responsibilities, and common goals primed it to take action.

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Such an _ad hoc_ community would be motivated by a transcendent vision of an alternative world and the lessons of the stage--be it a parking lot, shopping mall or church basement--would be applied to the real world.

In order to fire the enthusiasm of its spectators to undertake the task of revolution, closing images of RAT plays had to be upbeat. The underdog class had to triumph over all emissaries of the establishment, be they the police, government officials, or wealthy industrialists.

RAT aimed to offer truth. Truth, however, may only be determined in context. Part of RAT's indictment against both the educational and media establishments was that neither attempts an integrated picture of the world. What they present is a constellation of fragmented facts and images which effectively stymie the American mind. Moreover, in a populace whose world view is constructed from such a hodgepodge of information, there is a lack of perspective. Great events rank along with small simply because there is no coherent context to which to refer.

RAT dramaturgy attempts to provide that overall political picture. The problem is that such a play loses focus and unity in the process. However, such considerations are much better left to the traditional drama. The New Left was not interested in creating masterpieces for the bourgeois

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theater. They wanted drama that was politically utilitarian. Aesthetics were largely derived from Bertolt Brecht's theory of Epic theater and the principles of agitation propaganda. The practitioners of this type of theater were not interested in creating psychological portraiture, sustaining charged emotions, other than outrage or anger, or creating an illusion of time and place. As required by the Brechtian "alienation effect," the audience for New Left plays was never to lose itself in identification with a protagonist, abandon itself to heady emotion, and thus lose sight of the argument. To coolly and dispassionately judge the issues, and then carry such deliberation into the real world in the form of action was the goal of this theater.

The Big Top, collaborative product of New York City SDS Rat, serves as a paradigm of this type of dramaturgy.[37] Its chief concern is to educate, and it uses allegory, song, topical allusion, and direct address of audience in order to do so. The goal, common to most of RAT plays, is to expose the interdependent network between the Big Three: government, industry and the military. Specifically, _Big Top_, offers a brief history of American military and economic operations up to its present involvement in Vietnam and exposes how education and labor cater to the demands of Big Business.

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The play opens with a symbolic wedding between government and business, the former a salacious whore anxious to copulate. The ceremony is an exchange of vows which reaffirm traditional American rhetoric to clothe the poor and feed the hungry, to establish economic equality, to keep America free from foreign intervention and preserve her as "the beacon of hope in a world darkened by slavery."(P. 62)

The master of ceremonies, a circus barker, appropriate to a perspective that views the circus as a metaphor for American global hegemony, informs us that the ceremony was staged for the public. Both government and business are motivated by a lust for lucre. They will maintain low wages while boosting production. They will raid other countries for resources. They will impose restrictive tariffs against foreign imports. They will remove anyone or anything that stands in the way of "profit, and more profit and more and more and . . . "(Ibid)

The first offspring of this union is the military, "that little Samson of 1776." (P. 63) The confrontation between it and King George's men is symbolic: the Revolutionary forces wrest a cash register from the British. With great flourish, they hand it over to Big Business. Next, the Indians are ejected from the land. This menace under control, the whole southwest is annexed. Finally, to the

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accompaniment of the ringing of the cash register, the whole continent, from coast to coast, is obtained. However, domestic labor dissent poses a threat to industry. First, there is the Pullman strike, then, the Haymarket Square affair. Both are brutally suppressed by the military.

All quiet on this front, the attention of Business government is drawn to the international arena. Big Top recites in abrupt fashion the adventures of American imperialism from its actions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Phillipines and Guam, through its involvement in the two world wars.

Barker 1945--Europe in ruins.

Government: (happy): We rebuild,

Business: and buy--

All: EUROPE! (Pp. 65-6)

According to Big Top, the Marshall Plan is a ruse to control Europe economically.

This bald recital of the facts of American overseas intervention provides a context for understanding American intervention in Vietnam. The play presents the Indo-China war as the logical culmination of America's historical drive

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for new markets, cheap resources and cheap labor. In order for America to assure her prerogatives in other countries, she must control the native political scene.

In order to man this super effort at national and international repression, the power elite must be able to command a massive personnel. How do they enlist a great proportion of the population in these efforts? Big Top turns its attention in the second scene to the educational establishment, or the "MIND BENDERS."

In Big Top, school is a rigid, brutal environment, run by teachers and administrators interested in turning out automatons whose only impulses are to obey the law and take orders. The Teacher sums this up pithily--"Ours is not to question why but to do and die."(P. 66) Initiative and creativity are squelched in order to produce a malleable tool of the state.

Fascism requires such a citizenry, not a participatory democracy. Conformity and irresponsibility are characteristics of "the Good German," and anathema to the kind of citizen called for in the Port Huron statement. This generation would not go mutely to its assigned post in society. It would not function in its work as atomized cogs in some vast technological plant. Echoing some of the concerns of Paul Goodman (Growing up Absurd), they would reject the

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imposition of false or absurd values. C. Wright Mills' observation that the liberal university was to provide liberating education, yet was becoming little more than a trade school producing people unlikely to pursue a reflective life is a point echoed in Port Huron. Supremely offensive to the radical young was education's role in staffing the higher echelons of elite institutions and shunting off others into menial or military positions, a task guided according to *Big Top* by considerations of race.

The characters of Labor and Military come on the scene. They inform Teacher that they are in need of

Labor: More workers

Military: More Soldiers. Soldiers don't need much education.

Labor: Workers don't need much education either (P. 62)

So advised, Teacher begins the task of determining the strata of society. She asks questions which are obviously to be answered in a certain way, much like giving a password to a confederate. If the student answers contrary to her specifications, she assigns them to either labor or military. The black student is nabbed by the military; the brown student is slated for labor.

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Only the white student is a candidate for the elite, the cream of American society. In this privileged position, he is wooed by business, military and government.

> Business: . . . . Be an efficiency-expert [sic] at IBM! Travel, expense-account!
>
> Military: Be a top-weapons-expert! [sic] Earn 100,000 a year!
>
> Education: Be a scientist! Do war research at your STATE UNIVERSITY!
>
> Government: Power! Prestige! Benefits! We need top experts on poverty, on crime in the streets (P. 68)

All this spells "SUCC-CESSSS!!!!"to the student.

Much less glamorous is the lot of the student designated for labor. He is relegated to routinized, repetitive work from which he realizes only a fraction of its actual worth; the lion's share goes to "the Bosses." (P. 70) Outraged, the workers unite: "We are going to unionize and fight for control of our labor!" (P. 70) The Union-Leader steps in, obviously a confederate of Business, and discourages the men from striking. When the men voice their complaints about low wages and automation, the Union-Leader

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replies that "it certainly ain't the bosses' fault!" (P. 71) He needs to re-focus their anger and he finds the perfect target: a "WELFARE-RECIPIENT." The men vent their rage on her while Business and Union-Leader shake hands.

"The Last Scene" or "GRAND FINALE" recapitulates the major themes of the piece: the cooperation between the major American institutions, military, government, labor and education, here referred to as "Happy Family"; the cunning of this "family" in redirecting social grievances towards targets other than themselves; the connection between overseas oppression and domestic; and, finally, the need for people to identify the oppressors and fight them.

Big Top is very typical of RAT dramaturgy. It is agit-prop: it is not interested in presenting balanced debate of the issues. It does not develop an argument; it has a case against the establishment, and it presents it. The establishment side of the argument is presented merely as rationale or as a cynical dodge to mask capitalist rapacity with a veneer of virtue. A structural principle of these plays is to contrast rhetoric with reality, as stage directions indicate, ". . . _Happy family must switch without any transition, very abruptly, from this exaggerated unnatural sweetness, friendliness, and happiness to incredibly hard tones. The revealing of the ruling class is in the sharp contradictions between their ideology and reality, the hard_

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<u>facts. These contrasts, if done suddenly and abruptly, are an important dynamic of the scene.</u>" (P. 73) They must replace characterization, plot development and suspense, traditional dramatic techniques to sustain audience interest.

In order to further educate the audience, a goal of this theater as noted above, a volley of statistics is fired at them:

> <u>Barker. . .</u>: FREEZE!(<u>the scene freezes</u>) One half of one percent of the U.S. population owns 80% of the corporate wealth and controls the entire economy. U.S. investors own 60% of Canada's industry, own 40% of Europe's entire car industry and 90% of Europe's electronics industry. U.S. owns 90% of Venezuela's oil-interests and owns all the major banking facilities in Latin America. UNFREEZE! . . . . (P. 75)

Armed with this information, the Chorus of People spar verbally with the establishment.

> <u>Someone from the People</u>:. . . . We need more schools!
>
> <u>Military</u>: . . . . We need: more armies; More counter-insurgency; More green berets, more bombs, guns, missiles!
>
> <u>Chorus of the People</u>: BUTTER--NOT GUNS/BUTTER--NOT GUNS!

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. . . .

Welfare-Recipient: (has picked up brick, ... threateningly to [Happy Family]) CHANGE NOW! CHANGE NOW! (advancing slowly, with the brick, on family).

Happy Family: . . . . LAW AND ORDER! LAW AND ORDER! LAW AND ORDER! (P. 76)

The dialectic which results reveals the myth of democracy in the United States, for the only way that the Chorus can prevail is to overrun the government.

In another of its productions, Song of the Mighty B-52 (1973 SDS excoriates the military, the strong arm of the state.[38] Preying on the ambitions of the young for upward mobility, it seduces them with visions of travel and free training for well-paying jobs. Once in the grips of the institution, the recruit is trained to become an efficient, instinctual killer. He is unimpeded in this career by a personally evolved moral code. His only allegiance is to the state. The state determines his opinions, his goals, his enemies.

The state as represented in Song of the Mighty B-52, is totalitarian. Totalitarian government aims to exert com-

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plete control over its subjects. In pursuit of this goal, it will destroy any independent bases of local power. It is no respecter of human rights, that of its own people, or of any other nation. It does not hold with the fraternity of all men. Rather, it seeks to erect enemies. The totalitarian state needs enemies. They keep the emotional level of the populace at a fever pitch and justify the intense allegiance required by the state.

In Song, the military offers several candidates for the enmity of its men, foes both foreign and domestic: "Vietnamese Peasants";"Dominicans in the Dominican Republic";"blacks in Detroit." (P. 83) Even though it its true that "if you're black, brown, yellow and red and make trouble YOU'RE DEAD," the basic determinant of enemy status is the color of one's skin. The enemies are the Blacks in Watts and the Vietnamese and if they

> Should try to resist our presence
> We'll chop 'em to bits
> Because white America's rule is law (P. 83)

A new found fraternity is established among the soldiers, black, brown, and white when they discern their true enemy--the racist U.S.Government, or more accurately the American military-industrial complex. They determine to overthrow it.

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For Teatro Campesino, the acculturation required by the American educational system is a form of racism, albeit a more subtle species than that described above in Big Top. The Teatro was founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 as a theatrical adjunct to the grapeworkers' strike in Delano, California. Its task was to embolden resolve, define issues and target enemies for the Chicano migrant worker community.

Coercion by the educational establishment is the subject of Teatro Campesino's No Saca Nada de la Escuela (1969), or You Don't Get Anything from School which follows the fortunes of four people as they progress through the American educational system. It is divided into three parts: elementary school, high school and state college. The Teatro's concern is the acculturation that the American educational system imposes. This process confronts Francisco, a Chicano, on his very first day of classes, as a teacher insists on anglicizing his name. Francisco resists and holds on to his ethnicity through elementary school and on into high school. He is finally expelled for his independence. The other Chicanos who have accepted the values of the white establishment proceed to State College where Francisco is employed as a janitor. He tries to enter the college, but is stymied by racism. A black man, Malcolm, would not have been able to attend either, except that he

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forced the issue--with a gun. Francisco, following suit, re-enters the stage as a militant brown beret.

The racist mind categorizes individuals according to stereotype, and imprisons them within an ideological construct. On the societal level, the ability of establishment agency to impose self-image on the individual has powerful political ramifications. Self-image determines self-worth and the limits of aspiration. A negative self-image can effectively keep an individual "in his place"; for example, he or she is at the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder because of inherent stupidity, laziness or sex-linked incapacity. If the individual believes the negative conditioning, he believes he belongs right where he is in the social hierarchy. For an establishment that has a vested interest in oppressing one group or another, the opportunities are clear.

The Teatro believes that the American mind has classified Chicanos according to several types. Classification of individuals according to a social typology is the subject of <u>Los Vendidos</u> (1969), a one-act play, or <u>acto</u> as the Teatro labels its dramas,

> The scene is set in Honest Sancho's Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop. On sale are three Chicano models: "to the right, there is a REVOLUCIONARIO, complete with som-

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brero, carrilleras, and carabina 30-30. At center, on the floor, there is the FARM WORKER, under a broad straw sombrero. At stage left is the PACHUCO, filero in hand."[39]

A Miss Jimenez comes in from Governor Reagan's office because "we're looking for a Mexican type for the administration." (P. 213) Since she is unimpressed with any of the above floor models, Sancho, the salesman, brings out a model he has stored away, a "1970 Mexican-American." This is a versatile type. He is college-educated, ambitious, well-mannered and clean. He is also a lover. But, queries the efficient Miss Jimenez, "does he function on boards?" He does, Sancho assures her. The model is also a politician, and at this juncture it steps forward and gives a political speech.

> Mr. Congressman, Mr. chairman, members of the board, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen . . . . I come before you as a Mexican-American to tell you about the problems of the Mexican. The problems of the Mexican stem from one thing and one thing alone: he's stupid. He's uneducated. He needs to stay in school. He needs to be ambitious, forward-looking, harder-working. He needs to think American, American, American, AMERICAN, AMERICAN, AMERICAN, GOD BLESS AMERICA! P. 221)

Even though the price is high for the Mexican-American, $5,000 dollars, Miss Jimenez purchases it for "The Governor

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is having a luncheon this afternoon, and we need a brown face in the crowd." (P. 222)

Just as she is about to leave with her purchase, he starts screaming revolutionary slogans. He is joined by the other three models who scream, "Viva La Raza! . . . . Viva La Huelga! . . . . Viva La Revolucion!" (P. 223) They succeed in terrorizing the secretary, and she flees from the store. The models then reveal themselves as real people contriving a scam to bilk prejudiced society. At the end, they divide up the money paid for the Mexican-American and the audience discovers that the only real "dummy" in the shop was Sancho.

These establishment images are the basis for prejudice and oppression. They restrict the social mobility of the Chicano because not only does society prescribe and perpetuate these racist stereotypes, but the Chicano himself begins to subscribe to them and the result is a dynamic of self-oppression.

The most extreme circumstance of entrenched societal racism is race war. 1984 (copyright 1972), a production of the Bodacious Buggerilla, a black guerrilla theater troupe, offers a futuristic vision of a world divided into two warring factions, one black, the other white.[40] With a backdrop of both political and ecological devastation, the play

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shifts back and forth in focus from the white perspective on the war to that of the black man. What makes this play eligible for inclusion in the New Left repertory--even though it its not produced by students and the group is black--is not only its aesthetics but its political vision: it does not see the dynamic of race as merely the spiritual peccadillo of one race or another, but presents it as a dynamic of oppression of one class by another. A narrator explains.

> In the United States of America, because there were ever-increasing numbers of factories, machines, and profits for some, there was increasing unemployment, poverty, and death for others. There were some attempts among those whom society had cut off from any means by which to live, to organize themselves against this system that would, through neglect, destroy them. But their attempts were hopeless, and society became more and more split. . . . Somehow every issue raised against the system was painted with some strange racial overtones. So as a result, none of the issues were ever dealt with. It was almost as if someone were sabotaging democratic activity purposely

Interlarded within the scenes is the image of the businessman. After each evil consequence of total war, hunger, disease, ecological destruction, he appears. His

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relationship to the calamities is not articulated. His image, attached as a coda to the atrocities, stands as a tacit indictment of his culpability.

In no play in the New Left repertoire is the capitalist a human being of any moral dimension. In this theater he is exposed as ruthless, greedy, salacious, imperialist, sexist and racist. He not only will maintain his profits no matter what the human cost, but he will strive equally hard to make his actions seem beneficent to the individuals whom he is exploiting because he wants to feel good about himself.

The businessman is not the less evil because his racism seems to be less a matter of philosophy than expedience. The dynamics of capitalism are not intrinsically racist (though the white male is frequently depicted as such). Racism is a weapon in the capitalist arsenal to better manipulate labor; for example, strong labor solidarity is a threat to a cheap labor force. If racism will diminish the threat that unionism poses, then racism is a recourse. In THE TURN OF THE SCREW (1969), a RAT production of the University of California (UCAL), this is illustrated.[41] In TURN, when a strike is called, the boss cries out

> This calls for my super-duper tool kit! (He takes an axe out of his kit. "Racism" is written on it) Chop! (He uses racism to split the working class) (To a white worker Can't you recognize a black power grab when you

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see one? (P. 116)

Fortunately, the black worker is not distracted. The Boss is attempting to mislead him and block his progress towards the goal of worker unity: "Black Worker: Black power grab my ass! Better wages for all!" (P. 116)

Profit, or material gain, is the only absolute value in the capitalist ethos. The most labor for the least cost is one of the aims, as in The Story of the Three Big Pigs, a production of a socialist agit-prop troupe, the San Franciso Red Theater, presented in the winter of 1971.[42] The subject of the piece is a workers' march to end unemployment. The three pigs are businessmen, one of whom admits that "capitalism isn't based on truth, it's based on profit . . . at the worker's cost." (P. 303) Workers band together and rebel. They demand payment for the full period of unemployment. They demand preferential housing for minority workers. They demand an end to the war in Vietnam, demonstrating their comprehension of the international context of labor oppression. No longer will they settle for scraps left over from the tables of the high and mighty.

Government cooperates with business in oppressing labor. The play asserts that the benevolent paternalism of social welfare programs as outlined in the New Frontier, the Great Society and the Poverty Plan are really ruses to cushion the

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social shock of recurrent unemployment. Far from being plans to improve the lot of labor, they are designed to facilitate the maintenance of the status quo.

Unemployment, itself, is a method to forestall a deterioration of the economy. Lay the Bosses off--Not the Workers presents unemployment as a calculated scheme on the part of the government/business to deal with inflation.[43] This piece, another production of the San Francisco Red Theater, was by the group's account, a popular play. (P. 298) Worried about the economy, President Nixon seeks a doctor's advice. The latter advises lay-offs. Four workers line up on stage and the lay-offs proceed. The boss fires workers according to color. Whites are terminated if they have black friends. Finally, however, the workers revolt. They vow to unite, the first worker crying, "We'll smash racist unemployment." (P. 300) Nixon is attacked at the finale.

The San Francisco Mime troupe, founded in 1959 by Ronnie Davis, presented Frozen Wages (1972), during "Phase One of Nixon's New Economic Policy [NEP], the wage-price freeze, when only wages stayed frozen." [44] This story of Nixon's redress for a stagnant economy exposes the NEP as a way to maintain high profits at the expense of labor. The Modus Operandi of the NEP is to "scare the piss out of everybody and start laying off workers."(240) A raise in salary is

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awarded to the remaining workers. But the pace is killing because the same amount of work is now parcelled out among fewer men. When workers complain, they are presented with the alternative of beggary. As the personified NEP explains to the Capitalist, fewer jobs will destroy unions for "when there aren't any jobs left, there won't be any unions." (237-8)

The poignancy of this acto as the group calls it is the attempt to make obscure political and economic machinations clear to a victimized working force. In Frozen Wages, the workers are informed by the capitalist that they are to blame for inflation :"You [workers] insisted on cars and homes and vacations. You had to have meat every night." (236)

In another of the Mime Troupe's plays, The Dragon Lady's Revenge (1972), the international drug trade is presented as an excrescence of the unmitigated anti-humanistic greed of government and business. The story concerns Clyde's effort to avenge his friend's death which was due to a drug overdose. He discovers that the United States is behind the native drug trade and that his own father, the American Ambassador, is its ringleader.

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Unlike his son, the Ambassador is sanguine about the American connection. Drugs are profitable he reminds his son:

CLYDE: but it's criminal.

AMBASSADOR: Can anything that makes billions REALLY be called criminal? 45

The logical corollary to such a philosophy of jurisprudence is that there is no action so heinous that the end result of profit cannot justify it. The contingency of the value affixed to human life in such a view is obvious. It offended mightily the practitioners of the theater of the New Left, and they saw it as explanation for the United States' protracted engagement in Vietnam.

New Left theater insistently presented the war as a battle for mercantile gain, not a principled fight to preserve a people's rights to self-determination, as official propaganda presented it. In To Be Radical is to Get to The Root of Things (copyright 1971), a production of People's Street Theater, the reality behind American intervention in Vietnam is contrasted with the official rationale that, "the United States is involved in supporting a free and independently elected government which can defend itself

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against Communist aggression."46 Far from supporting the move to self-determination of a sovereign people, the United States is actively engaged in suppressing that expression. In this short skit, the CIA is referred to as the real government of Vietnam, and its target, the entire Vietnamese people.

In SONG OF THE MIGHTY B-52 discussed on pages 27 through 29, the same point is made. The play indicts America for warring on the very people whose democratic privilege it is claiming to protect. In Vietnam, the enemy of the United States is the rebel Vietnamese. The subject of the play is the American soldier's confusion in determining the rebels

> White G.I.: But that's impossible! I need targets. . . clear targets.
>
> Vietcong: We look like the Vietnamese people . . . We act like them . . . We plant rice like them . . . We are the Vietnamese people... that's your target! 47

The enemy is the entire population. Or, rather, it is the poor that is the enemy. In order to establish a basic fraternity between the poor Vietnamese and working-class or poor Americans, the play suggests a parallel violence occurring on the domestic front, especially to Americans of non-European descent for in Vietnam it is "killing poor yellow

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people. . .while back in the States it's killing poor blacks. . . " (P. 84)

The New Left was anxious to parallel international exploitation with domestic to make it very clear that the same nexus of repressive forces which produced a Vietnam--the military-industrial-complex--created poverty at home. In VIETNAM CAMPESINO (1970), a production of Teatro Campesino, the message is much the same. The peasant in Vietnam has his precise American counterpart

> General: (Points at Vietnamese) Farmworkers just like the farmworkers. (Points at Campesinos, then back at Vietnamese) Campesinos just like them Campesinos. (Points again.) Poor people just like them poor people. (Points again) And we've been killing them for ten years![48]

Exposition of the true motivations behind the war will debunk it, so that young men will not be seduced by its promotion as a fight to maintain democracy and enlist, a conception popularized n a movie made by John Wayne in 1968, The Green Berets. In Vietnam Campesino, the draft is caricatured as the figure of death with an American flag for a shroud. He hooks a young Chicano farmworker with ease, for as General Defense, says,

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What trouble? Mexicans are pouring into the army. We just give 'em a pretty little uniform, a few pesos, a blessing from Mamacita, and wham-o, they're in the frontlines. Those boys are just dying to show their machismo." (P. 108)

It was just such cynicism that the Teatro wanted to expose.

The San Francisco Women's Street Theater broadened the scope of its concerns to offer a history of our involvement in Laos and parallel it to our engagement in Vietnam in LAOS FLIPPY (1973).[49] LAOS FLIPPY is a didactic exercise designed to reveal American capitalism's *modus operandi*: dependence on war to provide new markets and/or appropriate natural resources.

Why are we at war with Southeast Asia?

....

Standard Oil, Bank of America, Dow, Boeing and our industries need growing markets.

Where are we going to get our rubber, oil, and tin?

If Southeast Asia turns Communist we can't sell them any Coca Cola! 50

Ulterior concerns for profit are disguised by rhetoric which professes humanitarian goals, i.e., the preservation

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or installation of democracy, the desire to facilitate self-determination among indigenous peoples, etc. Quotes from President Nixon and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird among others are given in order to contrast government propaganda with the reality of the war,

> Nixon: There are no American ground troops in Laos. We have no plans for introducing ground combat forces into Laos. . .
>
> Reports from France and Laos say that 43,000 troops, 10,000 of them American, invaded the southeastern region of Laos Monday, February 8th. The State Department denied that any U.S. troops were on Laotian soil, but admitted heavy military assistance, including air support, troop transport, supplies, and backup defense inside South Vietnam. (P. 360)

As the Women's Street theater presents it, the government is a liar.

Feminists were eager to set the problem of their oppression within an international context. Many had bridled at the male SDS'ers derision of their subjugation as minor when compared with the lot of the Vietnamese peasant. Now, they would articulate their condition in America as yet another manifestation of white, male, Eurocentric imperialism. In

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The Mad Bomber, a production of the Rapid Transit Guerrilla Communications group, a woman's nascent consciousness of her manipulation by men coincides exactly with the development of her antiwar sentiment.

> Two women come on stage and stand completely motionless. A man enters, looks at one, calls her Miss America and arranges her body in a poised sexy model style. He puts a stupid smile on her face. Then he goes to the other women [sic], calls her Miss Cambodia, treats her roughly, puts a gun in her hand and arranges her in a shooting position. He goes over to Miss America and puts a skillet in her hand. Then he goes toward the audience, flexing his muscles and smiling. The two women come to life, look at one another, go toward the man and shoot him and hit him with the skillet. He falls and the women grasp hands triumphantly and walk off.[51]

After this display of international sisterhood, the narration abruptly changes the action to any small town, U.S.A. An elderly couple out of "American Gothic," are discussing the war. "Ma" says she is changing the name of her women's sewing circle to Women's Liberation Movement and one of the first things she is going to do as a "Women's Libber" is go to Washington to protest the war, a radical departure from

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her traditional role and a radical redefinition of her self-image.

To feminists, control of self-image was the key to self-determination. To allow standards of beauty, sexuality and femininity to be dictated by men was to relinquish autonomy. The era called for a destruction of all of the icons of femininity and womanhood derived from male fantasy and promoted by Fifth Avenue, from dress to sexual etiquette and mores.

The Models, another production of the Rapid Transit Guerrilla Communications, offers a male image of what constitutes female perfection. Three models enter and "assume sexy, stylized mannequin positions."[52] Another woman enters and judges herself inferior because she doesn't compare to the models. At this point, a man enters and asks, "Hey, would you like to look like that?"

> She: (gets real excited): Yes, oh I sure would.
>
> He: Well, I think we can take care of it. Just let me take control. (P. 276)

He snaps his fingers and she becomes immobile while he manipulates her into a "frozen model sexy position." (P. 276) She has no self-determination, is utterly malleable. She is, finally, and happily, a product of male fantasy.

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Daddy, May I?, a production of Mass Transit Street Theater, models its dramatic action after the logic of the child's game, Giant Steps, because it is seen "as a metaphor for the traditional relationship of American Women with their men." 53

Each of the six women in Big Daddy's life, his mother, wife, baby daughter, teenage daughter, executive assistant and secretary sues him to progress in the game by being allowed to take a step. Each woman woos Big Daddy in her own particular way, according to her own determination of her strengths and deficiencies. Flattery, guilt, and, of course, sex are the tools in their arsenal. Big Daddy manipulates all, changing the rules of the game as he pleases. He becomes so tyrannical that the women rebel. They take steps in their own way, at their own speed and, finally, not at all. They stop vying for his attention and pay attention to each other. The result is a new found sorority among the women.

For the movement, rebellion against such chauvinism often manifested itself as guerrilla theater or "zap" actions. Annie Popkin, a member of one of the earliest women's liberations groups, Bread and Roses (1968--1970), describes two such "zap" actions: one in which a number of women congregated in front of a store in Harvard Square and hurled sexual epithets at passing men; the second when a

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local radio station ran an advertisement for a secretary which read, "if you're a chick and can type, we need you." This so offended feminists in the era that they purchased a basket of chicks and arrived at the station. "These are chicks," they announced. "We are women. There's a difference." 54

To combat such preconceptions, a massive re-education campaign was needed. The first thing liberated women set out to do was to reclaim their history or _herstory_, and to reveal the true story of their oppression at the hands of white males. The San Francisco Women's Street Theater produced a paper movie, or a "cranky," _In the Beginning_, that vividly illustrated the history of women's oppression from its ancient origins; "it is about how the myth of women's inferiority began and has been perpetuated to oppress us and about how women are refusing to submit to that HIS-TORY any longer." 55

The philosophy behind the education of women was based on Rousseau's concept that all of her education should be made relative to the men in her life. (P. 334) _In the Beginning_ illustrates women's fight to enter schools even though it was commonly believed that their brains were inferior to men's, that they were constitutionally incapable of benefiting from higher education. Once they made it into schools, obstacles still impeded their progress for they

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were "directed away from analytical subjects like science and math and into clerical courses, home economics, nursing, and lower paying jobs." (P. 337) On the job, they were unable to get "equal pay and training for more skilled work." (P. 340)

World War II revealed female mettle, however. The cranky lists the many traditionally male occupations that women performed due to shortage of manpower: truckers, riveters, machinists. While they worked, their children were tended in day care centers. But when the war ended, "women were reminded of their proper place." (P. 346) Statistics given in the play concerning women's salaries compared to men remind the audience that this is a system that sets a low value on women's labor.

Another statistic reveals that seventy-five per cent of all advertising is directed at the housewife which tries to convince her that " . . . she needs a new hair color, a new face, and a new shape." Clairol's famous slogan of the era, "is it true blondes have more fun?" is asked of a blond chorus member in the play who responds with a resounding, "No!" "Every day of our lives we're reminded that this system considers us inferior to men, and we're sick of it." (P. 348) The audience is encouraged to struggle against this anti-feminism in all areas of its life.

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A contemporary evaluation of the female predicament in America is offered by What is woman? A Revolutionary Soap-box Opera (1973). It was developed collectively over a three week period by the Burning City Theater of New York. The six playlets that comprise the piece are personal experiences of womanhood offered by individual members of the group and then further developed by the whole. They range in subject matter from the experience of young motherhood to the mature relationship between mother and daughter; from the exploration of ideal love to the experience of woman in the educational system.

"The Story of a College Graduate," is an expressionistic pastiche of a woman's experience in a woman's college. From the opening image of a "grotesque cop-like figure," a character who dresses the actress playing Sophie Smith (founder of Smith College), to that of graduation as a "funeral-like procession," education is presented as a thorough assault on the integrity and freedom of the human spirit. Moreover, college gives " information that "does not relate to anyone." 56 When questioned as to why they attended school, the women answer severally

My mother is making me go.

My father said he would disown me if I didn't.

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> I want to go and become a successful career woman
>
> I want to become the educated wife of a professional man (P. 399)

In modern education, the options available to women are myriad; yet, school is depicted here as an institution designed to reduce woman to automatons

> The characters enter and form a square, moving with jerky wooden-like postures, as though they had just undergone shock treatment. They . . . kneel around a pile of books. Each in turn picks up a book, kisses it reverently, and holds it until the others have done likewise. Then all four read in unison, very softly, a dull tedious monotonous droning sound issuing from their lips. We catch snatches of the words but they make no sense. Information that does not relate to anyone. (P. 399)

When one woman rebels at this conformity, she "is dragged out of the school system by the professor and cop-system." (P. 400)

Women are educated into unquestioning subservience by the educational system. The New Left indicted this system for instilling in women, blacks, Latinos, and any and all

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non-white, non-male individuals feelings of inferiority. The myth of American democracy was that everyone could make it: opportunity was available to anyone-if he/she tried. The task of American education, as this dramaturgy presents it, is to discourage certain populations from trying, as in The Big Top: the brown student is guided into a low-paying blue-collar job and the black student drafted into the army. The New Left contended that education operates as a conduit for establishment propaganda, deliberately giving students a false picture of themselves and of the world in which they lived.[57]

Academe was more severely criticized than primary education because far more was expected from it. The closing section of the Port Huron Statement, entitled "The University and Social Change," outlines SDS' hope for an alternative university; both students and faculty are needed to realize it.

> They must wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy. They must make fraternal and functional contact with allies in labor, civil rights, and other liberal forces outside the campus. They must import major public issues into the curriculum--research and teaching on problems of war and peace is an outstanding example. They must make debate and controversy, not dull pedantic cant, the common

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> style for educational life. They must consciously build a base for their assault upon the loci of power.58

Otherwise the university will continue to be "used to buttress immoral social practice," (Ibid, 373) as it is in UCONN Rat's play, Uconn GE Varsity Quiz.

On the occasion of the 1969 General Electric strike, the University of Connecticut (UCONN) SDS RAT presented the Uconn GE Varsity Quiz.59 It was presented at a meeting of the Black Student Union (BSU) and SDS in order to determine if the students would support the strike and also to work out the proper strategy to protest the planned appearance on campus of a GE recruiter.

The play is a parody of GE's college quiz show, College Bowl in which students test their knowledge. By pitting students against workers in the skit, UCONN rat exposes education as a tool to instill a false consciousness in its students by distorting history.

The contestants, Billy Bourgeoisie, Yolanda America-First, and Larry Liberal are introduced. Billy's major is military science and business management; Yolanda's is English Literature through which she hopes "to study poverty in the novels of Thomas Hardy," and Larry's, Law Enforcement and Social Welfare. (P. 42) The cynical pairing of Military Science and Business management in Billy's case and

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Law Enforcement and Social Welfare in Larry's case reveals SDS' perception of the natural alliances in advanced industrial capitalism. Tacit criticism is made of the university's alienation from the vital problems of community in Yolanda's goal to study poverty in books.

A battery of questions is aimed at the contestants and programmed responses are given. The correctives offered by the workers are ignored. When the moderator, the Duke of Earl, asks, "What is the primary cause of inflation?" the workers answer "Military spending and profits from imperialist wars."(P. 42) The answer is adjudged as wrong. UCONN is asked. Billy answers: "Inflation is caused by increased inflationary wage demands." (P. 42) When the Haymarket Square Riot is brought up, the event is described by the moderator as created by "criminal anarchists [who] viciously attack Chicago police and threaten to bring chaos to the city in 1886." (P. 44) When the workers define the source of profit as "the surplus value of our labor power," the answer given by Larry that "profits come from machines which do the work and provide lots of consumer goods" is approved as right, instead. (P. 46)

Inevitably, the UCONN varsity scholars win. The moderator congratulates them, saying, "We're proud of you students. You'll fit this society very nicely." He ends

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this paean by urging them to visit with the GE recruiter on campus.(P. 46)

The students recite flawlessly their received wisdom. Any opposition that is offered by the workers to their responses is either ignored or pronounced as incorrect. In their perfect obtuseness, their implacable belief in the validity of their dogma and its depiction of a just world besieged by the lazy and the criminal, these college students are perfect exemplars of the type of citizen required by a totalitarian system.

The indoctrination process begins before college. The first play of the Red Theater, One Day at Nixon High School (1970),[60] opens with a businessman who is lamenting the state of societal unrest.

> BUSINESSMAN (Walks in, dragging a money-bag and reading "Challenge") This is depressing! This Challenge Newspaper is full of bad news! (Points to chart for each group of people.) Workers on strike! GI's killing their officers! The unemployed demanding jobs! Nurses and patients writing against me! Even the grave-diggers went on strike last year in New York! It's getting harder each day to make a buck! Why, this is all I made yesterday. (Shows the bag full of money.) What shall I do? (pause). Ah! I've got it! (Points to school.)

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Education is the answer! I have to put them in the right frame of mind before they enter the meat market--I mean the labor market. (walks out). (P. 293)

Instilling in its student population the "right frame of mind" is the crucial task of American education. At Nixon High, the day starts out with an enforced pledge to the American flag. The flag is held by a policeman. After this, the teacher announces a program, the Citizen Observer Program, or COP. By assigning them a regular beat, COP hopes to interest young people in a career in law enforcement. When no student volunteers, a policeman seizes one.

The students proceed to criticize the police in a scurrilous song and the teacher calls for the principal, Mr. Shitfits. The principal is at a loss as to how to deal with the recalcitrant student who is now threatening the policemen. Shitfits decides to call in Dr. Fraud, the school counselor, who advises the student to "take this pill, it'll make everything groovy! . . . Wow! . . . Far-out!. . . etc. (Student rejects pill, and counselor goes wandering off). The teacher and parent begin to resist the coercion of the establishment and faced with these combined forces the principal, policeman and businessman are overcome. (P. 296)

In view of the efficacy of covert methods of persuasion in maintaining social control, it is rare that rebellion

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against the <u>status quo</u> ever occurs. As dramatized in the plays, every American institution from the military to education is designed to prevent it. When rebellion does happen in the form of demonstrations, strikes, or clashes with local police rarely does it pose a real threat to the state which has a great deal of capacity for absorbing and thus neutralizing dissent.[61] If civil unrest should prove the state vulnerable at any point, then there is recourse to overt action, or police force.

If the seminal concept of Port Huron, the one that so catalyzed the New Left, was participatory democracy, everywhere in its theater exercise of such franchise is depicted as subject to police interdiction. In <u>The Turn of the Screw</u> mentioned above, Uncle Sam puts on a policeman mask and brutally breaks up a workers' demonstration. In the People's Park play, a plot of land cultivated for recreational purposes is reclaimed by the state for private property by the use of police force. In the Pageant Players, <u>Conspiracy Play</u> (1970), based on the Chicago Conspiracy trial, a character in the play is hit on the head with a policeman's club and arrested--for flying.

These plays reflect the New Left's contention that the state is brute force in the service of a wealthy elite determined to preserve its privilege by any means, both covert and overt The government's chief responsibilities

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are, as presented in the New Left dramatic canon, to pass laws to protect and extend privilege and to coordinate police activities for the power elite. Indeed, as noted above in The Turn of the Screw, the allegorical figure of government is janus-headed: one side that of Uncle Sam and the other of a policeman.

In the plays of the New Left, the police are unquestioning servants of the power elite. They protect its privilege. They guard its property against the predations of those who would have it. In this literature, as often as not, they are referred to as "Pigs." They are depicted as automatons rigidly carrying out proscribed duties with no regard for human consideration or moral value. Like attack dogs, they are called out to track, beat down and restrain dissent.

There is no hesitation on the part of authority figures to back up their purview with the rigor of police action, even in the supposed hallowed precincts of academe. In "Heyns", a production of Berkeley RAT, the police are called upon to deal with student dissent over a number of issues.[62] The Heyns of the title is Roger Heyns, the chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley from 1968--1969. He is accused of being a liberal and a war-monger in his attempt to repress a demonstration against Dow Chemical on campus.

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Students (demonstrating): Dow of campus! <u>(Heyns blows a whistle; enter some cops who attack the demonstrators and Mace them down.)</u>

<u>H:(to cops):</u>Fine job! Have a liberal pipe!

....

<u>Cop:</u> Please accept a can of mace, sir. (P. 111)

When a demonstration is called to demand that Eldridge Clever, a black radical, be allowed to teach at UCAL, Heyns calls the police.

<u>Students:</u> On Campus! For credit! As planned!

....

<u>Nar.</u> The students liberated Moses Hall. <u>(Students clench fists.)</u> Barricades were set up. <u>(Someone plays the "part" of the barricades.)</u> Through the long night the students held the building. <u>(Students yawn.)</u> At dawn, the pigs arrived: 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600. <u>(One or two cops march around the students as the narrator counts them.)</u> (P. 112)

Again, they are summoned when the students agitate for a Black Studies department. Heyns calls then Governor Ronald

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Reagon for help,"Hello, Ronnie? [Reagan] I need the Alameda Sheriffs, the National Guard, the California Highway Patrol, the Tac Squad, the Boy Scouts, the forest rangers, and Smokey the Bear." (P. 113) The script indicates that at one performance the police did show up.

In Uncle Tom, a production of the Los Angeles Bodacious Buggerrilla, the relationship of the black men to those wardens, the police, crucially determines the factors of survival. [63] It is the point of this short skit. Uncle Tom believes the way to survival is placation, and he is ridiculed for this by a young radical black man. The latter is belligerent with the police, defying and verbally taunting them. When the police begin to draw their guns, the black revolutionary, nothing daunted, rails at them.

> That don't scare me, fuck it. Fuck it, you pig fascist muthafuckers. Y'all all think that fuckin' guns will get me scared of you pigs? It don't. We out to get you pigs and if you think you can come into this community like you do, you gonna have to shoot me when you do. (P. 82)

They shoot him down.

Underestimation of the state's power to intrude into almost every aspect of our lives via police force is a serious miscalculation. In many of the plays discussed here,

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a tacit accusation is made that America is rapidly approaching the status of police state. This is the closing observation of Los Siete Bart (1970), a paper movie, or cranky production of the The San Francisco Mime Troupe. The play is based on an actual case of seven Latino men charged with killing a San Francisco policeman in 1969.[64] The Mime believes that the play helped to vindicate the men.

The two characters of the play are a commuter and BART, or the Bay Area Rapid Transit, a train system under construction since 1960, the play notes. (P. 341) BART is going to give the commuter a ride down to the Mission District of San Francisco, a largely working-class area with a large Latino population. BART asks the commuter to pay attention to the sights along the way and says that he is open to questions, but only simple questions. As the trip proceeds, BART, pointing out the new buildings which range on either side of the system, describes the beginnings of a process soon to be called gentrification. He describes the San Francisco of yesteryear:

> charming, fascinating, the financial capital of the West Coast, but somehow still provincial, low profile. Oh it has its towers of commerce, but it lacks executive living quarters for the young movers and shakers of high finance. They're forced to live in faraway suburbs, and so eventually their businesses move there to and the

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> inner city decays. A tragic situation; but with the coming of me, BART, new high-rise luxury apartments--the Dolores Towers, the Bernal Arms, the hanging gardens of Guerraro sprout like magic castles in districts where nobody worth mentioning had lived for years. Like sequuoias from garbage heaps, the new Manhattan rises from the slums. (Pp. 341-3)

The individuals living in these areas are considered disposable.

The concept of disposable people becomes graphic as the play goes on to describe "The Tracking System," whereby some people are groomed for college and a lucrative career and others are slated for the military, a screening process depicted over and over in these plays. In visualizing this process, the cranky rolls in a drawing that depicts two separate tracks: one leading to a fistful of dollars and the other, for Latinos, leading to combat and, ultimately, to a headlong plunge into the toilet bowl. The image is obscene and stark.

The trip continues, the commuter asking naive questions, failing to perceive where this journey must logically end. He is told by BART of the story of Los Siete, seven men accosted my plainclothes police because they were carrying a

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television. In the ensuing melee, one of the policemen was shot--with his partner's gun.

C: Which one of 'em did it?

B: All of 'em. We don't know how exactly, but we're working on it. I shudder to think what they would've done if they'd known he was a police officer.

C: You mean they thought he was just a--

B: Just a guy with a rubber hose and a bulge in his jacket, after their TV set. And they wanted to go to college. (P. 349)

BART concludes by saying that six were caught. He then tells the commuter that he, BART, is the first train to penetrate the Mission district and " Los Siete and their families, and the twenty-nine Latinos who still live in the Mission District, will be standing in the station as I arrive." (P. 350) The commuter is horrified to learn that the people will be standing in the tracks and the train intends to run them down. "Too bad," BART taunts him, "How do you think you got your job, and your new high-rise luxury apartment?" (Ibid)

Too late, the Commuter learns that the system that has corralled others has also imprisoned him for he hates his

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job and his apartment in one of the new building complexes which has displaced the poor. Too late, he wonders why people didn't try to stop this project. "Los Siete fought," answers BART. "But you wanted security. And now you've got security, courtesy of the Total State. Welcome to Daly City--end of the line." (P. 351)

The cranky rolls up its final drawing: in the foreground to the right is a pyramid, aloft flies a flag with a symbol of the dollar on it. A series of pyramids recede into the distance behind it, one with an American Eagle, the next with the symbol of the San Francisco Police Department and the third with the title COKE inscribed on its medallion. In the foreground to the right, is a brand new apartment building, its form that of a swastika.

As the plays of the New Left demonstrate, the ideal citizenry for this "Total State," is processed through its major institutions, such as the educational establishment or the military. The result is a populace whose major attribute is passivity. The individual produced by such a system acquiesces, remains numb, and refuses to act--is in essence, a "Good German." The goal of New Left theater was to overcome such passivity in it audiences by urging activism.

It could only do so by a re-education campaign which would offer an alternative history and an alternative inter-

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pretation of contemporary politics. Alternative analyses of contemporary America could uncover the machinations of the military-industrial elite, or power elite, often covered up by a self-serving rhetoric which blamed abstract forces, like market dynamics, for societal inequities. New Left theater explained to its audiences that the system required an underclass as expendable labor; it exposed the tactics of the power elite, erecting false enemies through incitement of class hatred or racism as a cover for its own activities, a dodge that splintered loyalties among the people.

Revisionist history could refute stereotype and instill dignity in those whose humanity was degraded by such caricature. Knowledge of the particular contributions to world culture of one's ancestors aided in the rehabilitation of self-esteem; it ended self-derogation. Proclamation of the pride of one's ethnic heritage was an ideological keynote of the era and the drama of the New Left lent its own emphasis to that concept in an effort to embolden the oppressed to the task of revolution.

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Chapter 4

Politics On and Off-Broadway, 1968--1972

Based on production information offered in the Best Plays series, edited by Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1968--1973), approximately eighteen per cent of all new plays presented from 1968 to 1972 were political, approximately one in five.[1] The number of political plays produced would be significantly augmented if revivals of political plays were included in the statistics, such as Irwin Shaw's Bury the Dead (produced in 1971), or Arthur Miller's The Crucible (produced in 1972) or Martin Duberman's In White America (1972); or the production of classical plays, such as Aeschylus' The Persians (produced in 1970), overlaid with contemporary political parallels. The importation of foreign political plays, such as Heinar Kipphart's In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer (produced in 1969) or Peter Weiss' Song of the Lusitanian Bogey (produced in 1968) would also contribute to the frequency of production of political pieces.

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Political drama was a significant feature of the commercial theater in this period, and its commentary was offered through more than one type. Satire, protest musical, and the documentary drama were subspecies of the political drama much in evidence on the stage of this period. Satire, a tradition of the American political theater as outlined in chapter I, was utilized to express the political commentary of such writers as Art Buchwald, Jules Feiffer and Joseph Heller. The protest musical, whose most illustrious example is perhaps Hair (1967), the inaugural production of Joseph Papp at his Public Theatre, was another phenomenon of the period. It was followed up--not as auspiciously--by Stomp (1969), a "multimedia protest rock musical [which] takes pot shots at government,"[2] and Mod Donna (1970), a feminist musical. Mixing both political and countercultural complaint, the protest musical enjoyed a vogue, albeit brief. The documentary drama, a form pioneered by postwar Germany to explore her Nazi past, engendered another brief vogue in the American Theater. Daniel Berrigan's The Trial of the Catonsville Nine (1971), a documentary drama, was the hit of the season. Donald Freed, author of the documentary drama Inquest (1970), claimed that the very aesthetic of the genre was informed by political philosophy and evolved his conception of a "Theater of Fact," a theory which will be evaluated in greater detail below.

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Men like Freed, Berrigan, Heller, and Buchwald who contributed political dramas were not men of the theater; the production of their plays marked their theatrical debuts. Why did they choose the theater for political comment? The stage may have appealed to these mainstream writers for many of the same reasons it appealed to the practitioners of the New Left theater: the immediacy of the theater event; the communality of the theater event; the unique, handcrafted quality of it; the ability of theater, as the Yippies so astutely demonstrated, to produce compelling imagery in a world dominated by it.

Yet the vehicle of the theater would be used by the mainstream playwrights to convey a different political perspective on mid-century America than that of the New Left and black protest theaters. Though all three categories of political theater diagnose America as racist, imperialist and primed for totalitarianism, their analysis of the etiology of these social ills differs.

A more variegated approach to the assessment of political reality in America is offered by the mainstream playwrights. By and large, these writers refrain from issuing systemic indictments. As discussed above, in the canon of the Black protest and New left theaters, the system is unregenerate and deserving of destruction. In the commercial theater, the system is capable of reform. If one indi-

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vidual may corrupt it, another may restore it to legitimacy. In either case, the system remains integral. At worst, it is presented as neutral, but not illegitimate or deserving of overthrow.

In that the system is capable of reform, according to this philosophy, individual initiative might accomplish it or at least precipitate a national crisis of conscience. Mainstream theater provides several portraits of activists. The underlying motif of these various depictions of courage is the myth of Antigone, who defied her Uncle Creon, the King, in order to give her brother a decent burial. For the contemporary world, Antigone provides an allegory of the modern individual who cannot hope to prevail over the powerful and bureaucratic state but who aims instead for a moral victory. Mainstream theater emphasizes the effort of the lone individual acting in accordance with the dictates of his conscience. In The Trial of the Catonsville Nine, Daniel Berrigan offer us stirring examples of the importance and potency of individual initiative. In Eric Bentley's Are You Now; Or, Have You Ever Been (Grove Press, Inc., 1977), Paul Robeson, like David facing Goliath, confronts the overwhelming apparatus of the state when he refuses cooperation with HUAC and, consequently, scores a moral victory. In Donald Freed's Inquest, the Rosenbergs refuse to cooperate

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with the state and confess to an espionage they did not commit.

Yet in some of these plays, events are impervious to either human intervention or comprehension. Domestic violence, a frequent topic, is often presented as an evil genie of the period, as if its etiology did not originate in human motivation.

In a letter written in 1967 to the director of the London production of his play, Little Murders, Jules Feiffer stresses that he is writing in the "post-assassination era," a time of random violence.[3] The murder of John Kennedy was trauma enough for a nation which had been captivated by the idea of world harmony and progress that Kennedy offered. The deaths of his brother and Martin Luther King, Jr. in rapid succession invested the national psyche with presentiments of doom. To underscore the point, Feiffer includes a ditty in the published edition of his play, sung by the children of New York City, "Two, Four, Six, Eight--who do we assassinate?"

Little Murders is a love story set against a backdrop of urban violence--The drill of gunfire functions as theme music for the play. However, Patsy, the heroine, still has hope. She meets Alfred who, in an effort to cope, has become almost totally unresponsive. Nothing moves him;

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nothing touches him. He cannot be hurt--and he cannot love. Somehow, Patsy reaches him; Alfred has a breakthrough and begins to respond to her. But it is too late. While in her apartment, Patsy is shot from the street. She dies and Alfred loses his mind. By the end, a once confirmed pacifist, he picks up a gun and joins in the general fray, as do all the other members of Patsy's family. The play closes on an orgy of violence.

No pretext of grievance is needed for an attack in the world of Little Murders; its state of utter anomie is described by Lieutenant Practice, a detective dedicated to discovering a pattern behind the unsolved homicides committed within the last six months.

> A subtle pattern begins to emerge. What is this pattern? What is it that each of these three hundred and forty-five homicides have in common? They have in common three things: a) that they have nothing in common; b) that they have no motive; c) that, consequently, they remain unsolved. (P. 122)

Yet Lieutenant Practice discerns a logic to the randomness of the slayings.

> We are involved here in a far-reaching conspiracy to undermine respect for our basic beliefs and most sacred institutions. Who is behind this conspiracy? . . .

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> People in high places. Their names would astound you. People in low places. Concealing their activities behind a cloak of poverty. People in all walks of life. Left wing and right wing. Black and white. Students and scholars. A conspiracy of such ominous proportions that we may not know the whole truth in our lifetime, and we will never be able to reveal all the facts. We are readying mass arrests. (P. 123)

Practice has indicted all American society because he has not been able to discern either method or perpetrator to explain the violence. Instead, he has succumbed to a general paranoia.

A societal state of generalized paranoia is well articulated by the protagonist of James Leo Herlihy's one-act play, Bad-Bad Jo-Jo (1970). On the phone to a friend, Kayo Hathaway attempts to describe a pervasive fear that he suffers along with the rest of society:

> The stench of it is everywhere, it rises like fumes from the gratings in the streets, it lurks in doorways, it's the unwritten story on every page. Nobody knows what it is, and yet everyone has a name for it. The liberals call it the John Birch Society, and the Birchers call it Communism. The white man says it's Black Power, the Negroes say it's the fuzz, . . . 4

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Without compunction in regards to his own exploitation of the terror of the times--he is a successful purveyor of pulp violence--Kayo is surprised that anyone would attempt to assess the social significance of his work. A hippie, he explains to his friend over the phone, "seemed bound and determined to make one feel that one's every public act was freighted with social consequence." (P. 66) Society, according to Kayo, "amuses itself with bloodshed--making me a very rich man." He has profited from this blood lust by creating two fictional characters: Bad-Bad Jo-Jo and Mama. A mother and son team, they go around killing "Commies and hippies and faggots and niggers and peace creeps." (P. 76)

But Herlihy has poetic justice in store for his character. A young man, Frank, and his friend, Dennis, gain access to Kayo through the ruse of conducting an interview with the celebrated author. At the end of it, Dennis asks Kayo if he would like to see an imitation of Mama and Bad-Bad Jo-Jo and the author, flattered, agrees. The two dress up and mug, Dennis as Mama, and Frank as Jo-Jo. Mama talks of Jo-Jo's loyalty to Mama, God, country, friend. She declares their intractable hatred of Communists. In fact, she believes that Kayo, despite his creation of their two characters, is not a serious anti-communist: "Why, he's trying to make fools out of the plain, honest folk that tries to rid this old world of the Reds. I won't stand for

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it!" (P. 77) Kayo demurs and Mama slaps him. Too late, Kayo realizes their maniac intentions. He tries to bargain: he offers them money. But it is not money they are after; they want Kayo's life.

His murder, revealed in flashes of strobe lighting, is gruesome and ritualistic,

> while throughout the theater and on the walls of the set, a rapid succession of photographic blow-ups is projected: a policeman clubs a peace marcher; a GI stabs a Vietcong; and 007-type shoots someone in the face; soldiers burn an oriental village; someone is mugged; blacks smash a store window; a close-up of Sirhan Sirhan; President Nixon waves and smiles. . . . (P. 78)

Herlihy's ending posits Kayo's death as symptomatic of a violence that pervades every aspect of America's conduct. Our domestic governance is an expression of it; our military, an institutionalization of it; our entertainment, a glorification of it.

Frequently, in its exposition of violence, the dramatic imagination focussed on racial confrontation, a constant theme of political plays of the period. As shouts of "Black Power" began to replace chants of "We Shall Overcome," Americans feared race war. If the drama of the black protest theater threatened apocalyptic confrontation,

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examination of the drama of the mainstream reveals how seriously the threat was taken. In the mainstream drama, however, the role of victim is played by the white man instead of the black, as in Roger Cornish's Open 24 Hours (1968).

This play won Cornish the Annual National Collegiate Playwriting Award. It was first produced as The Laundrymat at the University of Minnesota; it was subsequently presented in Chicago and New York City.[5] In New York, the play was presented at the Actors' Playhouse in February of 1969.

Like Jules Feiffer's Little Murders, Cornish's play is a tale of urban violence; yet unlike the former, the violence is not diffuse and it definitely has a human agent--the black man. Open 24 Hours tells the story of how two black teenagers terrorize a white man to death--literally. It opens as two women, one black and one white, sit chatting in a laundrymat. They talk about the prevalent violence and both agree that either could be a victim. The white woman runs out of detergent and the black woman offers her some. In their amicability, the picture of racial harmony they present, they provide a contrast to the devasting racial violence to follow.

The central action begins soon after the two young men enter. At first, they are helpful to Harold who is doing

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the laundry for his wife--she is in the hospital having their first child. The black men banter with him, sounding the gentle man on his views on race. Harold reveals himself to be compassionate and tolerant. Rather abruptly, however, the tone of the interchange alters and the men become derogatory. Harold becomes disconcerted but in order to win their allegiance he decides to stand his ground even when the opportunity for escape from the deserted store becomes available.

His eagerness to gain their trust proves his undoing. A second opportunity for escape presents itself in the very person of a policeman; again, Harold proves his humanitarian credentials and does not denounce the young men to him. As soon as the officer leaves, the men redouble their efforts to degrade Harold, forcing him to play the role of "nigger," and address them in servile, debased language. All through the harangue, Harold protests that he is their friend. The young black men decry him as a liberal.

Instead of presenting the liberal as a villain who perpetuates the inequities of the status quo, as in the theater of the New Left, Cornish proffers him as the only real ally of the black man. In case the audience would miss the point, the playwright provides a bum who comes in and writes, "Your Friend is Dead."[6] The phrase is written over and over again on the rear wall of the stage.

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The well-intentioned liberal is the salutatory subject of yet another play, Leonard Spigelgass' The Wrong Way Light Bulb, produced at the John Golden Theater in New York City in 1969. The hero of the story is Harold, and the story centers on his efforts to run a newly inherited apartment house according to the tenets of his liberal beliefs. He is stymied, however, by the inveterate racism of his multi-racial population which confronts him his very first day as landlord. Before he takes over, his superintendent instructs him in the jargon of racism. When Harold reprimands him for being bigoted, Arnie asks:

> Arnie: What do we call the Spics?
>
> Harold: We do not have Spics in this house. We have Mexican-Americans.
>
> Arnie: No, we don't. We got Spics--Puerto Ricans--from Puerto Rico. It used to be that Caucasoids--
>
> Harold: Caucasoids!
>
> Arnie: That's what they call *us*.
>
> Harold: (Disagreeing) Mr. Charlie. . . . Honky. . . .
>
> Arnie: This year it's Caucasoids or Anglos--so it used to be us Anglos hate the Nig--Afro-Americans, but that's nothing to the way the Afro-Americans hate the Spics.[7]

Delores, a Puerto Rican Woman and Mrs. Devereaux, a black woman hurl racial epithets at each other. Carlton, a black militant lashes out at Harold, calling him a "Boss-Jew-man."

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Mrs. Rosen, an elderly Jewish woman is sweet and maternal but an inveterate racist, too.

The simmering tension comes to a boil when Mrs. Rosen is attacked and both her wrists broken. Carlton is the prime suspect and he is jailed overnight for the offense. Carlton, a fiery orator, commands a battalion of supporters who riot during the night of his impirsonment. This even forces Harold to reevaluate his dream of presiding over a harmonious racial plurality. He decides to sell the building and devote himself to screenwriting in California.

Mrs. Rosen's helplessness, however, has encouraged the tenants to cooperate and a newfound fraternity is established. Upon hearing of Harold's plans to decamp, Delores, Mrs. Devereaux and Mrs. Rosen prevail upon him to stay. He has not made up his mind at the end of the play.

The plight of the white liberal in a racially tense society is satirized in Joe Tuotti's <u>Big Time Buck White</u>; in this play, he is cozened by a black scheme to exploit the system and his humane sensibilities. The blacks in <u>Big Time</u> are profiting from an advertised reign of terror, subsidized by both their audiences and the government. The play was first performed in Watts, Los Angeles, a production of Budd Schulberg's Writers' Workshop. It premiered in New York on December 8, 1968 at the Village South Theater.

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The action takes place at BAD, the Beautiful Alleluiah Days Meeting Hall. Enter Honey Man who tells the audience that they are about to be threatened. The doors are locked. Big Time, when he arrives, is going to answer all their questions only if they "tap the plate," i.e., donate money. Honey Man explains how they devised the scheme. The idea first occurred to the men when they found out how many other social groups Congress was funding. They needed a movement or cause to attract financial aid. So they came up with the idea of "innerism," whatever that is; it is never made clear. The only credentials one needs in order to belong to the organization is to be black and poverty stricken.

Jive, another member, addresses the audience. He is concerned about the declining "Whitey" membership. He reminds the audience that BAD is a protection organization for them. Remember, he adds, how blacks loved to burn down things and beat up whites? "All I'm trying to say, Ladies and Gentlemen, all I'm trying to say is that if this back-lash dropout stuff continues, these cats are goin' to be back out in them alleys with them lead pipes beating you . . . "[8] Big Time shows up.

In a session, whose interchange is modelled on that of a revival meeting, Big Top dispenses wisdom on the issue of race relations. Whites in the audience are concerned to know what it is that blacks want. Why should contemporary

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Americans be held responsible for the deed of their ancestors? When will blacks stop rioting? Some of Big Top's responses rattle his audience.

> Well, what's happening is that the police department doesn't protect the black man, and so the black man is, to some extent, having to arm himself to protect himself.
>
> . . . .
>
> Now, what are we going to do about the violence? You know, we have a power ourselves. We don't have no big machines, we don't have an army, we don't have a police force, and we don't even have much money, but I'm here to tell you that the black people <u>unified</u> have the power, the capability of <u>thinning out</u> this nation . . . you know, you can still get two books of matches for one penny in some places. (Pp. 94-5)

Although a farce, there is no denying the menace underlying the clowning of BAD's personnel. In Tuotti's play, the white man is put on notice that the black man will sacrifice America to apocalyptic violence in order to gain his equality.

In Mel Arrighi's play, <u>An Ordinary Man</u>, produced at the Cherry Lane theater in New York City on September 9, 1968,

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fear of race war leads to fascism in America.9 Through the story of one man, Gordon Neff, Arrighi outlines a series of events that lead irrevocably to the installation of a police state.

Neff is a very ambitious man, an ambition only hindered by his insatiable womanizing. In fact, he is almost dismissed from his job at Modern Age Films because of it. Yet soon his career takes an upward turn and he is delegated to head a major government project: producing a series of films that will provide a history of the black man. He was not the first man considered for the job; Harris Fisher, his best friend, was first choice. Fisher refused the assignment and, in tacit criticism of it, left the company. Neff pushes him to explain his objections to the project:

> The first film will be the scientific one. Subject: the natural inferiority of the Negro. It will show how he's a hundred million years behind the white man in evolution--show all the hereditary reasons why a Negro's intelligence is below that of the white man's. The next film has a sociological slant. The Negro's lack of family cohesion, his lack of social responsibility, his lack of ambition, his sexual promiscuity, et cetera, et cetera. (P. 14)

Neff objects; he will be educating people, destroying negative racist stereotypes. The actual effect of his work is

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quite different; as Fisher warned, his films perpetuate, new, even more noxious images of the black man envisioned by the coordinators of the project. Vilification of the black man will help prepare Americans mentally for his removal to special detention centers or concentration camps.

Neff's story is revealed through flashback. The opening scene of the play is set in a courtroom where he is on trial, accused of committing "crimes against humanity."

> Judge: Do you believe yourself to be innocent?
>
> Andy: I do.
>
> Judge: And you take no responsibility for your actions during the rule of the Liberty Party?
>
> Andy: The leaders were responsible.
>
> Judge: And yourself?
>
> Andy: I didn't oppose the government. But then neither did most of my fellow Americans. I'm not political. I obeyed my superiors and did my work. (P. 5)

So did Eichmann.

Neff claims that the full realization of what he was helping to effect never came to him. The details of quotidien life prevented that;

> You've got to realize, when you live under a dictatorship, you don't go around thinking, day and night, "I am

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> living under a dictatorship." You get up in the morning, you put on one shoe after another, you go do your work and follow your natural inclinations. (P. 3)

The Reform Laws, a series of prohibitory laws regulating the lives of blacks, seemed a good thing to Neff: "I thought the Reform had been a good thing. Some of the measures seemed pretty harsh. But, all in all, I thought it accomplished a lot of good. Everybody felt the same." (P. 13) The bogey of race war enables the government to install discreetly the political and military apparatus of the police state.

Neff's defense for his participation is ignorance: he didn't know where the Reforms, the detention centers, the pro forma elections were leading. Besides, Neff and others like him had tolerated a "genteel" racism long before the racist state had become a political reality. The loss of more and more of their own civil rights, the ascendancy to power of a party that reduced the number of levers in the election booth from three to four to one, the hardware of the military rolling down their streets, were all taken in stride, accomodated, excused.

It is this accommodation to existing social evils, A. R. Gurney, Jr., argues that will lead straight to a homegrown fascism. Scenes From American Life produced at Lincoln Center in 1971 leaves the reader with a specter of a

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totalitarian America, replete as in Arrighi's vision with abrogated civil rights, and concentration camps.

Gurney jumbles time frames, crosscutting between past, present and future, to reveal precisely how past America has predicted her future. Episodes, ranging in topic from sexual morality to anti-semitism reveal American hypocrisy. In one, a grandmother sharply reproves her granddaughter for calling a black child a "nigger."

> Grandmother: That's very rude, Carleton. He is a darky.
> Girl: We play nigger baby. Is that all right?
> Grandmother: It is not. The children of darkies are called pickaninnies. (P. 23)

The grandmother merely replaces the epithets of racism with those of more traditional lineage.

No name calling is involved in the next example of racism. The Goldfarbs have been blackballed from a club by their best friend because as he explains "I don't want to see them hurt."

> I don't want Dave and Ronna embarrassed in any way. I'd feel personally responsible for it. Some people say I should resign if that's the way I feel. But I won't. Because I think we're just going through a phase now. And I'll bet by 1960 my friend Dave Goldfarb can play

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> tennis here, and have a shower, and join us for a drink in the grille, and not have to worry about a damn thing. (P. 24)

Meanwhile, no one will do anything to change it; instead, they perpetuate the system.

Howard tries to interest Ted and Missy in a new investment opportunity: machine guns. Pragmatic, Howard points out to a disapproving Missy,

> That's where it's at, my love. Do you like this house? Do you like that painting? Do you like this new rug? Did you like that dinner, and that wine, and that brandy you're drinking right now? Well, I like it. And I'm going to hold onto it. So wake up, my friends. Invest in the future, or you'll be left out in the cold! (P. 34)

Ted and Missy find it despicable that Howard would make money in armaments, and they find it deplorable that neither one of them has the courage to protest.

Gurney's Americans are slightly racist, slightly immoral and slightly hypocritical about it all. They have adapted their lives to feel minimal pain and the anesthetics are alcohol and money, two painkillers they introduce to their children, as soon as possible. Oblivious and apathetic, by

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turns, they seem to crave authoritarianism and deserve it when it comes.

From time to time, we receive information about a character named Snoozer, so called because at his 1930 christening, a scene which opens the play, he does not awaken when someone spills champagne on him. We learn he is a businessman; he is Uncle Snoozer to Nancy; he drinks a little bit too much; his wife's name is Esther. Finally, we learn that he dies, in mysterious circumstances in an America riddled with violence, computerized checkpoints and concentration camps. Snoozer has slept through all of the preceding developments. The military government that he and all the other American Snoozers have allowed to develop unimpeded has murdered him.

The character of young Snoozer closes the play. His family is gathered together to participate in a pre-Labor day ritual--tossing tennis balls into the family canoe and then torching it. A red glow illumines the faces of everyone watching the fire as they sing:

> It was sad/ It was sad; It was sad when the good ship went down,; to the bottom of the sea,/Husbands and wives,/ Little children lost their lives,/ It was sad when the great ship went down. . . . (P. 65)

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Gurney closes his play with this image of apocalyptic destruction.

Both Arrighi and Gurney excoriate the political acumen of the average American in their two plays, accusing him of racism and conformity, a common plaint in the mainstream theater. In Red, White and Maddox, a musical with book by Jay Broad, it is these two characteristics of John Q. Public that enable a man like Lester Maddox to ascend to the governorship; in the play, he becomes president.

Americans do not elect Maddox in this play because of a racist ideology--they don't even know who Maddox is or what he stands for. When a typical voter is asked who Lester Maddox is, he responds, "I don't even care who he is, can he win?"

Citizen 5: He can win.

Citizen 6: Who can win?

Citizen 7: Lester can win.

They all start screaming for Lester. (P. 41)

Americans love a winner, the play reveals. They want what others want; they deem desirable what others do; they aspire to standards that others set. In other words, they are conformitsts. It is because of this herd mentality, so well lampooned in the above quote, that Maddox is elected, a racist buffoon, who, nonetheless, must be taken seriously

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because he controls so much of the centralized force of the modern state and means to exercise that power.

A citizenry eager to conform is by its very nature susceptible to manipulation, an opportunity recognized by those institutions interested in obtaining consent. The agencies of mass persusasion--the mass media--are criticized in the musical, The Selling of the President with book by Jack O'Brien and Stuart Hample which was produced at the Shubert theater in 1972.

The play focuses on the media campaign devised to elect George Mason as President over incumbent Gordon Braggman. A computer specialist determines that mere tenths of the population will determine the outcome of the election. A strategy is developed to seek out and enlist those uncommitted voters in the Masom camp.

After twenty-five million dollars spent for television and radio coverage, Mason discovers that the American public does not identify him with any particular position; despite this, or perhaps more to the point, because of this, he has won. The people running his campaign are interested in tailoring his appeal to as many populations as possible, making him all things to all men. Much thought is given by the campaign strategists as to how to entice the minorities, populations as packaged as the presidential candidate.

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Indians, for instance, are appealed to with a jingle whose lyrics are "/SOMEBODY'S WATCHING YOU, LITTLE MOON . . . /SOMEBODY CARES FOR YOU!/ LITTLE MOON."(P. 34) With minor alterations, the jingle can be made to do double duty and address the black community by referring to them as "Black brothers and sisters." (P. 40) Thoughts are given to appealing variously to hardhats and hippies with slogans vague enough to ensnare all within the Mason net.

Broad appeal is the concern of advertisers pushing soap or sneakers and Mason is another product. Indeed, Hample and O'Brien close the show with the Masons enclosed within "a perfect plastic package." (P. 120) Mason is a product of television technology and television operates ruthlessly under the ethos of expedience. The operative logic of advertising is not how best to reveal a product's capacities but how to manipulate the consumer's perceptions of it; there need not be any real content to your product. Such amorality has no place in politics, Hample and O'Brien seem to be saying. It produces political ciphers, like Mason, men without vision or ideas.

Even if, perchance, Mason did commit himself to a platform, he could readjust it to coincide with current public sentiment. The politician in America "can reinvent himself every morning."[10] He can do so by engaging in a politics of symbolism, identifying himself with politically expedient

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positions--through gesture, pose, or image--of which his voting record may be a direct refutation.

A symbolic politics was the strategy of the Yippies, as evaluated in Chapter 3 and no discussion of American government proceeds in any body of Sixties political drama without reference to it. In Selling, the emphasis is not basically on the message behind the symbol which is generally so vague as to welcome myriad interpretations by its audience. The concern of Hample and O'Brien is the deliberate manipulation of the emotional value of symbol to direct the behavior of the voting public, and, thus, further the agenda of the disseminating agency, clearly, a strategy inimical to democracy. Even experience of the event does not counteract the influence of the received image which claims to represent it because " it is not primary, not raw, not really direct. It is mediated and organized in stereotypes. It takes very long and skillful training to so uproot an individual that he sees things freshly, in an unstereotyped manner."

A revisionist history might be one way to enable the individual to see things in an "unstereotyped manner," a history which refutes the traditional interpretations of America's past. This is a task in which all three political theaters have striven: to radically reeducate the average

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American and to debunk the traditional iconography through which he has filtered his experience.

For Gore Vidal, the myths of state are not the only obstructions to political enlightenment of the average American; in addition, the latter suffers from a kind of amnesia; or, rather he participates in a collective amnesia. Obviously, American ignorance of her historical past and more recent past will also abet the politician in the task of reinventing himself.

During the Nixon administration (1969--1974), Gore Vidal wrote a play, An Evening with Richard Nixon (1972), using actual quotations from the president that he hoped would delineate his career through a dialectic of rhetoric and reality. "At the end of this narrative it won't be possible for anyone to say, Oh, I'm sure he never said that about China or Truman or price controls--or compared his invasion of Cambodia with the Soviet's invasion of Czechoslovakia."(P.x)

A political weather vane, Nixon constantly readjusts his rhetoric to the ever-changing winds of mass sentiment. In the play, the American public is represented by "ten seated dummies on a trolley" who are faceless. (P. 21) Nixon watches them carefully: if they move towards him during a political utterance, he continues. If they move away, he

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forgoes the unprofitable stance for one more politically expeditious. He makes political capital out of any issue, no matter how scurrilous or manufactured. He resorts to slander and duplicity to ascend the political ladder, as in his campaigns against Jerry Voorhis in 1946 and Helen Gahagan Douglas in 1950, both of whom he slandered as communists. An actual quote from Nixon reveals his philosophy: "It isn't what the facts are but what they appear to be that counts when you are under fire in a political campaign."(P. 42) Although this was said against the context of his own trouble when he was accused of accepting money from special interests, Vidal is at some pains in the play to prove that this is Nixon's political Modus Operandi. It doesn't matter that neither Voorhees or Douglas is communist--and Vidal includes a quote from an older Nixon regretting the Douglas episode--but that they appear to be to the American public.

The play is intended to be more than just the political resume of one man's life. Nixon's career is offered as a paradigm; through it Vidal criticizes the American system for allowing such a ruthless demagogue to attain positions of influence in its government. In that context, Nixon is only a symptom, not important in himself. He encourages American imperialistic exploits, but he did not initiate them. He lies about the progress of American engagement in Vietnam and invades a sovereign country--Cambodia. Yet he

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has inherited the war and the tactics from previous administrations, as the play makes clear. Vidal, opining through his dramatic alter ego, George Washington, criticizes Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, also, accusing them of hastening America's transformation from democracy or republic to "Predatory Empire." This drive to maintain empire has unleashed unparalleled violence, not only abroad, but here, at home.

> You were murdered, your brother was murdered, more citizens are murdered in the streets of the United States than in all the other Western countries put together. And of course your armies specialize in murdering civilians by the million . . . (P. 94)

Through a multi-media approach, Vidal provides statistics and footage which attest to the truth of this statement. As in New left drama, his device is to contrast the rhetoric of Nixonian speech with reality:

> NIXON Some way we have failed to have our young people feel that this is a good time to be alive and not a bad time to be alive . . . Shots of the young being beaten in Chicago, Washington, L.A.).
>
> To look at America with clear eyes today is to see every reason for pride and little for shame . . . (On the screen, shots of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, ruined

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> forests, civilian dead . . . and statistics superimposed: one million Vietnamese civilians dead as a result of American bombing, 6 million made refugees, etc.) (P. 129)

Here Vidal illustrates the administration's attempts to manufacture reality, by denying its events.

Continued civilian unrest, campus uprisings, race riots, and anti-war demonstrations, however, attest to the failure at this method of domestic control by the government. Frustrated, the administration begins to blame media coverage for its own inability to quell domestic dissent, charging the industry with a liberal bias, as if " . . . television had invented the peace movement." (P. 105) Veiled threats are issued through its mouthpiece, Spiro T. Agnew, which have a chilling effect: "The National networks devoted less than five minutes to live coverage of the three hundred thousand who demonstrated [at the 1969 March against Death]."(P. 107); as Nixon's daughter, Tricia, observes blithely, "You can't underestimate the power of fear."(P. 126) The administration is pleased at this successful exercise in censorship: Agnew says, "Somehow when I look around the tube from time to time, I feel that I've had a modicum of success. . ."(P. 107)

Vidal, however, is not only interested in lambasting the government; he excoriates the "Silent Majority," that group

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represented onstage by a row of seated, faceless dummies and offstage by the audience. The American people bear the onus for the creation of the pre-totalitarian state depicted in the play because of their ignorance of the past which results in a susceptibility to manipulation by the state.

Manipulation of a population by the state is achieved largely through dissemination of integration propaganda. In his play, Indians, Arthur Kopit is interested in the ideology behind such propaganda. In addition, Kopit is as interested as Vidal to offer revisionist history, to expose the reality behind Indian removal in this country throughout the nineteenth century. Produced originally by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theater in London, it was subsequently produced in Washington D.C. at the Arena State in 1969, and New York City at the Brooks Atkinson theater later in the same year.

In an interview concerning the play, Kopit revealed its genesis: He had been listening to General William Westmoreland discussing the accidental killing of innocent people in Vietnam, "the inevitable consequences of war."[11] He was struck immediately by the ideology which is pressed into service to justify mass murder:

> I knew almost instantly that I would write a play that would explore what happens when a social and political

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> power imposes itself on a lesser power and creates a mythology to justify it, as we did with the Indians, as we have tried to do in Vietnam, what others have done elsewhere.[12]

What happens in America as is illustrated in this play is near genocide. Arthur Kopit corporealizes its bare facts by rendering historical portraits of otherwise mythical figures of the American West, such as Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, Sitting Bull, Geronimo and other Plains Indians. In so doing, he debunks our current iconology and revises the character of the pantheon of western folk idols.

Kopit has structured his play by cross-cutting between Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, a senate committee hearing investigating the grievances of Sitting Bull and his people, and various other invented or reconstructed scenes from American history. The scenes of the Wild West show and Buffalo Bill's activities are farcical, phantasmagorical and grotesque; they provide a sharp contrast in tone to the desperation of the scenes in which the Indians attempt communication with a culture that is so alien to theirs that no real discourse is possible.

As dramatized in the Senate committee scenes, Indian attempts to attain justice on the basis of treaties imposed on them by the United States government are met alternately

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by condescension, incomprehension and contempt. Confiscation of their lands and withholding of funds for their purchase is justified by the white establishment by alleged Indian inability to self-govern.

> John Grass: If you bought the black hills from us, where is our money?
> Senator Logan: The money is in trust
> John Grass: Trust?
> Senator Morgan: He means , it's in a bank. Being held for you in a . . . bank. In Washington! Very . . .fine bank.
> John Grass: Well, we would rather hold it ourselves.
> Senator Dawes: The Great Father is worried that you've not been educated enough to spend it wisely. When he feels you have, you will receive every last penny of it. Plus interest.(P. 30)

The futility of these negotiations is emphasized by a subsequent scene in which we learn that the committee is not intended to act on any of the grievances presented to them by the Indians; their dispossession is already irrevocable for as the "Ol' Time President" says "What do I do for 'em? Do I give 'em back their land? Do I resurrect the buffalo?" (P. 65)

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Kopit offers Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as a metaphor to expose the dynamics of ideology dissemination which is a precursor to genocide. As Stanley Kauffmann has observed:

> His [Kopit's] device, the Wild West Show, is particularly apt, not only because it grows directly out of his material but because it symbolizes a national attitude toward that material--a conversion of history into show biz in order to settle it, to fix the roles and the moral values forever. If history is written by the survivors, so, certainly, are the fictions, like the Wild West shows and the Westerns.[13]

By promoting images of the Indian as stupid, infantile, impulsive, violent, savage and superstitious in his show, Buffalo Bill, albeit unwittingly, denies their humanity and justifies their subjugation.

In the twentieth century, the technology of radio, film and television would make such a process of racial characterization much more pervasive. In Nazi Germany, for example, the production of such films as "The Eternal Jew," (1940) would persuade a country that elimination of an entire population would be a boon to posterity. Corollation between the two genocides, that of the Jew in Europe and the American Indian is made by having a german character deliver a speech in a play within the play presented by Buffalo Bill

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for the President. In it, the German actor emphasizes the beneficence of extermination.

> I am Uncas, Chief of the Pawnee Indians, recently killed for my lustful ways. Yet, before the white men came and did me in, I had this vision: the white man is great, the red man nothing. So, if a white man kills a red man, we must forgive him, for God intended man to be as great as possible, and by eliminating the inferior, the great man carries on God's work. Thus, the Indian is in no way wronged by being murdered. Indeed, quite the opposite: being murdered is his purpose in life. . . .Which has brought light to he darkness of my otherwise useless soul. . . . And now, I die again.[14]

It is Kopit's intention to present the white man's need to apply, a "neat moral transformation" to his aggression against the native American.[15]

As a paradigm of this process, the play closes on Cody's desperate rationalizing of official Indian policy while the pernicious effects of racist ideology are realized in human terms. As he recites a list of American objection to Indian claims, one Indian after another identifies himself and chants that he is dying.

In his play, <u>Wilson in the Promise Land</u> (1970), Roland Van Zandt also blames American overseas intervention on

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ideological thrall.[16] Ostensibly, a revisionist history of Woodrow Wilson's administration and youth, Van Zandt is primarily interested in locating in the president the origins of a coercive philosophy of "Pure Americanism" which, he argues, has overturned the founding principles of the American republic of freedom and self-determination.

In the play, the Hippies, anachronistic symbols of youth and innocence in the age of Wilson, function as ever present reminders of America's betrayal of her original idealism.[17] Ten in total, they oversee the stage, manage its action and become its scenery when necessary; they "provoke the action of the play and represent the awakened conscience of modern America."(P. 5) Acting as alter egos to the ailing Wilson, the Hippies force him to utter a monologue that is recited alternately with the pledge of the Ku Klux Klan, thus pointing up the similarity between Wilson's corrupting concept of a messianic America with the Klan's doctrine of white supremacy.

Wilson allowed little deviation from his doctrine of a "Pure Americanism," signing into law a series of Sedition Laws which were designed to root out subversion and coerce consent. They dealt harshly with those who did not conform: those who were black or foreign, those who criticized the government or the war, those who joined the communist party. In order to continue prosecuting dissenters after the war,

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Wilson retained the purview of the Sedition Laws; for according to him, such individuals were "villains masquerading as patriots. Such creatures of passion, disloyalty and anarchy are infinitely malignant, and the hand of our power should close over them at once."(P. 33) Under the aegis of his Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, all Communist Party headquarters were closed in the United States, hundreds of aliens were deported as seditious, and thousands of Americans felt obliged to take loyalty oaths. The Hippies see Wilson's enforcement of these laws as a proto-American Fascism and the use of Nazi iconology in the play--a book burning, the Nazi hand salute and greetings of "SEIG [sic] HEIL!"--underscores the analogy.

In a moment of reflection, Wilson reveals that he knew that the imposition of these laws would result in the loss of democratic freedoms in the United States, "that freedom of speech, the right of assembly, perhaps the Constitution itself, would have to go." (P. 41) Apparently never realizing the contradiction between wishing to bestow an American-style democracy on the rest of the world and destroying it at home, Wilson is prepared to sow the seeds of totalitarianism. He is obsessed with the idea of being a messiah: "And to this noble cause I sacrificed myself--I, the chosen agent of God--to fulfill America's and the world's destiny." (P. 37) The play closes with an indict-

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ment of Wilson for investing America with an ideology of fanatic nationalism that in its contemporary application has resulted in a Vietnam.

Cold War ideology is the subject of Art Buchwald's satire, Sheep on the Runway, first produced in 1970 at the Helen Hayes Theater.[18] In the play, Washington is referred to as Disneyland and the appellation is just for the Capital takes action on information fabricated by a red-baiting journalist, Joe Mayflower, that a small country, Nonomura, is facing a communist takeover. Nonomura, a peaceful, idyllic paradise untouched for the most part by the twentieth century, becomes a political football and a bomb target.

The action begins with the arrival of Joe Mayflower, contributor to over four hundred newspapers and self-appointed preserver of the Free World. It is he who first suspects subversive activities among the Nonomurans, no matter how impassive their demeanor. He collars the Prince of the country during a gathering at the United States Embassy. When the Prince refuses to credit any of Mayflower's speculations, the latter is exasperated.

> . . . You persist in this absurd fiction that your country is impervious to the forces that are shaking the earth, the forces of light and darkness. You persist in the fiction that these forces do not affect your people,

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> that you can avoid the responsibilities of life in this century, the responsibility of taking a position, of aligning yourself with one or another of the great power blocs, of using your strategic location for good or ill, or walking the dangerous tightrope of neutrality over the abyss that we call civilization. (P. 132)

Nonomura will be respected, Mayflower is saying, if the country adopts as its enemies those of the United States and as its friends, also those of those the United States. For as Martha says, wife of the Ambassador to Nonomura, "the United States wouldn't be where it is today if it didn't know what was good for the rest of the world." (P. 189)

After some initial hesitation, the Prince accepts the theory of a threat from the Chinese in the North. He applies for military aid from the United States: ". . . military aid staff, support troops for the military aid staff, drivers, specialists, support troops for the specialists, rest and recreation, armed forces radio, support troops for the armed forces radio." (P. 175) He also requests planes and a PX "Right next to the Palace."(P. 177) What the Prince does not bargain for is the political and social price to be paid for the importation of all these military goodies. With the arrival of the military and other government advisers, Nonomura is hauled forcefully into the twentieth century; the result is government

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destablization and social unrest. The Prince's confidant and second in command, Colonel Num, attempts a coup d'etat, but his tenure is short-lived. General Hung Kai has just succeeded in usurping Colonel Num, aided by the Ambassador's daughter, Holly. General Hung Kai, it turns out, is none other than the Ambassador's butler, Sam. More surprises are in store: Hung Kai is not really a communist; he is CIA--much to Holly's outrage. As the General says, "it's the usual, dirty, sneaky, little CIA operation." (P. 213) Joe Mayflower, faced with the truth about General Hung Kai, is not fazed.

> Raymond: But, Joe, you misled the whole world by calling Hung Kai a Communist.
>
> Joe: Well, a man can change his mind.
>
> Raymond: You've changed your mind.
>
> Joe: No, damn it. Hung Kai changed his. Last week he was a Communist. This week he's a defector. Why can't you see that? Tomorrow the whole world will read about the greatest Communist defector of all times. Gentlemen, my judgment may occasionally be wrong, but my facts are always right.
>
> (P. 215)

Mayflower will just concoct another story that expresses the apocalyptic battle in which he feels the world engages--that context between the capitalist world and the communist.

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Although Buchwald's play is hilarious, it also contains trenchant political commentary. The character of Mayflower, personifies the Cold War psyche, a mind that is constantly preoccupied with scenarios of conflict, in a world that it can see only in terms of polarization between capitalist and Communist.

Such men are dangerous--Mayflower comes to the paradise of Nonomura and within a week turns it into a war-torn battleground, facing imminent nuclear annihilation. One would infer from reading Buchwald's play that the writer is suggesting that our foreign policy is being directed by just such ideologues who, seeing peril everywhere, espy enemies everywhere. Their paranoia is a self-fulfilling prophecy for in moving against these supposed enemies, the United States creates foes. America, then, becomes an enemy and a target, herself.

During this period, several political documentary dramas were produced, a genre that purports to explore and explode the myths of state. Its inception is to be found in 1920s Germany, in the pioneering work of Erwin Piscator whose goal was to create a theater which is "one huge montage of authentic speeches, articles, newspaper clippings, slogans, leaflets, photographs and films of the War and the Revolution."[19] An hiatus in the experimentation of this form begins around the late nineteen-thirties and ends in the

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early sixties, in postwar Germany, at a time when German intellectuals and literati believed their countrymen were forgetting the horrors of the recent totalitarian past.[20] In 1963, Rolf Hochhuth revived documentary drama by writing The Deputy (1963), the most hotly debated example of the genre, The play created a furor wherever it was presented because Hochhuth had had the temerity to criticize the behavior of the Pontiff, Pius XII, during the second World War. Replete with documentation--the published 1964 Grove edition has sixty-five pages of notes--Hochhuth claimed to have done nothing more than allowed the archival evidence to make his case.

Though Americans have contributed fewer outstanding examples of the genre, they have also been interested in the form and have sought to contribute tenets to its evolving aesthetic. In his article on the subject, "Theater of Fact," Dan Isaacs offers the concept of the predatory state as central to the philosophy which informs the genre.[21] The predatory state victimizes the individual, restricting his autonomy. The state is a suprahuman organism that is responsible for the development of great civilizations, material progress and the organization into socially viable units of great populations. As it has evolved in the modern world, however, it has usurped more and more of the individual's prerogative of self-determination; it may and fre-

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quently does legitimize great disparity in the distribution of resources in a population; in reserving for itself the right to use of coercive force some modern states maintain arsenals capable of universal destruction. The modern state is not an assemblage of individuals in a particular socio-political relationship; it a monolith, a solid unit which may deny its citizenry self-determination.

In a forward to the published edition of his play, Donald Freed offers a more elaborately reasoned aesthetic for documentary drama.22 Freed accuses the government of disseminating fabricated facts, ideological constructs which are useful in creating an expedient reality. Freed asserts that the purpose of the documentary dramatist is to juxtapose an "anti-myth" against the fabricated fact of government origin. But this debunking of official reality is not to be accomplished by a bald recital of detached facts. Facts, alone, will not reveal the truth: they can be misinterpreted. Freed suggests that the Theater of Fact provide an explicative text as a context for the facts.

A presentation of the facts along with a simultaneous explanation is precisely the structure of his play, Inquest, which opened at the Music Box Theater on April 23, 1970, with Anne Jackson and George Grizzard in the lead roles of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Quite literally, the stage was divided into two parts to present the documented evidence on

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one side and Freed's reconstruction from the records on the other; the latter is referred to as Stage B, the former, Stage A.

The play is based on the 1951 trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for the crime of providing the Russians with information concerning the construction of an atomic bomb. They were found guilty and electrocuted for this crime on June 19, 1953. The historical trial lasted two years, engendering protest and inviting commentary from such intellectual giants as Albert Einstein and Jean-Paul Sartre.

As represented by the Judge, Irving Kaufman and the government's attorneys, Roy Cohn and Irving Saypol, the state is predatory, impassive and vindictive. Despite the aspirations of the documentary dramatist to a presentation of objective truth (even though, admittedly, their philosophical approach and theory are subjective), dimensionality is afforded the victims and denied the representatives of the state. Freed includes reconstructed scenes of the relationship between the Rosenbergs, of the impact of the trial on their two little boys, of the constantly high-minded ideals of Julius. The state is reduced in stature due to its representation by the wheedling and ostensibly biased Judge Kaufman, the insinuating Roy Cohn, the sang-froid Saypol. Although as Freed prescribes, "it is

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for the dramatist to infiltrate the huge historical abstractions of the time and to bring out from the flux recognizable human beings and a confluence of " 'all too human' motives to sweep us along to the rational and non-rational understandings of otherwise unspeakable events," he does not so humanize the state side of the argument. (P. 6)

Freed argues that the Rosenbergs were persecuted by the state because they refused to conform, i.e., they were Jews, intellectuals, suspected of leftist affiliations. Their persecution and eradication is an object lesson to any and all who might consider deviation from the norm. According to Freed, these intimidation tactics worked:

> To take a step backwards from the case is to see a generation of radicals tortured and beyond them the silent majority--dumb with fear, numb with guilt, irreparably injured by what the State let loose on them--coming into the 1970's astounded by events and broken-hearted at the end of the American Dream. (P. 41)

According to Freed, the state aims to encourage the appearance of an individual chastened by this example, one who strives to display his loyalty to the group, ostentatiously announcing his fidelity to it; adopting as his own its values, its beliefs, its enemies.

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The result is an utter conformity that is a sine qua non of totalitarianism. Yet the Rosenbergs refuse to gratify the state by offering the spectacle of the apostate who renounces his evil ways and once more embraces orthodoxy. They refuse to tender a false confession, or to be in Ethel's words, "a good German." In a letter to Emmanuel Bloch, attorney to the Rosenbergs, an excerpt of which is used in the play, Julius Rosenberg writes that "Ethel wants it known that we are the first victims of American fascism." (P. 132)

The atmosphere of the time is best expressed by a quote from Truman's Attorney General in 1950. He warned his countrymen that "there are today many communists in America. They are everywhere--in factories, offices, butcher shops, on street corners, in private business--and each carries in himself the germs of death for society."[23] With the legitimization of Truman's Executive Order #9835, an investigation was begun of persons suspected of plotting to overthrow the government.

The investigation of those suspected of subversive activities in the entertainment industry is the subject of Eric Bentley's Are you Now; Or, Have You Ever Been, first produced by the Yale Repertory Theater on November 8, 1972; it was later presented by the Theater of Riverside Church in

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New York City and other places across the country and overseas.24

Bentley claimed that he had not invented one line of dialogue--selection, editing, rearrangement and the passage of time have provided an interpretive context. Though his play is more purist in form than Inquest, the debate over whether this genre is as objective as it claims to be is of interest here. The comparison between Freed's play and Bentley's is made only to point out the provision of a context for the bare facts, without which no conclusions can be drawn. Freed provides it through reconstruction; Bentley relies on editing and intelligence that the passage of time has shed on the period.

Bentley asserts that he has tried to be fair--to both the state and the accused. Yet owing to the demeanor of the government interrogators, the flippancy of the questions which could and did destroy careers if improperly answered, the contingency of inclusion in the ever-widening circle of those libelled as Red, Pink, or fellow-traveler, Bentley gives us as odious a portrait of the state as that of Freed's.

The play begins by presenting men torn between fear of the mighty state and their allegiance to their fellow men. They are, finally, so cowed that they are eager to do the

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state's bidding, reciting their litany of devotion to the American way over and over, throughout their testimony.

Two men stand out as paragons of courage in this parade of human folly: Lionel Stander and Paul Robeson, particularly because of the nature of their interaction with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the length of their testimony offered in the play. Stander mocks the committee by ostensibly cooperating with them--yet giving them nothing. He is a lively witness, even garrulous--but he never names anyone. Instead, he impugns the sanity and veracity of those whose accusations have summoned him to HUAC. He takes the standard of Americanism of which the committee is appointed the guardian and condemns them according to its precepts.

> <u>The Chairman</u>: You are here to give us information which will enable us to do the work assigned to us by the House of Representatives: to investigate reports regarding subversive activities in the United States.
>
> <u>Mr. Stander</u>: Well, I am more than willing to cooperate--
>
> <u>The Chairman</u>: Now, just a minute.
>
> <u>Mr. Stander</u>:--because I know of subversive activities in the entertainment industry and elsewhere@
>
> . . . .
> . . .

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> Mr. Stander: I have knowledge of subversive action! I know of a group of fanatics who are trying to undermine the Constitution of the United States by depriving artists of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness without due process of law! I can cite instances! I can tell names. I am one of the first victims, if you are interested. A group of ex-Bundists, America Firsters, and anti-Semites, people who hate everybody, Negroes, minority groups, and most likely themselves-----(Pp. 61-2)

The Committee urges Stander to compose himself, and after some back and forth he is asked why he won't swear under oath that he is not, at present, a Communist. He answers:

> I don't want to be responsible for a whole stable of informers, stool pigeons, psychopaths, and ex-political heretics, who come in here beating their breasts and saying, 'I'm awfully sorry, I didn't know what I was doing, please, I want absolution, get me back into pictures!' They will do anything to get back into pictures! They will mention names! They will name anybody! (P. 64)

When they insist that he answer the charge that he is a communist, he takes the Fifth.

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The final symbol of refusal in this play is the black singer and actor, Paul Robeson. Like Stander, he refuses to deny that he is a communist. "There is no mystery in this," he says. "I have made it a matter of principle to refuse to comply with any demand that infringes upon the constitutional rights of all Americans." (P. 67) He takes the Fifth.

Although Bentley has decided to make the interrogators and committee members generic--their individuality is not important; they are the limbs of the state, not its brain--it is interesting to note that Robeson always requests the name of the person questioning him; this is no mere formality. Robeson will not allow the man to hide behind a title, a function, a job. He will not permit a man to feel so little responsibility for his actions.

The chairman of the committee identifies himself as Walter, the representative from Pennsylvania In an acrimonious exchange, Robeson exposes the undergirding philosophy which guides the committee's probe.

> Mr. Robeson: You are the author of the bills that are going to keep all kinds of decent people out of the country.
>
> The Chairman. No, only your kind.

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Mr. Robeson: Colored people like myself. And just the Teutonic Anglo-Saxon stock you would let come in. (P. 70)

The interchange exposes the racist and anti-intellectual bias of HUAC.

After Robeson affirms his admiration of the Soviet Union for prohibiting racial discrimination, he is asked why he did not stay there.

Mr. Robeson: Because my father was a slave, and my people died to build this country, and I am going to stay here, and have a part of it just like you.
Committee Member 1: You are here because you are promoting the Communist cause!
Mr. Robeson: I am here because I am opposing the neo-Fascist cause. Jefferson could be sitting here, and Frederick Douglass could be sitting here, and Eugene Debs could be sitting here. (P. 75)

The play ends with Robeson's rebellion.

Bentley dedicated his play to Philip and Daniel Berrigan, two men of the cloth, who are contemporary figures of dissent. Daniel Berrigan wrote a play, another documentary drama entitled The Trial of the Catonsville Nine in which he dramatizes an act of civil disobedience he participated in

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along with eight others: the burning of draft records at Catonsville, Maryland. It was produced in 1971 at the Good Shepherd-Faith Church and, subsequently, at the Lyceum Theater in New York later on that same year. At the time, Berrigan was underground to escape incarceration for his part in the activities dramatized in the play.[25] The play was the hit of the season.

Trial is a documentary drama with material added later by Berrigan when he was compiling the script. Like Freed, Berrigan provides a context to the bare facts. He describes the development of his own political psyche. He offers commentary on the indicted as they take the stand. He gives us bits of his biography.

So do the others who participated in that act of destruction of Federal property. The Judge interrupts again and again to admonish that much of what the defendants say has little to do with Catonsville. Yet, the nine insist, it has everything to do with why they arrived at Catonsville to destroy draft records. Each one has experienced disillusionment with the American government. Almost all started out in their adult lives with great pride in being American. But due to experiences varying only in the particulars from that described by George Mische, one of the defendants, they were in for a brutal awakening.

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> I went down to Yucatan, down to Central America, for the Alliance for Progress, going with the idea that the Latins would be waiting at the boat to greet me because I was an American. This is the naivete we have, I guess, until we arrive overseas. We were not only not welcome, we had bricks thrown at us. This confused me, but after I became involved I started to understand why bricks were thrown at us. We were working in two countries where revolutions had taken place. I should not say 'revolutions'; I should say 'coups d'etat,' military overthrow of governments. Two democratically elected governments were overthrown by the military with Pentagon support. Our programs were . . . (crossing toward jury.) Let me give you an example of what was going on. There was a specific program called the American Institute for Free Labor Development. The idea was, it came out of the University of Chicago, but later on we realized it was a CIA front-----.[26]

The Judge interrupts him to say that the court is not trying the CIA; as he says, it is not trying the Catholic Bishops of the United States, or the series of Guatemalan revolutions, or the draft card case--or the war.

Yet Berrigan insists on giving the historical context as well as the religious because if they are "not accepted as a substantial part of my action than the action is eviscerated

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of all meaning and I should be committed for insanity." (P. 38) His political and spiritual particulars corporealize the bare fact of his action at Catonsville. The court has restricted itself--as it must--to the question of whether they did or did not burn the draft records at Catonsville and, thus, break the law. The defendants admit that they burned the records; yet they still maintain their innocence.

> Phillip Berrigan: We do not consider ourselves as having committed a crime.
> Prosecution: You are going to have to explain, please, how you distinguish violating the law from having committed a crime.
> Phillip Berrigan: . . . . Yes, we violated the law, but the law is not absolute to us. I must say that our intention was to destroy the files, but our motive was to illustrate genocide in Vietnam and corruption at home. (P. 33)

They are asked why did not resort to legitimate means of protest. In answer, they recite a long list of activities undertaken to legally protest a war they consider immoral and illegal--not one of which halted its progress.

They were also anxious to protest the war "in an actual, physical, literal way," to get away from the abstractions that are words. (P. 32) Politicians frequently offer the

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rhetoric of peace in place of place of actual contributions to it. Daniel Berrigan speaks about announcing the Gospel from the pulpit and being "threatened with verbalizing my moral substance out of existence" (P. 37) because constant trading in symbols distances the blood and death of the war. As Freed mentions in his forward to Inquest, the bombardment by the media of fact, figures, statistics makes an abstraction out of actual human suffering. The nine regard action as the only moral course.

The lesson of World War II is that passivity is a great evil; action is its antidote. When the citizenry, the good Germans, failed to rise up and protest the removal of state decreed "undesirables" in their midst, they, unwittingly, collaborated. As one of the defendants tells the court, "every German citizen had the responsibility to stop Hitler. If that was true then, and I thought it was, then it was also true that this is expected of me now as a Christian--and also expected of our Jewish brothers--to stop the atrocity of the war in Vietnam."(P. 30)

The obligation to speak out and object is often thwarted by our inability to believe in a reality we do not directly experience. This is pointed out by Joseph Heller in his play, We Bombed in New Haven. Heller's play was first produced at the Yale School of Drama in 1967 then at Circle in the Square where it opened and closed at the evening per-

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formance on September 24, 1972.[27] Its bleak ending, as well as its subject matter, may be one of the reasons it did not succeed. The characters in the play are airmen who are routinely assigned to bombing raids for no reason and to places that may no longer exist. The play opens as a bombing raid is being planned against Constantinople.

> Henderson: Constantinople isn't on the map. There just ain't no such place any more.
> Starkey: . . . Henderson, Ours not to reason why. It's yours but to do as you're told . . .and die. (P. 17)

But this isn't a real bombing raid. All the airmen are really actors, and they acknowledge this to the audience whom they frequently address. No real bombing raids are going to take place. Constantinople is not going to be leveled and no men are really going to die in the attack. This is a theater event where the blood is really paint and the dead rise up at the curtain to take their bows; "It's just a little game we're having here now. It's only a play, a show, a little entertainment, so let's not get carried away too far and forget who we really are." (P. 25)

The theatricalization of our everyday reality is the point of Heller's piece; it is the context we have extended to the Vietnam war, the reality of which we have filtered through sensibilities created by film and stage treatments

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of battle. The aura of unreality about the war is further encouraged by the fact that, as Fisher says to his kid brother, "All the fighting takes place far away."

> Young Fisher (referring to the audience) They don't see it?
>
> Fisher: No, they wouldn't like that. There's no violence out here, and no blood. Nobody gets killed here, so you don't have to worry. There is no violence in public. (P. 84)

When one of the men, Sinclair, who is to be "Killed," seems to be missing after a raid, the tone of the play becomes ominous. A golfer and a hunter are affable, at first, as they strive to learn the decorum of the military; they become its deadly flunkies by the end of the play. Searching everywhere, respectful of nothing, they attempt to unearth Henderson, a young airman who does not want to be the next to be "killed." To Starkey, his commanding officer and Ruth, his wife, Henderson explains why he wants to stop,

> I don't want to make believe any more. I'm tired of playing soldier--[referring to golfer and hunter] like those two jokers out there. I don't want to make believe I'm going to be killed. I don't want to make believe I'm not going to be killed. I don't want to

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> make believe I'm killing other people, and then have to make believe I'm not killing them. (P. 156)

He wants to stop the pretense; he wants to leave the play.

His fate brings violence to the fore: he is shot at point blank range in the stomach. The blast sends him hurtling across the stage and into Starkey--who was to have protected him. There is blood on Starkey's shirt now, real blood.

He does not demur at this turn of events. He likes his job, his position, his authority. He is the "Good German" so decried by Mische in Trial, and by playing along with the system he hopes to protect himself and his son. Yet, inevitably the violence to which he is a contributor, affects him: the next man to be killed is his own son and despite his protestations to the major, he is unable to save him. He has already sacrificed him--symbolically--by allowing Henderson to go to this death, a boy old enough to have been his son.

The closing address of the audience by Starkey is meant to implicate them in the continuance of the war. Although he is speaking about himself, it is obvious that the playwright wishes to indict the audience for its tolerance of a corrupt war.

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> Captain Starkey: "I'm ____________ _______________
>
> (He mentions his real name)
>
> You all know that. Do you think that I,
>
> ____________________,
>
> (Repeats his real name)
>
> would actually let my son go off to a war and be killed and just stand here talking to you and do nothing? (P. 185)

That is precisely what he is done--and also, by implication, what the audience continues to do. Yet it cannot hide its collective head in the sand for long; if there is a conflagration offstage the flames will reach them eventually. As was noted above, civic participation was a key tenet in New Left political ideology. Mainstream theater also targeted a passive citizenry as the greatest threat to a functioning democracy, and in plays such as We Bombed and Trial sought to galvanize it into action.

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Conclusion

In this thesis, Sixties political theater has been categorized into black, New Left and mainstream because each type is informed by a singular perspective. Though all three diagnose America as racist, imperialist and primed for totalitarianism, their analysis of the etiology of these social ills differs.

For the personnel of black protest theater, the dynamics of oppression are racist. Societal inequities exist to oppress blacks as a race--not a class. The revolution often exhorted in this drama, and for which the latter serves as a rallying cry, is a race war. The black theater contends that the battle has already begun but the establishment is subtle in its conduct of war. The war is waged to usurp the identity and culture of the black man, by the enemy, the white man or "White Beast" who assumes many guises. In order to survive, the black in America is forced to assume a cultural amnesia, like the Jew in Nazi Germany. Like the

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Jew, he maneuvers this country under the ubiquitous surveillance of a totalitarian police force, the wardens--as the dramatists see it--of their confinement. Yet their "Yellow Star," their afrogenetic features, render all their survival tactics, stalling mechanisms. They fear the application of a "Final Solution," or, at best, a war that ends with a detente: an America with segregated populations and decimated areas, a futuristic American apartheid.

The New Left offers an analysis that transcends the racial. Oppression is a matter of class, and revolution can only be fought if all oppressed peoples band together to overcome the real enemy--the military-industrial complex. This structure runs our government, declares the New Left, and its personnel are individuals unaccountable to the American people. The motivating force behind the operations of this structure is not racial, but commercial--the drive for profit.

Emphasis on this last point was critical to the political doctrine of the New Left which maintained that racism was a capitalist tool to create confusion by fragmenting loyalties. One of the goals of the New Left theater was to synthesize a brotherhood among the various peoples whom its personnel sought to mobilize; for unlike the black theater, it had no ready-made community to exhort. Racism within the ranks of the working-class set the black worker against the

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white worker, the white worker against the brown, and destroyed solidarity.

Mainstream theater offers an approach to the assessment of political reality that differs not only from the New Left and Black theaters but from play to play within its own corpus. In general, the mainstream playwrights set themselves the task of encouraging America to soul-search. They looked into the American past, as Van Zandt, Vidal and Kopit did; they evaluated the present, as Spigelass and Berrigan did; and they forecasted the future, as did Arrighi and Gurney. If all reflect the turbulence of the era and the seriousness middle America accorded the threats of revolution, they differ in their analyses of the source of that conflict. As Herlihy, Feiffer and Cornish see it, America is suffering a social malaise, fallout from the Kennedy assassination. The murder of the president set loose a genie of violence upon the nation, quite divorced from political or social ills; rather, those ills are but a symptom of the violent genius of the time, not its progenitor. For Vidal, Van Zandt, and Berrigan, violence erupts in America as the contradiction between her policy and her practice is revealed.

The dramatic form each species of Sixties political theater assumed was a reflection of the political bias of its creators. Political protest could be registered _via_

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aesthetic, as well as content. Eschewing a "white art in black face [sic]," black theater revolutionaries aimed at a new dramatic form, one to be based on Afrogenic culture, its language, rhythm, and myth. _Ododo_ and _Slave Ship_ are examples of the self-conscious application of these new dramatic principles. Perhaps more of an arbitrary cultural imposition on American blacks than the prevailing eurocentric culture, the nascent form never dominated the output of black protest theater.

More successful, in consideration of its almost universal adaption by the New Left, was the skit or _acto_ created in response to the exigencies of street performance--lack of sanctioned playing areas, mobile audiences, the multitudinous distractions of the outdoors. The _acto_ was brief, exaggerated and highly portable. The political philosophy which guided its characterization provided that social conditions rather than idiosyncrasy determined the life of people. The _dramatis personae_ of the New Left theater did not include the capitalist with a "heart of gold," or the conscience-stricken cop. "There may be a cop somewhere who has such problems. But what would be the purpose of representing such a cop? To tell the truth? What truth?"[1] To focus on individual dilemma would be to distort the historical processes by obscuring the larger context. The goal of the theater, was to educate its audience, to inculcate an "historical consciousness" within

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it. Such a consciousness would transcend the alienation so characteristic of mass man and so lethal to the task of revolution.

As noted in Chapter 1, satire has always been a palatable way to infuse politics into the commercial theater. The success of a protest rock musical, such as Hair, or a documentary drama, such as The Deputy, broadened the repertoire of dramatic forms for the political dramatist working in the mainstream theater. Yet, regardless of their practical political intentions, playwrights had to be acutely aware that too much of an emphasis on the political moral of their fable could result in a flop. Furthermore, launching any political appeal from within the confines of an establishment cultural organ, such as Broadway, would automatically lessen its radicalism.

Although there are substantial differences in the stylistic and political approaches of the three types of political theater, on some essential points, they are in agreement. All three warn that America is gradually being transformed from a nation of interacting publics into which citizens are integrated via a network of reciprocal civic responsibilities, into a mass society whose members are bound together in an "iron band of terror." And according to Hannah Arendt, terror is the sine qua non of the totalitarian state.[2]

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The state achieves terror by its destruction of the independence of the judicial system.[3] For due process, the totalitarian state substitutes its fiat, in effect becoming the only law for only it must be obeyed. In such a situation, deprived of legal recourse against violation, man is unfree. Removal of all objective sanctions for behavior destroys the important space between men and "one essential prerequisite of all freedom . . . is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space."[4] Without an agency of objective justice, the world becomes a wilderness, without guidepost or sanctuary. The denizens of such a world are demoralized for they are unable to exert any political authority. Feeling powerless, they are susceptible to manipulation from any authority which will relieve their sense of vulnerability. Thus, is the man in the mass born.

Such existential alienation is a prerequisite to installation of a totalitarian state. The pre-totalitarian world is characterized by it. The most acute depiction of such a world is offered by Jules Feiffer in Little Murders. In this play, intervention by legitimate authority accomplishes nothing. Lieutenant Practice spends most of his time trying to discern a pattern in a plague of homicides besieging the city. By the end, Alfred is a perfect paradigm of mass man, numb, isolated and violent. He

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is also terrified, and because such a man may desire security at all costs, he may welcome a government which ostensibly makes order its primary goal--this is the point of both Los Siete Bart and An Ordinary Man. In the former, commuter was frightened and he wanted security; he gets it but at the cost of his civil liberties. In the totalitarian state presented in An Ordinary Man, the abrogation of the rights of black people is explained away sanguinely by privileged whites as a necessary means to keep the peace.

Propaganda has prepared them to view coolly the disenfranchisement of an entire race, the sister tool of terror of the totalitarian state in managing the mass. In the plays, all American institutions are indicted, either severally or together, as agencies for state propaganda. Primary and secondary education, the military and labor are favorite targets of the New Left and Black protest theaters as being mere conduits for state sanctioned dogma. Mainstream theater focuses on the major media which is depicted as neutral, ready to be skewed by any ideological bias that is most profitable.

Ideology is the mentor of propaganda. Sixties political theater frequently depicts Americans in the thrall of one ideology or another, from Wilson's concept of a "Pure Americanism," to McCarthy's anti-communist crusade. All such "isms" are predicated on the notion of one arbitrary

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standard of humanity to which all must adhere or suffer the consequences. The ideology of race, or racism is a salient theme in American history as presented in these plays. Sixties political theater indicts America for being a nation built on presumptions of racial superiority, as was Nazi Germany, and it borrowed category, symbol and image from the experience of European fascism to explain political reality in contemporary United States. Kopit uses a German orator to rationalize the removal of the indigenous population of America in Indians. The image of the concentration camp is often a metaphor for the black ghetto, as in Bass' We Righteous Bombers or Gordon's Breakout. A final solution of sorts is being worked out for the blacks in Caldwell's Top Secret; Or, a Few Million After B.C.

Racist assumptions also guide America's international dealings and explain her relations with all people of color. The creators of political theater in this period are painstaking in their attempt to parallel the American treatment of blacks with her treatment of other non-white peoples. If we are racist abroad, they contend, it is because racism begins at home. From Teatro Campesino, to New SDS Rat, this is the message relentlessly propounded.

Racist ideology, however, can justify the violation of the human rights of others, as pointed out above in the case of Arrighi's sanguine whites; therefore, Sixties theater

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practitioners were eager to blunt the effectiveness of such thought through education. They were also aware of the rigidity of thinking under the influence of ideology for its precepts become a priori principles in guiding behavior. Once these are adopted, the ideologue no longer subjects the tenets of racism or anti-communism to the rigors of logic or experience because such a pattern of thinking "can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise."[5] For the demoralized masses--alienated, impotent and isolated--the seduction of ideology is understandable: dogma offers them the solace of a certitude whose authority they would not dare to question. Unable to assume responsibility, and, consequently, eager to conform, mass man is receptive to persuasion.

The emergence of mass man is the greatest threat to a functioning democracy, as these plays reveal. His passivity, euphemized as tolerance by those who would seek to exploit him, is exposed in Gurney's Scenes from American Life, Arrighi's An Ordinary Man and Los Siete Bart, as an invitation to installation of the totalitarian state. Eager to stay alive, and therefore anxious not to offend, mass man tolerates the abuse of officially designated "inferiors," a concept he has been prepared to accept through propaganda. Too late, he realizes that the abridgement of the human rights of others has led to his own destruction.

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Though the plays hold out the non-conformist as the only hope in such a world, they reveal his ill-treatment. In Wilson in the Promise Land, the state imprisons a critic of its war-mongering. In Big Top, an outspoken student, tagged as a trouble-maker, is drafted. In Inquest, Freed depicts the Rosenbergs as Jewish, intellectual and leftist, outsiders in every respect, a non-conformity they pay for with their lives.

Yet despite their execution, Freed depicts the Rosenbergs as victors, paradigms of modern resistance because they declined to add false testimony to a paranoiac theory of apocalyptic confrontation, i.e, McCarthyism. The theme which unifies all the political drama of the era is the importance of the assertion of the individual will, whether as a member of an ethnic group, a specific socio-economic class, or as a solitary voice. The creators of Sixties political theater aimed to offer truth as an antidote to state propaganda for the real victory was not physically prevailing over the state--which was impossible, in any case--but in each individual retaining autonomy of perspective. Sixties theater politicos aimed to assist in this task, presenting truth which debunked the state propaganda to which they were exposed every single day of their lives. The successful accomplishment of this goal would result in a wresting of man from the mass and, possibly, an avoidance of

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the totalitarian future augured on the pages of almost every one of the political dramas produced from 1968 to 1972.

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Endnotes

Introduction

1. Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), 487.

2. In his Democracy is in the Streets (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987), James Miller locates the original use of the term (ca. 1965) in reference to the activities of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). (P. 38). Todd Gitlin in his book, The Sixties; Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), defines the movement as a nexus of "single-issue movements: civil rights, civil liberties, campus reform, peace" but with "a common elan, a tangle of common principles, eventually a generational identity. . . ." (P. 83).

3. The Bread and Puppet participated in the 24th of May Parade in Washington, D.C. in 1971. James Schevill, Breakout!; In Search of New Theatrical Environments (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1973), 24; The East Bay Sharks and the San Francisco Mime Troupe, both from the Berkeley area in California, aided the April Coalition, a roster of candidates heavily supported by poor people and by student populations. John Weisman, Guerrilla Theater; Scenarios for Revolution (New York: Anchor Books, 1973) 116.

4. Several studies are available which evaluate different aspects of this theater. Plays, Politics and Polemics (New York: Drama Book Specialists/Publishers, 1973) by Catherine Hughes focuses on both American and foreign political plays. Hughes' analysis, however, does not proceed from a coherent ideological framework. Plays are classified under broad unifying rubrics, such as "The Theatre goes to War." People's Theatre in Amerika (New York: Drama Book Specialists/Publishers, 1973) by Karen Malpede offers an historical approach to the American avant-garde from the New

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Playwrights Theater in the Twenties to El Teatro Campesino. Malpede includes interviews with various theater personnel and some scripts. James Schevill's Breakout! (See footnote #2 for complete citation) contains a potpourri of visions of an alternative, not necessarily political theater. This study includes scripts of political theater not available elsewhere and some commentary by personnel of the agit-prop alternative theater. Margaret Croyden's Lunatics, Lovers and Poets (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974) is essentially a history of the aesthetics of the avant-garde theater groups, such as the Living Theatre and The Open Theater. Arthur Sainer's Radical Theater Notebook (New York: Avon Books, 1975) is a valuable source because of its collection of scripts and its overall introduction to the social and cultural dynamics of countercultural theater. Claudio Vicentini's 1975 doctoral dissertation, "The American Political Theatre of the Sixties" (New York University) considers the Civil Rights movement and the guerrilla war tactics of Third World revolutionaries, such as Che Guevarra, influential in shaping alternative theater aesthetics. Judith Rieser's dissertation, completed at Northwestern in 1984, "The American Avant-Garde Ensemble Theatres of the Sixties in their historical and cultural context," is a careful study of the American theatrical avant-garde. Like Croyden's book, Rieser's work is primarily an evaluation of aesthetic rather than political aspects of the works produced by the avant-garde. She offers an in-depth analysis of only three groups and their respective works, The Living Theatre, The Open Theater and The Performance Group. Not one of the aforementioned studies has discussed the development of these groups against the backdrop of the major crisis of the twentieth century--the Holocaust. Not one of them offers a systematic content analysis of the scripts available of political theater of the period; consequently, none cross-references the political commentary of the non-commercial theater to that of the commercial.

5. Morgan Y. Himmelstein, Drama was a Weapon: The Left-wing Theater in New York, 1929--1941 (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishers, 1963).

6. Croyden, Part I, Pp. 3--71, passim.

7. Vicentini, 4.

8. According to C. Wright Mills, the assignment of an individual to the category of either "mass" or "public" is contingent upon that person's realization of the broader social context of his apparent private malaise. "The knowledgeable

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man in the genuine public is able to turn his personal troubles into social issues, to see their relevance for his community and his community's relevance for them. He understands that what he thinks and feels as personal troubles are very often not only that but problems shared by others and indeed not subject to solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structure of the groups in which he lives and sometimes the structure of the entire society." C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 318.

9. Todd Gitlin, The Sixties; Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam, 1987), 371.

10. Distant Drummer 25 June 1970, notes that a Quaker Action Group in Pennsylvania staged an antiwar play; East Village Other 15 November 1968, records a production of The Expressway by Robert Nichols which is unavailable; another play by Nichols, Undercover Cop, subtitled a street play, is cited in The Village Voice 21 September 1972; In addition, whole companies appear who profess allegiance to radical values; they disappear, leaving nothing in the annals save incendiary proclamations. Such is the case of Poverty Playhouse which proclaimed in Dallas Notes (April 16--May 6, 1969) that "their intent is subversive! . . .That they haven't been caught is only because the Establishment hasn't yet discovered their base of operations." (P. 11). They go on to assert that they have performed original plays in over seventy different locations, ranging from swimming pools to orphanages. They have left no archival evidence of their repertoire, however.

Chapter 1

1. Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War, second edition (New York: Appleton-Crofts, Inc., 1951), 2.

2. Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1919), 119.

3. Quinn, 6.

4. Glenn Hughes, A History of the American Theatre (New York: Samuel French, 1951), 44.

5. In his article, "European Influences on American Theatre: 1700--1969," in The American Theatre: A Sum of its Parts (New York: Samuel French, Inc. 1971) Francis Hodge

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scruples to note the presence of theater in America, but not American theater, before the twentieth century. He cites William Dunlap's 1832 observation that out of all the plays produced up until that date approximately 275 were of American authorship. (P.2).

6. Walter J. Meserve, An Emerging Entertainment (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 337--42.

7. Walter J. Meserve and William R. Reardon, Satiric Comedies (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1969), viii.

8. Quinn, 46. Quinn disputes authorship. Although Norman Philbrick, editor of Propaganda Plays of the American Revolution (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1972), does not believe that Warren's authorship is improbable. (P. 141-2).

9. Ibid. 6.

10. Ibid, 4.

11. Ibid, 15.

12. Owing to the prohibitions enacted by the revolutionary authorities, one in 1774 and two more in 1778, probably none of the pamphlet plays enjoyed a lively stage existence. Consequently, they are of minimal importance to the development of American theater in this country. Rather, they represent literary ambitions of those revolutionary literati attached to the pamphlet form because of its inherent polemic.

13. Meserve, An Emerging Entertainment, 127.

14. Philbrick, 15.

15. Quinn, 88.

16. Meserve, An Emerging Entertainment, 146.

17. Quinn, 127.

18. Susannah Rowson, Slaves in Algiers; Or, A Struggle for Freedom

19. Americans In England (1797), her last play, is not available for examination.

20. Jacques Ellul, Propaganda (New York: Knopf, 1965).

21. It is difficult to understand Ellul's assertion that no examples of the type existed prior to the twentieth century.

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Shakespeare's chronicle plays, written before Elizabeth I's death, coherently validated the Tudors' claim to the throne and as such were representative of the type of propaganda Ellul defines as integrative. There are several examples of the type before the twentieth century from the pens of such writers as Racine and Lope de Vega. Ellul would exclude such examples from this category because they do not possess the potential to create mass conformity. Furthermore, the technique of integration propaganda involves the use of communications technology of a sophistication obviously not available before the twentieth century. This, too, may account for Ellul's determination that such propaganda is present only at the onset of this century. Still, Ellul provides us with no other category in which to place early plays which validate the myths of state. To avoid controversy, any such play written in the eighteenth or nineteenth century will be evaluated as possessing one or more characteristics of the integrative propaganda type but none will be subsumed under the category. This will avoid an abuse of Ellul's typology.

22. Hodge, 6--7.

23. Ibid, 7. He notes that before 1830 the possibility of an homogeneous culture existed to support a vital native theater. After that date, however, the influx of immigrants from Northern and Southern Europe inhibited that chance.

24. Ibid, 7.

25. Quinn, 131.

26. Grimsted, 169.

27. William Wells Brown, The Escape; Or, A Leap for Freedom- (Afro-American History Series, Rhistoric Publications No. 287), 32.

28. Ibid, 3.

29. In Grimsted's study, Melodrama Unveiled, he notes the emphasis placed on the individual rather than on his class as a true index of one's worth. He refers to these heroes of the melodrama as "Nature's noblemen"; uneducated and of poor birth, they retain a natural aristocracy by virtue of a pristine natural intuition. (P.211-2)

30. Booth, Hiss the Villain (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), 16.

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31. Murphy, 83.

32. Ibid, 82.

33. Ibid, 83.

34. The reputation of the Thirties as an era of commitment drama may not be borne out by the proportion of such plays in comparison to the number of mainstream pieces produced. In fact, this is Morgan Y. Himmelstein's obsessive contention in his book, Drama was a Weapon (New Brunswick, New Jersey, c. 1963). He doggedly assert that the leftist drama was never more than a trickle in comparison to the total output of theater pieces during that decade. Nevertheless, the reputation of the Thirties as that of particular political agitation in the American theater has persisted.

35. Murphy, 170.

36. Elmer Rice wrote, Judgment Day (1934), American Landscape (1938), and Flight to the West (1940); other antifascist dramas by lesser luminaries are Oliver Garrett's Waltz in Goose Step (1938); Claire Booth's Margin for Error (1939); and Dorothy Thompson and Fritz Kortner's Another Sun (1940). Under the impetus of the second World War, at least two volumes of plays were published issuing paeans to American democracy: The Free Company Presents A Collection of Plays about the meaning of America (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1941) and Plays of Democracy (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944), edited by Margaret Mayorga. The volumes contain contributions from Paul Green, William Saroyan, March Connelly and Archibald MacLeish, to name just a few.

37. Stuart W. Little, Off-Broadway; The Prophetic Theater (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc. 1972), 81. This show was forced to close because of a prior booking engagement. It was re-opened at the Theatre de Lys on September 10, 1955. (P. 82).

38. See both Joseph T. Shipley, "Is McCarthy Killing the Theater?," in The New Leader 8 September 1952, 19--20 and Arthur Miller, "Brewed in 'The Crucible,'" New York Times 9 March 1958.

39. Ira A. Levine, Left-Wing Dramatic Theory in the American Theatre (UMI Research Press; Theater and Dramatic Studies, 1985), passim. Much of this section (Pp. 20--3) has been informed by Levine's painstaking study.

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40. Agit-prop is used in the sense of its application to the specific formal genre which developed in this time. At other places in the text it will be used according to Ellul's typology.

41. Levin, 48.

42. Quoted in Jay Williams, Stage Left (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 37.

43. Levine, 103.

44. Williams, 88-9, passim.

45. Ibid, 37.

46. Ibid, 34.

47. Ibid, 37.

48. Levin, 84.

49. Ibid, 84.

50. Gerald Rabkin, Drama and Commitment; Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties (New York: Haskell House Publishers, Ltd., 1973), 37.

51. Leslie Catherine Sanders, The Development of Black Theater in America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 14.

52. Ibid, 17.

Chapter 2

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. Why We Can't Wait (New York: Harper, 1964), dedication.

2. Harvard Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality: 1954--1980 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 177.

3. Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 274.

4. Ed Bullins, ed. New Plays from the Black Theatre (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), xii.
5. Shelby Steele, "Notes on Ritual in the New Black Theatre," in The Theatre of Black Americans, Volume I; Rituals/The Image Makers, ed. Errol Hill (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), 32.

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6. Mance Williams, Black Theatre in the 1960s and the 1970s; A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 13.

7. Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), The Slave in Drama and Revolution Bernard F. Dukore, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 557--80.

8. Woodie King, Jr. and Ron Milner, eds. Black Drama Anthology
(New York: New American Library, 1971), 427.

9. Nowhere in the script is it indicated that this is a characterization of the actual Reverend Jesse Jackson. But in the character's expression of non-violent sentiments, and in consideration of the actual Jackson's relationship with King, a doctrinal pacifist, conclusions may be drawn.

10. Amiri Baraka, The Motion of History (New York: William Morrow & co., 1978), 129--46.

11. Marvin X, The Black Bird in New Plays from the Black Theatre, 109--118.

12. Leroi Jones, Junkies are Full of SHHH in Black Drama, 11--24.

13. Ben Caldwell, "Top Secret, Or a Few Million After B.C.," and "Mission Accomplished," The Drama Review 12, #4 (Summer 1968): 47--52.

14. Leroi Jones (Baraka), The Death of Malcolm X in New Plays from the Black Theatre, 1--20.

15. Ed Bullins, "Death List," Black Theatre #5, 13.

16. Richard Wesley, "The Black Terror," Scripts 1, #2 (December, 1971): 16.

17. Zinn, 455.

18. Kingsley Bass, Jr., We Righteous Bombers in Black Drama Anthology, 21--96. There is dispute as to whether this play is a genuine artifact of the Black dramatic canon. In his doctoral dissertation, "Black Theatre Movement," (University of Pennsylvania, 1974), 436--447, Gerald Goodman proves the case that We Righteous Bombers is a plagiarism of a play by Albert Camus, The Just Assassins. As Bullins is

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the suspected "author," if we may term him so for the sake of expedience, Goodman expends some ink in attempting to determine the rationale behind the former's plagiarism. Expounding on Bullins' goal to fashion a black aesthetic, one removed from the mechanical and thematic characteristics of Western drama, a major concern of the black arts movement in the sixties, he deduces a didactic purpose behind the act: Bullins is trusting the savvy of his black audiences to reject the Western retrograde counterrevolutionary sentiments embedded within the text of <u>We Righteous Bombers</u>. To the <u>cognoscenti</u>, the humor of the hoax resides in its being yet another example of a piece of establishment text masquerading as black doctrine--at least, according to the surmise of Goodman.

Notwithstanding the danger of speculating on anyone's reasons for doing something, especially when the individual in question has never owned the deed, this hypothesis does not bear up when one considers the circumstances of the play's existence, nor if one compares the philosophical thrust of this play to others in Bullins' revolutionary repertoire.

Firstly, the play has been published in Bullins' own anthology, <u>New Plays from the Black Theatre</u> (New York: Bantam World Drama Book, 1969), and as it is unlikely that many casual readers will inquire as to the exact authorship of this play, it probably will be read and accepted as a document of the black theater of the period. It is accepted as an artifact of that theater by Flora Mancuso Edwards in her Ph.D. dissertation, "The Theater of the Black Diaspora: A Comparative Study of Black Drama in Brazil, Cuba and the United States" (New York University, 1975). Ms. Edwards includes a brief footnote in which she records that the play is "based" on the Camus play and then proceeds to analyze it as a legitimate expression of the Black American experience. Of course, it may be objected that Bullins just overrated the sophistication and knowledge of his audiences both present and future. But if one compares the sentiments expressed in <u>We Righteous Bombers</u>, with that expressed in his later <u>Death List</u>, as is done in the body of this paper, one will see many points of theoretical convergence. Therefore, to ascertain that the play is a plagiarism of a Western play and to conclude, consequently, that it must be some kind of joke perpetrated by the plagiarist is to overlook that there may be considerations other than the aesthetic that determine the kind of dramaturgy offered in the Black dramatic canon.

19. Joseph Walker, <u>Ododo</u> in <u>Black Drama Anthology</u>, 349--88.

20. Sitkoff, 154.

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21. Sonia Sanchez, Sister Son/ji in New Plays From the Black Theatre, 97--104.

22. Gerald Goodman, "The Black Theater Movement" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1974), 525--6.

23. Salimu, Growin' Into Blackness in New Plays from the Black Theatre, 195--200.

24. China Clark, Perfection in Black in Scripts 1,#7 (May 1972), 81-5.

25. Robert MacBeth, A Black Ritual, Black Theatre #5, 8--9.

26. James R. Brandon, William P. Malm and Donald H. Shively,
Studies in Kabuki; its Acting, Music, and Historical Context (U.S.A.: The University Press of Hawaii, Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan), 2.

27. Ed Bullins, It Bees That Way in Four Dynamite Plays (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1972), 1-16.

28. Ed Bullins, "State Office Building Curse," The Drama Review 14, #4 (September, 1980): 93. Many times the volcanic eruption of violence which closes the revolutionary play seems disproportionate to the events immediately preceding it. It must be remembered that this theater was meant for a black audience whose collective memory of oppression and victimization could be relied upon to supply exposition.

29. Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, The Victims of Democracy (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1981), 11.

30. Ed Bullins, The Gentleman Caller in Contemporary Black Drama, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), eds., Clinton F. Oliver and Stephanie Sills.

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Chapter 3

1. James Miller, Democracy is in the Streets; From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 192.

2. C. Wright Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society," 23--38, in Power, Politics and People; The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), 24.

3. Miller, p. 35.

4. Ibid, 59--60.

5. Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, Turning Point: 1968 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p. 230.
Miller, 87.

6. Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society," in Power, Politics, and People, 28.

7. Miller, 336.

8. Ibid, 152.

9. Ibid, 332.

10. Ibid, 87.

11. Massimo Teodori, The New Left; A Documentary History (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), 68.

12. Miller, 25.

13. Eric Bentley, Theatre of War; 32 Comments on 32 Occasions (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 269.

14. Bentley, 274.

15. Gitlin, 374.

16. Gitlin, p. 373.

17. Ibid, p. 363.

18. Pierre Biner, The Living Theatre, (New York: Avon, 1972), 76.

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19. R.G. Davis, <u>The San Francisco Mime Troupe; The First Ten Years</u> (Palo Alto, California: Ramparts Press, 1975), 69.

20. <u>Ibid</u>, 70.

21. <u>Ibid</u>, 150.

22. Henry Lesnick, <u>Guerrilla Street Theater</u> (New York: Avon Books, 1973), 134.

23. <u>Distant Drummer</u>, #76, March 12--19, 1970.

24. See, for example, Robert Brustein's <u>Revolution as Theatre</u> (New York: Liveright, 1971).

25. Miller, 286.

26. Gitlin, 236.

27. Lesnick, 16.

28. James A. Gregor, <u>The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics</u> (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

29. <u>Do It</u> (New York, 1971), 106.

30. Gitlin, 233.

31. <u>Ibid</u>, 233.

32. Lesnick, 30.

33. <u>Ibid</u>, 17.

34. <u>Ibid</u>, 30.

35. <u>Ibid</u>, 31.

36. The script of <u>Big Top</u> is found in Lesnick, <u>Guerilla Street Theater</u>, 60-76. All quotes from play derived from this edition.

37. The text of this play is found in Lesnick, <u>Guerilla Street Theater</u>, 82--86. The date given for the play is its publication date, 1973; no production date is given. Of course, with plays of this sort, it is safe to assume that they were kept in the repertory of New York RAT for several years.

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38. P. 212. Text of play found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 212--224.

39. John Weisman, Guerrilla Theater; Scenarios for Revolution (New York: Doubleday, 1973). Text of 1984 found in this book, 110-5.

40. Text of this play is located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 115--119.

41. Text of play found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 302--3.

42. Text of play found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 298--301.

43. San Francisco Mime Troupe, By Popular Demand (San Francisco, 1980), 232. Text of Frozen Wages located in this edition, 233-243.

44. Ibid, 161.

45. Lesnick, 58. Text of play located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 57--9.

46. Ibid, p. 84.

47. Lesnick, 239. Text of play found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 225--249.

48. A Flippy is not an acted drama. Rather, it is a narrated demonstration aided by maps and pictures attached to a portable frame. The pictures are then "flipped" in front of the audience as the presentation progresses.

49. Lesnick, 362. Text of play found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 358-368.

50. Lesnick, 276. Text of play located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 276--86.

51. Lesnick, 275. Text of play found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 275--6.

52. Lesnick, 380. Text located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 379--381.

53. Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, eds, From Camelot to Kent State, (New York: Times Books, 1987), p. 184.

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54. Lesnick, 317. Text located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 320--351.

55. Lesnick, 399. Text found in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 398--99.

56. This is a task that education shares with the mass media. Yet even though the ideologues of the new left were very articulate about the capacity of the media to manipulate perceptions of reality, the drama it produced contains little concerning the subject.

57. Miller, 374. The whole text of the Port Huron Statement is found in Miller's Democracy is in the Streets, Pp. 329--74.

58. Text of play located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 40--7.

59. Text of play located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 293--7.

60. See Herbert Marcuse's "The Desublimation of Protest," Counterrevolution and Revolt (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

61. Text of play located in Lesnick, Guerilla Street Theater, 110--4.

62. Text of play found in Weisman, Guerrilla Theater, 82--6.

63. Arthur Sainer, Radical Theatre Notebook (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 351.

Chapter 4

1. For each season, the series offers a categorical listing of the total number of productions. The statistic given for the production of new plays was obtained; it was a simple matter to compute the percentage of that number which were new political plays. One-half of the 1967--1968 season and one-half of the 1972--1973 season statistics were used to accommodate the chronology of this thesis.

2. Marjorie Gunner, "On & Off Broadway" in Matzner Publications (December 7, 1969), 4.

3. Jules Feiffer, Little Murders (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), 134.

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4. Text of play found in James Leo Herlihy, Stop You're Killing Me (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 61.

5. All quoted material derived from Roger Cornish, Open 24 Hours (New York: Samuel French, 1968).

6. Cornish has provided different endings to several versions of his play. This ending is eschewed in the edition of Open included in the anthology edited by George E. Wellwarth, Themes of Drama (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1973), 623--44.

7. Leonard Spigelgass, The Wrong Way Light Bulb (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1969), 10.

8. Joseph Dolan Tuotti, Big Time Buck White (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 52.

9. Mel Arrighi, An Ordinary Man (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1969).

10. Gore Vidal, An Evening with Richard Nixon (New York: Random House, 1972), P. ix.

11. New York Times, 15 October 1969.

12. Ibid.

13. Stanley Kauffmann, Persons of the Drama; Theater Criticism and Comment (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 184.

14. Kopit, 43.

15. Kauffmann, 184.

16. Produced by the Trinity Square Repertory Company in Rhode Island and, subsequently, in New York City at the ANTA Theater on May 26, 1970.

17. All quotes from Roland Van Zandt, Wilson in the Promise Land (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1970).

18. All quotes from this play are derived from Art Buchwald's Counting Sheep; The Log and Complete Play of Sheep on the Runway (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970).

19. Erwin Piscator, Das Politische Theatre (Berlin, 1929), 65.

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20. Mason, Gregory, "From the Revue to the Tribunal," Modern Drama 20 (Spring 1977), 265.

21 . Dan Isaac, "Theatre of Fact," The Drama Review 15 (Summer 1971): 109--35.

22. Donald Freed, Inquest (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 1--18.

23. Zinn, 427.

24. Quoted material from Eric Bentley, Are You Now; Or, Have You Ever Been and Other Plays, (New York: Grove Press, Inc.), 7.

25. He made his escape through the aide of the Bread and Puppet Theater troupe, hidden inside one of their huge puppet creations.

26. Daniel Berrigan, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1971), 19.

27. All quotations from this play are taken from Joseph Heller, We Bombed in New Haven (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

Conclusion

1. Arendt, Hannah. The Origins of Totalitarianism. (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1951, renewed 1979),467.

2. Ibid, Chapter 3, passim.

3. Ibid, 466.

4. Ibid, 468 .

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