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Go

FEB MAR APR

14

2012 2013 2014



4 captures

14 Mar 2013 - 1 Apr 2013

About this capture



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COLUMN: FORCE FIELDS

Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment: The Frankfurt School as Scapegoat of the Lunatic Fringe

BY MARTIN JAY

On August 18, 2010, Fidel Castro contributed an article to the Cuban Communist Party paper *Granma* in which he endorsed the bizarre allegations of an obscure Lithuanian-born conspiracy theorist named Daniel Estulin in a 2005 book entitled *The Secrets of the Bilderberg Club*.^[1] In an Associated Press wire story written by Will Weissert, which was quickly picked up by scores of sites on line, Castro's infatuation went viral, and suddenly Estulin was unknown no more. Soon after, he was invited to Havana for a meeting with his new admirer, who was untroubled by Estulin's ambiguous political affiliations, and before the day was out, the aging Cuban leader and his unexpected friend had declared that Osama Bin Laden was really a secret CIA agent and the United States was planning to destroy Russia's still potent military forces, if necessary by nuclear means.^[2]

Estulin's claim in the book that captivated Castro goes something like this: beginning with a meeting in 1954 in the Bilderberg Hotel in a Dutch town, a group of powerful men—heads of state, economic tycoons, even the occasional monarch—have gathered annually in order to decide the fate of the world. Among the usual suspects, the Rockefeller family, the Rothschilds, Prince Bernhard and Henry Kissinger are prominent *eminences grises*. With the ultimate goal of installing a world government—or more precisely, a "one-world corporation"—under their control, they pull the strings of the economy, aiming to create chaos, and plot to narcotize the population by any means possible. Perhaps their most effective gambit has been the concoction and dissemination of mass culture, in particular the rock and roll that turned potential social revolutionaries into countercultural stoners.

After decades of battling actual conspiracies dedicated to overturning his Revolution, the 84-year-old Castro is, I suppose, as entitled anyone to paranoid fantasies. But what makes his embrace of Estulin's book especially risible is the subordinate argument—and this is the part that most concerns me here—that the inspiration for the subversion of domestic unrest came from Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal and their colleagues at the Institute for Social research in the 1950's. To cite the Associated Press condensed version: "The excerpt published by Castro suggested that the esoteric Frankfurt School of socialist academics worked with members of the Rockefeller family in the 1950s to pave the way for rock music to 'control the masses' by diverting attention from civil rights and social injustice."^[3] The Radio Research Project under the direction of Paul Lazarsfeld, which had hired Adorno when he came to America in 1938, had, after all, been funded the Rockefeller Foundation. It was here that the techniques for mind control via pop music had been developed. And then according to Estulin, the task of realizing their sinister potential was given to no less a luminary than Walter Lippmann (!), who was somehow able to engineer the Beatles' conquest of the American media in the 1960's. What followed was a new and more powerful opium of the people (although, to be sure, opium or substitutes were doing a pretty good job as well). For after all, didn't John Lennon admit as much when he so memorably sang, "you say you want a revolution....you know you can count me out, don' you know it's gonna be all right, all right, all right."

Here we have clearly broken through the looking glass and entered a parallel universe in which normal rules of evidence and plausibility have been suspended. It is a mark of the silliness of these claims that they even subjected to ridicule by Rush Limbaugh on his August 20, 2010 radio show. Even he had to point out that the Beatles were on the side of social change, not opposed to it. Limbaugh, to be sure, ignored the other most blatant absurdity in Estulin's scheme, which was attributing to the Frankfurt School a position precisely opposite to what its members had always taken. That is, when they discussed the "culture industry" it was with the explicit criticism, ironically echoed here by Castro, that it functioned to reconcile people to their misery and dull the pain of their suffering. Whether or not the Frankfurt School's argument is fully plausible is not the issue here, but rather the pathetic miscomprehension of Estulin and the credulity of Castro in seeing them as agents of the Bilderberg project to make the world safe for capitalist elites. The even weirder fantasy about their assigning Lippmann the job of reconciling theory and practice is so outlandish that it is impossible even to guess how it might have been concocted.

I have no stake in exonerating or blaming the Bilderberg gang for ruining the world. Until this episode, I had, in fact, never heard of them. Like other candidates for the role of chief conspiratorial clique—the Masons, the Illuminati, the Trilateral Commission, the denizens of Bohemian Grove, take your pick—they can surely take care of themselves. Anyone, moreover, who believes, to take one of Estulin's sillier claims, that Watergate was a frame-up devised by Bilderberg kingpin Kissinger to get rid of Nixon because he was failing to carry out their orders is not going to convince many sober-minded observers. What concerns me here instead is the transformation of "the Frankfurt School" into a kind of vulgar meme, a charged unit of cultural meaning that

Go
FEB **MAR** APR
👤

◀
14
▶

2012 **2013** 2014
▼ About this capture

[4 captures](#)

14 Mar 2013 - 1 Apr 2013

and was often portrayed in simple-minded terms, it wasn't really until a decade or so ago that the School as a whole entered the netherworld of garbled memedom, and began circulating in a wide variety of narratives, such as that promoted by Estulin and Castro. Most of these, to be sure, came from a very different political direction. Patrick Buchanan's 2001 best-selling screed against the nefarious impact of immigration, *The Death of the West*, was one major source, stigmatizing as it did the Frankfurt School for promoting "cultural Marxism" (a recycling of the old Weimar conservative charge of "cultural Bolshevism" aimed at aesthetic modernists). But the opening salvo had, in fact, been fired a decade earlier in a lengthy essay by one Michael Minnicino called "New Dark Age: Frankfurt School and 'Political Correctness,'" published in 1992 in the obscure journal *Fidelio*.^[4] Its provenance is particularly telling: it was an organ of the Lyndon Larouche movement *cum* cult, one of the less savory curiosities of nightmare fringe politics.

Larouche and his followers have, to be sure, always remained on the fringe of the fringe, too confused in their ideology to be taken seriously by either radical left or right, with little, if any significant impact on the real world. But the germ sown by Minnicino was ultimately to bear remarkable poisonous fruit. The harvester was the Free Congress Foundation, a paleo-conservative Washington think tank founded by Paul Weyrich, who was also in on the creation of the Heritage Foundation and the Moral Majority movement. Much of the financial support came from his collaborator Joseph Coors, who knew how to turn all that pure Rocky Mountain water into a cash flow for the radical right. The FCF sponsored a satellite television network called National Empowerment Television, which churned out slickly produced shows promulgating its various opinions.


In 1999, it broadcast an hour-long, skillfully crafted exposé of "Political Correctness: The Frankfurt School," which was put together largely by William Lind, one of Weyrich's colleagues at the Foundation and head of its Center for Cultural Conservatism. Weyrich himself appeared only at the end during a question-and-answer session with viewers who called in. In addition to Lind, a number of the usual suspects—the right-wing pundits Roger Kimball and David Horowitz, and the former football star and homophobic religious preacher Reggie White—comment on the School's history. There is as well one anomalous figure, the author of the first history of the Frankfurt School, *The Dialectical Imagination*. The book was itself displayed at the end of the show, and recommended to anyone interested in the full story, albeit with the cautionary reminder that its author was himself a dangerous apologist for the School's philosophy. Later Lind would crow in a column in *The American Conservative*, "The video is especially valuable because we interviewed the principal American expert on the Frankfurt School, Martin Jay, who was then the chairman of the History Department at Berkeley (and obviously no conservative). He spills the beans."^[5]

Ever since that lamentable broadcast I have often been asked how I fell among such dubious characters, and so let me beg the reader's indulgence for a moment to explain before moving on to the larger issues at hand. When I was approached for the interview, I was not informed of the political agenda of the broadcasters, who seemed very professional and courteous. Having done a number of similar shows in the past on one or another aspect of the history of the Frankfurt School, I naively assumed the end results would reflect my opinions with some fidelity, at least within the constraints of the edited final product. But what happened instead was that all my critical remarks about the hypocrisy of the right-wing campaign against political correctness were lost and what remained were simple factual statements confirming the Marxist origins of the School, which had never been a secret to anyone. Interweaving my edited testimony into the larger narrative may have given it an unearned legitimacy, which I now, of course, regret, but it's likely the effect would have been pretty much the same without my participation as "useful idiot." Those beans I allegedly spilled had already been on the plate for a very long time, and it would have taken no effort at all to confirm that, yes, they were Marxists, and yes, they thought cultural questions were important, and yes, they—or at least Marcuse—worried about the effects of "repressive tolerance."

In any event, the "documentary," soon available on the net, spawned a number of condensed textual versions, which were reproduced on a number of radical right-wing sites. These in turn led to a welter of new videos now available on You Tube, which feature an odd cast of pseudo-experts regurgitating exactly the same line. The message is numbingly simplistic: all the ills of modern American culture, from feminism, affirmative action, sexual liberation and gay rights to the decay of traditional education and even environmentalism are ultimately attributable to the insidious influence of the members of the Institute for Social Research who came to America in the 1930's. The origins of "cultural Marxism" are traced back to Lukács and Gramsci, but because they were not actual émigrés, their role in the narrative is not as prominent. Nor do most of the commentators attribute responsibility to the Communist International, although occasionally, as in the case of *Cry Havoc!*, a 2007 book by a founder of the *National Review*, Ralph de Toledano, the crackpot claim is actually advanced that the Frankfurt School was a Commie front set up by Willi Muenzenberger.^[6]

There is a transparent subtext in the original CFC program, which is not hard to discern and has become more explicit with each telling of the narrative. Although there is scarcely any direct reference to the ethnic origins of the School's members, subtle hints allow the listener to draw his own conclusions about the provenance of foreigners who tried to combine Marx and Freud, those giants of critical Jewish intelligence. At one point, William Lind asserts that "once in America they shifted the focus of their work from destroying German society to attacking the society and culture of its new place of refuge,"^[7] as if the very people who had to flee the Nazis had been responsible for what they were fleeing!^[8] Airtime is also given to another of Weyrich's colleagues at the FCF, Lazlo Pasztor, who is innocently identified as a "leader of the Hungarian resistance against Communism," but had already been discredited a decade earlier as a former member of the pro-Nazi "Arrow Cross," who had to leave the Bush campaign in 1988 when he was outed.

A number of years later a fringe neo-Nazi group called "Stormfront" could boldly express what had hitherto only been insinuated, and in so doing really spill some foul-tasting beans:

FEB MAR APR 
 ◀ 14 ▶
 2012 2013 2014 ▼ About this capture

One can even quite innocently mention that the Frankfurt Schoolers had to leave Germany in 1933 because "*they were to a man, Jewish,*" as William S. Lind does.^[9]

Now that the real origins of political correctness in the cultural Marxism devised by a clever bunch of foreign-born Jews had been revealed, the full extent of the damage they had caused could be spelled out. Here is a list cited verbatim from many of the websites devoted to the question:

1. The creation of racism offences
2. Continual change to create confusion
3. The teaching of sex and homosexuality to children
4. The undermining of schools' and teachers' authority
5. Huge immigration to destroy identity
6. The promotion of excessive drinking
7. Emptying of churches
8. An unreliable legal system with bias against victims of crime
9. Dependency on the state or state benefits
10. Control and dumbing down of media
11. Encouraging the breakdown of the family^[10]

Well, I suppose at least the second plank has been realized, with perhaps the self-inflicted help of the sixth. In this confused world, it is only a short step to blaming everything from Roman Polanski's lust for underage girls to the allegedly liberal curriculum at the Naval Academy to Obama's health care initiative—these are among many of the wild assertions one can find on line—on the sinister influence of Horkheimer and his friends. One site even asserts that the Fabian Society, the reformist intellectuals of late 19th-century British socialism, was "a division of the Frankfurt School," which suggests that linear chronology can be swept aside when it comes to exposing the work of the devil. The ultimate goal of "cultural Marxism" in their telling is thus far more than the leftist thought-control that denies alternative positions under the guise of restricting hate speech. It is the subversion of Western civilization itself.

It is, frankly, very difficult to know what to make of all of this and even harder to imagine a way to counter it. The radical Left, it has to be conceded, has at times also scapegoated émigré intellectuals for their sinister, covert influence. After Bush's invasion of Iraq, the neo-conservatives supposedly inspired by Leo Strauss and his followers were blamed for inspiring a foreign policy that was ultimately in Israel's interest. Here too a certain anti-Semitic subtext could easily creep into the discourse.^[11] And as we see in the unholy alliance of Castro and Estulin, the Frankfurt School could be assigned the same role by leftists also fighting against the shadowy string-pullers allegedly running the universe. Indeed, if we go back to Estulin's original Spanish text and look for the source that he cites to make his absurd claim that was swallowed whole by the gullible Castro, we find the very same 1992 essay by the Lyndon Larouche minion Michael Minnicino that was the source of the Free Congress Foundation video!^[12] But the vast majority of accusations of this sort come out of a swamp of shockingly ill-informed, logically challenged demagogues on the radical right, whose easy access to the internet allows them blithely to spread the most egregious nonsense.

Does the sheer quantity of sites devoted to disseminating it, almost always drawing on the same obsessively repeated pseudo-facts and unfounded speculations, suggest a genuinely widespread phenomenon? Although it may be hard to gauge its real extent, the momentum of the dissemination has certainly accelerated in the past few years. What began as a bizarre Lyndon Larouche coinage has become the common currency of a larger and larger public of addled *enragés*. As the case of Pat Buchanan shows, it has entered at least the fringes of the mainstream. Indeed, if you include right-wing radio demagogues with sizeable audiences like the thuggish Michael Savage, it has now become their stock in trade as well.^[13] Can it be doubted that if you polled the crowds at Tea Party rallies about the influence of "cultural Marxism" on the decline of American culture, which they want to "take back" from immigrants, recent and otherwise, you would find significant familiarity with this discourse?

Until very recently and then only in passing has the radical right's obsession with "cultural Marxism" and the Frankfurt School even been noticed, let alone systematically analyzed.^[14] There has, in contrast, been a sustained scholarly interest in the ways

Go
FEB **MAR** APR
◀ **14** ▶
2012 **2013** 2014
👤

4 captures
14 Mar 2013 - 1 Apr 2013
▼ About this capture

Studies in Authority, who were analyzed sixty years ago by the Frankfurt School itself. ^[16]

It is very disheartening to see how robust this phenomenon remains today, and a source of bitter irony to observe how the School itself has become its explicit target. But if there is one positive implication of these developments, it is the perverse tribute today's radical right pays to the School's acuity in revealing the workings of their deplorable ideology and its origins in their political and psychological pathologies. In looking for a scapegoat for all the transformations of culture which they can't abide, they have recognized the most acute analysts of their own condition. In the fog of their blighted understanding, they have discerned a real threat. But it is not to some phantasm called "Western civilization," whose most valuable achievements they themselves routinely betray, but rather to their own pathetic and misguided worldview and the dangerous politics it has spawned in our climate of heightened fear and despair.

The answer should not be to replace one scapegoat with another and trace all critiques of political correctness and the anxieties of those who level them back to the machinations of an extremist cult. Only a solution in which the deeper sources of those anxieties can be reduced will lessen the attraction of such theories to the people who find them persuasive. But perhaps at least exposing the paper trail leading from Lyndon Larouche to both Paul Weyrich and Fidel Castro can cause some of the more gullible to pause before they leap into the abyss. If not, at least we can always fall back on those death panels mandated by our foreign-born Muslim socialist president, himself a tool of the Frankfurt school, ^[17] to keep those who resist our plot to destroy Western civilization in line. Oops, sorry, more beans spilled.....

Notes

[1] <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/reflections-i/19agosto-34reflexiones1.html>. Originally written in Spanish as *La Verdadera Historia del Club Bilderberg*, the book is translated as *The True Story of the Bilderberg Group* (Waterville, Or., 2007). In the English translation, all references to the Frankfurt School, Walter Lippmann and the Beatles are purged.

[2] Daniel Estulin and Fidel Castro, "Humanity Must Preserve Itself in Order to Live for Thousands of Years," *Granma Internacional*, Tuesday, August, 31, 2010.

[3] <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ixj3s-khJwpcfPSqYbjoTDn-q20aAD9HM2NVG0>. Castro's paraphrase of Estulin reads as follows: "The responsibility of devising a social theory of rock and roll fell to the German sociologist, musicologist, and composer Theodor Adorno, 'one of the leading philosophers at the Frankfurt School of Social Research...' Adorno was sent to the United States in 1939 to direct the Princeton Radio Research Project, a joint effort between Tavistock and the Frankfurt School with the aim of controlling the masses, which was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation and founded by one of David Rockefeller's trusted men, Hadley Cantril..." One of Estulin's main players in the Bilderberg conspiracy, it should be noted, is the Tavistock Institute for Social Relations in London.

[4] Michael Minnicino, "New Dark Age: Frankfurt School and Political Correctness," *Fidelio*, 1(1991-1992); reprinted by the Schiller Institute http://www.schillerinstitute.org/fid_91-96/921_frankfurt.html

[5] www.amconmag.com/.../the-roots-of-political-correctness/

[6] Ralph de Toledano, *Cry Havoc! The Great American Bringdown and How it Happened* (Washington, 2007).

[7] In later incarnations of his narrative, Lind would elaborate this point, arguing in a chapter of a 2007 book edited by Pat Boone and Ted Baehr, *The Culture-Wise Family: Upholding Christian Values in a Media-Wise World*: "The Frankfurt School was well on the way to political correctness. Then suddenly, fate intervened. In 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in Germany, where the Frankfurt School was located. Since the Frankfurt School was Marxist, and the Nazis hated Marxism, and since almost all its members were Jewish, it decided to leave Germany. In 1934, the Frankfurt School, including its leading members from Germany, was re-established in New York City with help from Columbia University. Soon, its focus shifted from destroying traditional Western culture in to doing so in the United States. It would prove all too successful." www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=55833.

[8] www.stormfront.org/forum/t633959-3/. For a similar anti-Semitic rant, see www.thejewishquestion.com/.../jews-created-spread-political-correctness-to-destroy-western-civilization.

4 captures
14 Mar 2013 - 1 Apr 2013

Go FEB MAR APR
14
2012 2013 2014

About this capture

of Western civilization, in which the Frankfurt School figures prominently.

[10] Timothy Matthews, "The Frankfurt School: Conspiracy to Corrupt," *Catholic Insight*, March, 2009 www.scribd.com
>Research> Humanities.

[11] When the invasion took place, I was asked to support a commission set up in Belgium by Lieven de Cauter on the model of the Russell Tribunal during Vietnam to have a public trial of the perpetrators, who turned out in the first version of the initiative to share certain ethnic traits. When I pointed this out to de Cauter, he publically acknowledged my warning. See his blog of March, 18, 2003: www.mail-archive.com/Jnettime-l@bbs.thing.net/msg00582.html

[12] Estulin, *La Verdadera Historia del Club Bilderberg*, p. 15, footnote 25.

[13] See Savage's show on You Tube entitled "Liberalism and Frankfurt School Marxism" where he blames Obama on the influence of the evil Herbert "Marcoosee."

[14] See the incredulous response to one of the more prominent conservative voices, Andrew Breitbart, in the May 24, 2010 *New Yorker* by Rebecca Mead and the internet piece by John Knesel on May 18, 2010: trueslant.com/.../who-let-andrew-breitbart-into-the-critical-theory-section-of-the-book-store/ . They focus on Breitbart's claim that Obama was a tool of the Frankfurt School, but do not comment on the larger phenomenon.

[15] David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis, 2007) and Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis, 2009).

[16] Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (New York, 1949).

[17] For an example of the link, see James Simpson, "Frankfurt Reigns Supreme at Notre Dame," *American Thinker*, September 8, 2010: http://www.americanthinker.com/2009/05/frankfurt_school_reigns_suprem.html

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