

I. GENERAL ISSUES

THE COLUMBIA SOCIAL ESSAYISTS*

Albert J. Bergesen

Wallerstein came of age intellectually at Columbia University, where he was an undergraduate, graduate student and faculty member for a quarter of a century (1947-1971). While we often think of his work on African politics and his concern with third world development as precursors to world-system theory, a large part of his intellectual biography was shaped by those Columbia years. They mark the high point of a triple hegemony of university, city, and nation, as at this time Columbia was the leading university in the leading city of the hegemonic nation. It was a time before the 1960s when the New Left and Berkeley would challenge the centrality of New York and Columbia as undisputed centers of American social thought and it was before what would be called the policy intellectuals would emerge in Washington DC in the 1970s/80s. It was also a time before the great influx of federal money in the 1960s which spurred social research and lifted other universities to prominence. It was a time of what I will call The Columbia Social Essayists, referring to scholar/intellectuals such as C. Wright Mills, Daniel Bell, Lionel Trilling, Richard Hofstadter and Meyer Schapiro.

There is a literature on each of these prominent academic intellectuals, and it is not my purpose to go into any further detail about their particular interests or differences. I am more interested in what they share in common than in what made them unique, for it is on the basis of their commonalities

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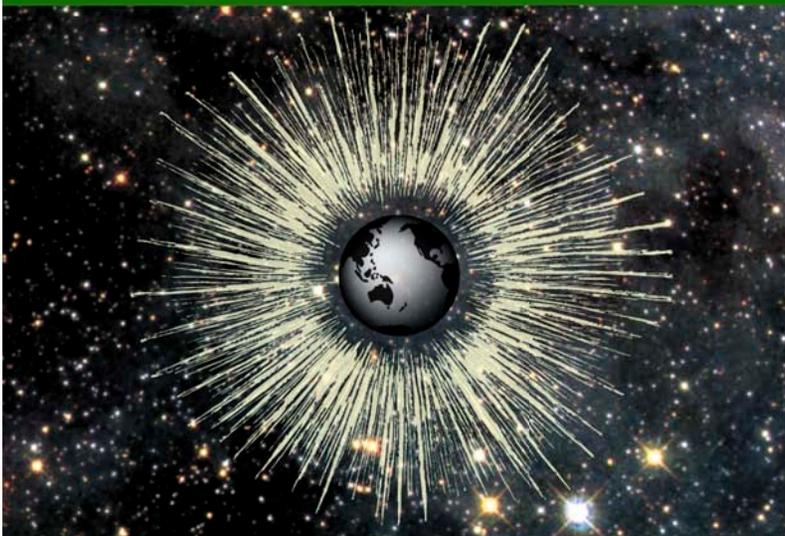
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that they are meaningfully grouped together to constitute a definite chapter in American intellectual life. They existed at a particular time and place, Columbia at its peak between the later 1940s and the 1960s, while some of their careers start earlier in the 1930s and others continued into the 1970s and beyond. They knew each other, were friends and enemies, and taught some classes together. Bell helped Mills get acquainted with the world of New York authors and aided his early article publishing career; Hofstadter and Mills both taught earlier at Maryland and came to Columbia at the same time in 1946; Hofstadter and Bell conducted a faculty seminar together; and Mills critiqued Trilling and Hofstadter in print, and they in turn responded (Horowitz, 1983). As was often said of the larger New York Intellectual community there was affect and disagreement.

While university professors, they found their voice in the more generalized format of the essay, and like the broader New York Intellectual community, published in small intellectual journals (Trilling, Schapiro, Mills, and others published in *Partisan Review*). As a broad generalization they tended to be left or liberal in political persuasion, social in explanatory mode, and open in content. Their essays were less pure critical opinion and political line, and more expository analysis of social institution, political movement, literary text, or art object, and in that sense they reflected their complicated social position as university faculty grounded in disciplinary traditions as well as intellectual commentators on the American condition. The tradition of the Columbia Social Essay continues today—one thinks of Arthur Danto on art or Edward Said on the ideology of Eurocentricism, but it reached its zenith as a contribution to American intellectual life in an earlier period. While we are aware of the passing of the more general community collectively known as the New York Intellectuals (see Cooney, 1986; Bloom, 1986; Barrett, 1982; Abel, 1984; Howe, 1968; Podhoretz, 1967, 1999; among the many), the world of the Columbia Social Essayists is also gone. There was an overlap with the broader world of New York Intellectuals, of course, but the Columbia academic/intellectuals provided their own identifiable contribution to both American intellectual life and sociological thought.

C. Wright Mills was a professor in the College and is best known for his studies of the emerging middle strata of bureaucracy (*White Collar*) and the concentrations of power at the top of different social institutions as a new

pattern of social power in America (*The Power Elite*). He was also known for his criticisms of the very general and abstract theory of Talcott Parsons and the quantitative research of his Columbia colleague Paul Laszarsfeld (*The Sociological Imagination*), but Mills' lasting sociological heritage is not what most think, for his central contribution turns out to have been, ironically, empirical, not the criticism of American society or professional sociology. The attacks on general abstract theory, the essay, "Grand Theory," make little lasting sense, for abstraction in and of itself isn't right or wrong, nor does whether an account is long winded or circuitous, make any difference. The issue is whether one gets it right or not, and in this regard the downfall of Parsons lay in the truth value of his propositions not in how he stated his theory. Marx certainly can be abstract, long winded, and obscurantist, and reading Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* is certainly as difficult as Parsons' *The Social System*, yet social thought continues to extract insights and hypotheses from Gramsci while Parsons is, excepting sporadic German or Russian interest in social functionalism, largely ignored. Mills' reaction to abstract formulations, then, seems more a critique of form than content, and in terms of Trilling's essay, "Reality in America," Mills would seem to be a prime representative of that American belief in reality as something hard, practical, and concrete, such that Parsons' theoretical exercises generate in Mills an almost aesthetic reaction to form of expression as much as to what was actually said. The spunk and cynicism in Mills' critique of Parsons reflects an American distrust of large theoretic schemes, and if anti-intellectualism is too strong, then it certainly reflects the practicality of a progressive Texan's skepticism toward fancy Harvard theoretical renderings.

Mills' real contribution it turns out was his illumination of 20th century changes in the occupational structure and a refiguring of power relations. There were two fundamental observations. *White Collar* draws attention to the proliferation of middle level bureaucratic positions throughout society as part of the next stage of American, and by extension, social and economic development in general. Ironically, it is Mills' empirical eye that is stronger than his later Marxian theoretical outlook, for he helps document, through illustration, an important qualification of the more orthodox Marxian conception of capitalist class structure. Rather than a model where people are forced into a proletarian status in an ever more polarizing class structure, what he observes is that the leading capitalist economy shows another trend:

a post-1945 proliferation of a Weberian middle stratum of functionally specific organizational roles, captured in his “white collar” designation. Second, his idea of “the power elite” is, in its essence, an empirical observation about the basis of power in developed capitalist societies. He notes that the simpler model of power being ultimately derivable from landed or capitalist classes doesn’t map on to the present distribution of power in a variety of institutional realms from the military to politics and the economy. What the focus on power, as opposed to just class, does is to open the door for understanding society in a more pluralist or liberal way. This is one of the central observations of late 20th century social life that will have to be factored into the next great round of social theory analogous to what Marx/Weber were for the end of the 19th century. One of the implications emphasized by Mills is that one cannot have a model where one institutional area subordinates all the others, as would a class model. Political, military, economic and media institutions are all hierarchical orders, hence power orders, and hence at the top have elites or higher circles.

Daniel Bell was also a professor of sociology and wrote general essays about virtually all aspects of American political and economic life, from organized crime to class structure, status politics, and some of the cultural contradictions of capitalism. Bell introduced Mills to New York and is perhaps the most general of the Columbia essayists, often acting as something of an intellectual mid-wife between more esoteric original sources of sociological theory and a wider reading public. His primary intellectual contribution lies in the introduction of a number of seminal ideas that captured complex aspects of social change and American society, such as “the end of ideology,” “post industrial society” and “the cultural contradictions of capitalism.” One of his more direct contributions to the sociological heritage lies in his collaboration with Richard Hofstadter and S.M. Lipset in explicating the notion of “status politics” and generalizing it to conservative social movements in the 1950s and 1960s.

Lionel Trilling. Not all Columbia Social Essayists were professional sociologists. In fact, what makes the group so interesting is their utilization of generalized social theories as explanatory variables in so many different disciplines. One of these was Lionel Trilling, professor in the English department and social and literary critic, whose essays placed a great deal of emphasis upon the distinctly societal context of the novel. While his pri-

mary area of expertise was 19th century English literature his social concerns were prominent, writing on the relation of the writer to America, attitudes toward American culture, the relation of culture and personality more generally, and the complexity of moral stances taken in both literature and life. The importance of such social factors can be seen in the titles of the collections of essays comprising his major works: *The Liberal Imagination*, *Beyond Culture*, and *Sincerity and Authenticity*.

The contributions of non-sociologists such as Trilling to the corpus of generalized sociological concepts lies in their perspectives on literature, history, and art. These domains of culture have been the most difficult to quantify and turn into variables for systematic sociological analysis, and sociologists themselves often do not know enough about the specifics of art, history, or the novel to meaningfully dissect variation in these cultural products. The point was, I think, originally Hofstadter’s, when he was talking about the importance of reading literary criticism for the study of history and argued that the vocabulary of literary criticism provided concepts that could be utilized by the historian to more accurately describe and capture cultural dimensions of the historical process. The same general point goes for sociology, except here I would add both the distinctions of art history and social history to those of literary criticism. It is in this regard that the Columbia Social Essayists are of particular importance for the development of sociological concepts, for with their already finely tuned sociological eye, they provide something of a half-way house for the professional sociological imagination to enter into distinctions made by the literary and art historical critic. Just history, or just the aesthetics of art or the novel, are often difficult to translate into sociological concerns, but when the critic has a social bent of mind, then the distinctions are already in something of a sociological shape and are much more easily digestible by the professional sociologist.

Richard Hofstadter was a professor of American history whose central idea was the interface of social status and social change as an explanatory mix to account for some of the unique properties of social movements from the Progressive Era (*The Age of Reform*) to McCarthyism and the Radical Right (*Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, and *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*). There has been a direct impact upon Columbia sociology in the form of Lipset and Bell’s work on status politics, the radical right, and the dispossessed as generalizations on Hofstadter’s observations about the

status anxieties generated by the social change surrounding the progressive movement. Wallerstein's MA thesis was on just such a topic. Second, the displacement-leads-to-protest hypothesis is similar to Charles Tilly's generalization of the experiences of the protest of the "little people" of the French Revolution into ideas of "reactionary" collective violence. Both Tilly and Hofstadter followed a similar process: start with an historical example, Progressive Era and revolt of the Vendee or Parisian little people, and generalize their experience into notions like "status politics" and "reactionary collective violence," which capture the same general social dynamics of historical change loosening the ties, or displacing from positions of status and power, social groups that defensively react in protest and collective violence. This tradition has continued not only from the Progressive era into the McCarthyism in the 1950s, but in Goldwaterism of the 1960s and the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, and the Christian Right of the 1980s and 1990s.

Meyer Schapiro was a professor of art history who looked for the relevant social context to account for shifts in artistic styles. If Trilling focused upon the social conditions of literature, Schapiro did the same for art. In one of his early essays on abstract art, Schapiro points to the limits of explanations of change in art that are totally internal to the art making process. In such a view, "the history of modern art is presented as an internal, immanent process among the artists; abstract arises because...representational art had been exhausted....but no connection is drawn between the art and the conditions of the moment" (Schapiro, 1968: 187,188). In Schapiro's work art movements from the introduction of perspective in the Renaissance to the abstraction of Italian Futurism are linked to socio-economic changes. His work is relevant for post-colonial studies and the relationship between the aesthetics of the colonizing European core and the art styles taken from the colonized periphery. "By a remarkable process the arts of subjected backward peoples, discovered by Europeans in conquering the world, became aesthetic norms to those who renounced it. The imperialist expansion was accompanied at home by a profound cultural pessimism in which the arts of the savage victims were elevated above the traditions of Europe. The colonies became places to flee as well as to exploit" (Schapiro, 1968: 201).

COLUMBIA AND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

If we make a continuum between more micro, localized, concrete, neighborhood empirical analysis at one end and more general abstract theorizing at the other, the Columbia Social Essayists fall somewhere in between. At one end would be the style of work pioneered by the Chicago School of sociology comprised of neighborhood ethnographies and systematic analysis of urban life. If Chicago sociology is known for its concrete empirical studies and urban ethnographies, at the other end of the continuum lies the abstract general theorizing of Talcott Parsons at Harvard. This distinction, though, isn't as clear or obvious as it once seemed, for Parsonian theory turned out to be more classic European theory synthesized and abstracted into an elaborate set of principles and social functions, constituting a towering edifice of layer upon layer of abstract social structure. It turned out that aside from synthesizing some European thought, there was not a lot of original social theory emanating from Harvard at all, and ironically, Chicago, for all its empirics was the originating point for Mead, Goffman, and what would become Symbolic Interactionism, which, in retrospect, is perhaps America's unique contribution to world class social theorizing. R.K. Merton would speak of "middle range theory" as a goal of social theory, and in some sense that is an accurate characterization of Columbia's position in social thought between the more particularistic Chicagoans and the excessive generality of Parsonian Harvard.

The Columbia Social Essay was about something—it wasn't just Parsons on pure structure and function—nor Chicago with an ethnographic description of a neighborhood. They were theoretically informed studies, or studies from which theory would be extracted, or theory could be applied. A Chicagoan description of the institution, social movement, political party, novel or art object was not the end, nor were they mere fodder for very abstracted theoretical models of "the social system." The interest was half way: half theory, half historical social arrangement, and the essay was the perfect expressive format for this style of work, for the theory part centered more on introducing a concept or explanatory idea than in explicating the specifics of a case study or general theoretical scheme.

THE HEGEMONIC INTELLECTUAL

Accounting for the intellectual predominance of Columbia's Essayists during this period involves more than the absence of other university competitors. The overlap with the more generalized New York intellectual community is certainly part of the story of the prominence of the Columbia Essayists. But there is another factor which centers on the fact that the heart of the prominence of the Columbia Social Essayists is also is also the high point of American hegemony in the larger world-system.

While world-system theories of culture are not well developed, hegemony does appear to generalize, such that leading positions in finance, production, and military dominance correlate with a leading position in cultural production. We are not just speaking of a volume of cultural production, but both cutting edge cultural innovation and critical and moral authority in aesthetic judgement. The High Renaissance under the Habsburg hegemony in the early sixteenth century, British Neo-Classicism and Romanticism under their generalized hegemony of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and the High Modernism under American hegemony after 1945 all involved discourse about the state of artistic/literary being in its most general terms. During the Italian Renaissance under the Habsburg hegemony Vasari sorts and orders artistic output with a moral eye finding early Renaissance art more wooden and stiff and late Renaissance art more emotional and convulsive, with the High Renaissance judged to be the proper balance of form and content, creating "classic" art. Under American hegemony there are similar efforts at moral judgement of a final and encompassing sort. The New York critic Clement Greenberg sorts and orders the history of painting, finding an almost "classic" perfection of the medium in American Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s, and judges other periods to be of a less pure quality, and in literature Lionel Trilling's collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*, assess the state of the preeminent form of literary expression, the novel, and renders absolute judgement as to its essential nature, praising the nineteenth century British novel and finding fault with the American for its lack of a well developed sense of manners and social structure around which the narrative story can be erected.

The novel, then, is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul....Now the novel as I have

described it has never really established itself in America...the novel in America diverges from its classic intention, which, as I have said, is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field. The fact is that American writers of genius have not turned their minds to society. Poe and Melville were quite apart from it; the reality they sought was only tangential to society. Hawthorne was acute when he insisted that he did not write novels but romances—he thus expressed his awareness of the lack of social texture in his work. (Trilling, 1950: 212).

This absence of discourse about the social field would matter less, if it were not judged to be the essence of the novel, and one which the Europeans were quite capable of mastering, hence their qualitative superiority over American literary efforts.

The novel...tells us about the look and feel of things, how things are done and what things are worth and what they cost and what the odds are. If the English novel in its special concern with class does not...explore the deeper layers of personality, then the French novel in exploring these layers must start and end in class, and the Russian novel, exploring the ultimate possibilities of spirit, does the same—every situation in Dostoevski, no matter how spiritual, starts with a point of social pride and a certain number of rubles. The great novelists knew that manners indicate the largest intension of men's souls as well as the smallest and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning of every dim implicit hint. (Trilling, 1950: 211-212).

This brings us to another, and deeper point about the relationship between the political economy of hegemony and the form and content of literary, and by generalization, cultural judgement. On the surface the British, French and Russian novels are praised and the American found short which would seem like an effort to subvert, rather than support, American hegemony. But at a deeper level the real issue of hegemony lies in the ability, and will, to evaluate and judge in a critical fashion from the point of view of purportedly universalist standards. The exercise of mind over all that lies before it regardless of the substance of the verdict rendered is the essence of hegemonic intellectuals. It is also that moral authority to judge that has been abandoned with the Postmodernist impulse, which is in reality the culture of hegemonic decline, claiming that such universalist standards are but masks for the exercise of power of particular racialized, gendered, classed, and sexual preferenced social groups. It is not an accident, then, that with American economic decline starting in the 1970s that the cultural under-

standings of the world system turned toward the introduction of ideals of not privileging any theoretical discourse, nor judgements, nor received opinion, wisdom, or theory, in what came to be called Postmodernism. If the culture of universalist standards, and the moral authority to judge and apply those standards is the height of Modernism, and if such a formalism is also the culture of American political economic hegemony, it stands to reason that with materialist decline there would also be a shift in cultural position toward a more relativist, non judgmental position, based upon postulating the equality of points of views and claiming the impossibility of any one universalist standard with which to judge, and thereby to rank order by a single standard the art, literature, and social thought of multitudinous groups. Such “multiculturalism” is, then, the official ideology of hegemonic decline, as “modernism” had been of hegemonic ascent.

The period of the Columbia Social Essayists is also the period of uncontested American hegemony, and it is the period of universalist moral judgement. The answer to the question who is to exercise such moral judgement lies with the notion of the triple hegemony, which is something of a trickle down model of cultural authority. At the top is the hegemony of the United States, uncontested from the end of the second world war through the 1960s. Within that sphere of hegemonic authority there is the secondary hegemony of New York, the lead city, morally positioned because of that hegemonic status to be the home of cultural judgement. And then, the third hegemony, that of Columbia university, which brings us to the Columbia faculty’s social concerns, and ability or flair with the essay format and their desire to judge history, art, literature, and society.

Imagine these hegemonies as platforms. American global hegemony is a platform of power and entitlement upon which everyone stands and might feel entitled to judge and comment authoritatively on everything from the future of the novel to the essence of power in America to our national character flaws. Upon that platform sits a much smaller one, the hegemony of New York City within the city system of the United States. Upon this narrower, but higher platform of social empowerment and subsequent moral authority, New York writers obtain a vantage point and moral authority to further judge and apply even more final and absolute criteria. Finally, there is the hegemony of Columbia, the lead university within the lead city within the lead nation: the final step of the triple hegemony. Here is an even

smaller, yet even higher platform upon which to judge, evaluate, and determine the essence of art, literature, and social institution. On this last platform stand the Columbia Social Essayists, and, because of that perch the implicit taken for granted moral authority that underscores the tone of their voice and the finality of their assertions.

One of the keys to understanding this connection between intellectuals and hegemony is the intellectual’s primary mental function. Intellectuals, of course do many things, but in essence, the intellectual is not the artist, writer, or playwright, as actual doing is different from knowing about, and knowing what is the good and the serious, is different from producing good and serious art or literature. The intellectual’s goal is not to write good literature, or paint good paintings, write great plays, but to “know” what makes a great novel, for the mental task is the act of segmenting, sorting, dividing, making distinctions between what is good and average, what is high culture and what is kitsch, who are the best novelists of our time and who aren’t, between what is important and what isn’t. It is a matter of judgement and exercising a moral will in the act of creating a moral hierarchy. Hegemony provides the critical mind the moral authority to make absolute judgements and prize the act of judgement as the essence of mental activity. Being serious seemed to matter as much as what one was serious about and so armed with a critical intent one could then range over literatures—prose, poetry, novel, short story—for what mattered was the operation of mind upon material, not the material itself. It was truly the life of the mind. It was not the creations of the mind as novel, painting, play, or symphony, but the mind’s activity—the mental act of combining, and recombining, sorting and ordering intellectual products—that constituted the heart of New York intellectuality. Evaluation and prioritizing, hence standards, hence seriousness of approach is what mattered, and this is a manner of control and reason, not the expressive irrationality of the artist. From the perspective of the mental operations of such critical evaluation, New York intellectuality came to be described as something of a state of mind, a mental being, a poise or awareness involving mental discipline and agility.

In their published work during these years, the New York intellectuals developed a characteristic style of exposition and polemic. With some admiration and a bit of irony, let us call it the style of brilliance. The kind of essay they wrote was likely to be wide-ranging in reference, melding notions about literature and politics, sometimes announcing itself as a study of a writer or literary

group but usually taut with a pressure to “go beyond” its subject, toward some encompassing moral or social observation. It is a kind of writing highly self-consciousness in mode, with an unashamed vibration of bravura and display. (Howe, 1968: 41)

The intellectual quality I prized most at that state of my life was brilliance, by which I meant the virtuous ability to put ideas together in such new and surprising combinations that even if one disagree with what was being said, one was excited and illuminated. Everyone in the Family [i.e. NY Intellectuals] had this ability—it was in effect the main requirement for admission....the art historian Meyer Shapiro, whose lectures at Columbia were generally considered the *ne plus ultra* of brilliance. (Podhoretz, 1999: 143).

Irving Howe and Norman Podhoretz. Two memories, almost thirty years apart, yet virtually the same description of New York intellectuality. Such an argumentative style is usually treated as a derivation from the more contentious jostling immigrant culture from which many of the New York Jewish Intellectuals arose, and while such bottom-up explanations capture much of the phenomena, it is also the case that there is a top-down element as well, the platform of moral certainty provided for by the triple hegemony.

An intelligentsia flourishes in a capita: Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin. The influence of the New York writers grew at the time New York itself, for better or worse, became the cultural center of the country. And thereby...the New York writers slowly shed the characteristics of an intelligentsia and transformed themselves into—An Establishment? (Howe, 1968: 44).

Behind the moral authority of Lionel Trilling to judge what is the essence of the novel; of Meyer Schapiro to judge what is the essence of style and abstract art; of C. Wright Mills to judge what is power in America; of Richard Hofstadter to judge what is the essence of America’s political personality; and of Daniel Bell’s willingness to judge whether we have reached the end of ideology, lies the triple hegemony of nation, city, and university.

WALLERSTEIN TOO

In general, American intellectual life seems more often the story isolated figures, rather than schools of thought, or forms of expression, such as the Columbia Social Essayists. Part of this, no doubt, is attributable to our values of individualism which transform the collective history of ideas into stories of individuals rather than schools of thought. We are aware of New England Transcendentalists, Southern Agrarians, and New York Intellectuals,

als, but in the end it seems it is the individual—even if a member in some such grouping—which stands out. I also think, whether as a consequence of our values, or our social arrangements, that American intellectuals have, in fact, a tendency to be isolated as their natural social condition. It’s a consistent pattern clearly seen in history from Thoreau to the present, and I would guess that more isolated intellectuals like Noam Chomsky and Gore Vidal will be remembered more than schools or communities like the New Left or the New York Intellectuals. In a similar way, Wallerstein, even though the originator of a school of thought, world-system theory, and surrounded by the Braudel Center and the journal *Review* seems, in the final analysis, more the American isolated scholar/intellectual. It’s not that life at McGill, Binghamton, Yale, or yearly visits to Paris, have not been without significance for him, but somehow they don’t seem traceable to characteristics of his work or political outlook. This may be contested by those closer to the work and influence of the Braudel Center, but I still suspect that when the story of Immanuel Wallerstein and world-system theory is more completely written, that the Braudel Center will be judged to have been more of a material support structure than an intellectual influence of any lasting significance.

While the story of the isolated intellectual remains a social fact of the American landscape, I think the tradition of the Columbia Social Essay had an effect upon Wallerstein. Like Bell, Trilling, Schapiro and Hofstadter, he excelled in essay form. For many he is associated with his present academic residence, the State University of New York at Binghamton, but Wallerstein is first and foremost part of the Columbia tradition, the same way Daniel Bell, even after moving to Harvard, is still Columbia in breadth of intellectual commitment, wide historical scope of inquiry, and generalized essay format of expression. For both of them the essay allows an easy introduction of complex ideas and most importantly forces a focus of expression. The essay allows ideas and concepts to be introduced without the burden of having to fully document, prove, or support their validity. The essay is a sort of mid-wife to concept formation, doing away with the necessity of filling additional pages with supporting material. One can just introduce the idea, say of the semiperiphery, or the core-periphery division of labor, or the long sixteenth century, or idea of the modern world-system itself. The essay also condenses the mind as there is less for the theoretical imagination to engage tangential issues, side points, or supporting evidence. There is just

enough room to make the point and provide an example or two. It worked for Trilling and Hofstadter—they are recognized for their essays—but it also worked for Wallerstein. “Three Paths of National Development” and “The Rise and Future Demise of the Modern World-System” are classic Wallersteinian essays that succinctly spelled out the essence of what was to become the world system perspective.

There is, then, something of a world-system analysis for the pioneer of world-system theory captured in the idea of the triple hegemony. It may be more a sociology of knowledge of form than content, but it does add to our understanding of the manner of Wallerstein’s expression and something about the broad sense of his intellectuality and politics. The final contribution of Columbia to his work will no doubt be debated. I may have exaggerated the influence here. That is for others to decide. My sense, though, is that it minimally constitutes the bed rocks of his approach. Many of the characteristics of his work overlap with those of the Columbia Social Essayists.

The Essay. The writing is dominated by the potentials of the essay. It allowed both political commentary, wider audiences, and condensed theoretical exposition. The match of the Columbia mode of expression with the natural inclinations of Wallerstein was close to perfect. He used the essay to perfection, and in it lies his most interesting and engaging sociology.

The Middle Ground. His focus was quintessentially Columbia; neither Chicago in depth study of a social particularity, nor a Parsonian Harvard discourse on general systems, but somewhere in between. His world-system is an historical world-system (the concrete and specific) but it is also an abstract system of a core-periphery division of labor, commodity chains, long term trends and cycles (the theoretically general).

The Concept. With essay and middle ground the intellectual contribution lay with introducing concept and idea, the most significant of which is the very idea of a “modern world-system.” Like the genius of Goffman whose concepts of presentation of self, interaction rituals, and stigmatized identities are taken as parts of realities, and not the theoretic concepts they were when he first introduced them, so too do we think of the world-system as a thing, and not an idea introduced by Wallerstein. The concept is a Columbia product too. Status politics, the Radical Right, the Liberal Imagination, White Collar, the Power Elite, and now the World-System and the Semi-

Periphery, all Columbia-like theoretic concepts rather than elaborated theoretical systems or in depth documented historical particularities.

Intellectually Empowered. What the triple hegemony did most, I think, is to provide the moral certainty to generate universal standards and apply them to all that the sociological eye could see. The goal was to determine the essence of things: of the novel (Trilling) of abstract art and style (Schapiro) of the pathologies of American national character traits (Hofstadter) of power in America (Mills) of the cultural contradictions of capitalism (Bell), and with Wallerstein, of the essential nature of global power and exploitation. If the concern with “manners and morals” characterized the essence of the novel for Trilling, and “anti-intellectualism” and the “paranoid style” the essence of national character pathologies for Hofstadter, and “White Collar” the new middle strata of occupational positions for Mills, then, the “core-periphery division of labor” constituted the essential structure of the capitalist world economy.

It was neither the moral status of Binghamton, nor its material resources, nor the intellectual contacts made in Paris, but the triple hegemonic platform that was coming of age intellectually in Columbia in New York in America that provided Wallerstein with the sense of intellectual entitlement to conceptualize the world as a singular system, and to plead for its democratic and egalitarian transformation.

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