

and women of a literary bent from adopting such a strategy on an individual basis.

Otherwise, if they find the walls of the mainstream houses impenetrable, conservatives are left with nontraditional options. Self-publishing is unlikely to become more prestigious, but micropublishing is well suited to take advantage of the opportunities of the digital age. The capital barriers are low and getting lower. Perhaps we will see the advent of small, nonpartisan, conservative-leaning but open-minded for-profit presses. Even local centers, institutes, and think tanks could easily launch their own imprints. The time is ripe, too, for imaginative middlemen: distributors, consultants, marketers, agents—yes, thanks for asking: I work in these fields—who can help small-fry start swimming in the big publishing pond.

This could mean a more intelligent, interesting, and diverse landscape for conservative authors and ideas. Maybe a more golden age, even, than the one that flourished, according to Adam Bellow, in the halcyon George H.W. Bush days. Perhaps one like that interlude in the 1950s, when Richard Weaver and Friedrich Hayek could publish with the University of Chicago Press and Henry Regnery could publish genuine philosophers and courageous iconoclasts. Or even, perhaps, one like that truest of golden ages, before World War II when T.S. Eliot's arch-traditionalist books on culture and the Christian society could be published by Harcourt Brace, and when a volume such as *I'll Take My Stand* could be brought out by Harper & Brothers—that is, an age when the conservative and liberal might again lie down like the lamb and the lion beside the desk of the very same publisher.

Chaos, after all, means opportunity. ■

Jeremy Beer was principal editor at ISI Books from 2000 to 2008.

Guilt Trip

Eric Foner writes history to suit the politically correct Left—and the neocons.

By Paul Gottfried

ERIC FONER, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, is the most professionally successful academic historian of our time. He has served as president of all three major historical organizations, published a widely acclaimed book on Reconstruction as “America’s unfinished revolution,” and appears frequently on national television. He and a likeminded historian, James McPherson, have been conspicuously urging President Obama to sustain affirmative action and consider reparation payments for the descendants of American slaves. Foner has put before the public what he considers the unfinished civil-rights agenda in his 2002 textbook *Give Me Liberty: An American History* and in other books written for a popular readership, such as *The Story of American Freedom* and *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. Rarely has an historian had such abundant opportunities to shape public consciousness on a critical social issue.

Foner’s vision of American history comports with the political correctness favored by the Left today—indeed at times he seems less interested in Reconstruction than in reconstructing latter-day American society. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, this project has won him influential admirers among the Republican Party. But even as Foner invokes the legacy of slavery and other racial iniquities as pretexts for government-mandated “social justice” and sensitivity

today, he has never had to say he was sorry that he and his family white-washed the crimes of Stalin’s USSR.

Foner has earned high praise from George W. Bush’s gray eminence, Karl Rove. A 2003 *New Yorker* profile by Nicholas Lemann noted that one of Rove’s favorite books was Foner’s study of the early Republican Party, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*. According to Lemann, Rove read the book “less as a dispassionate analysis of the early Republicans’ strengths and weaknesses than as a guidebook on how to broaden the appeal of the Party.” Foner was delighted to learn of this: “Karl Rove is my man,” he told his class at Columbia, even as he continued to hold Rove’s employer in disregard. In 2006, Foner published a *Washington Post* op-ed saying of President Bush, “He’s the Worst Ever.” “I think there is no alternative but to rank him as the worst president in U.S. history,” Foner wrote, comparing him unfavorably even to the alleged “fervent white supremacist” Andrew Johnson.

Despite the professor’s Bush-bashing, Rove clearly respects Foner, and so it is perhaps not remarkable that certain phrases from Foner’s ideas about “the unfinished revolution” popped up in Republican campaign literature during the 2006 midterm elections. Party strategists evidently decided that linking the Union side in the Civil War with the later civil-rights agenda would provide a useful metaphor for the war to build democracy in Iraq. The plan only partly

succeeded. Although Rove's party picked up votes from the descendants of those who bled and died on the Confederate side, it did far less well among black voters.

Foner's appeal to the Left and to vote-seeking Republicans such as Rove is as much moral as historical. But on both accounts, there are reasons to have deep reservations about the Columbia professor. As the late liberal historian John Patrick Diggins noted, for Foner "Liberal America, it seems, must remain forever corrupted by slavery while Bolshevik Russia remains, even in the historical past tense, forever free of tyranny. Foner ... is both an unabashed apologist for the Soviet system and an unforgiving historian of America."

Foner's father and two of his uncles had been associated with the American Communist Party, something the professor has never deplored. In fact, in a 1994 exchange in *Dissent* with historian Eugene Genovese, Foner brushed off the accusation that he and other Communist sympathizers had failed to "ask

cism ... and with various expressions of right-wing ideology." Foner and his family had supported the Communist Party to the extent that it represented antiracism and such other commendable positions as "anti-Fascism, promotion of colonial independence and opposition to the war in Vietnam." What Genovese called their "silence in the face of unspeakable crimes" had come from an awareness of "the Communists' contributions to some of the country's most important struggles for social betterment." Foner and his family had been too busy fighting for equality to worry about the problem of making common cause with the Communists.

According to Foner, what divided him and Genovese was not so much their relation to the Soviet past as where they stood on present-day issues. Genovese had never made the transition to the New Left's agenda of "social change." Entrenched in the views that "human nature is immutable, hierarchy inevitable, equality impossible, the desire for personal autonomy perni-

now routinely condemned as an apologist for slave-owners, had provided what was essentially the Marxist account of Reconstruction. According to Stamp, Marxists took Dunning's work on Reconstruction as a given and then tried to refine his account of the exploitation of the defeated South. This effort yielded results very different from Foner's.

In this shared Marxist-Dunningite view, the Northern occupation of the South involved the extensive confiscation of property and money. It was carried out by grasping Northern capitalists, who used former black slaves as an interim government, while stripping of their rights as citizens Southerners who in any way assisted the Confederacy. Among Radical Republicans could also be found predatory state capitalists, who, as the historian Ludwell Johnson has shown, dragged off what they could of the resources of their defeated enemies. Among their acts of political corruption was to have Southern tax money transferred to the coffers of the national Republican Party. In the end, even strong opponents of slavery and admirers of Lincoln expressed indignation over these outrages. While for Foner and others of his school Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson was a reactionary racist who deserved to be impeached in 1868 by the Radical Republicans, in the older view to which the Marxists subscribed, Johnson was the victim of capitalist predators.

Today the emphasis of left-wing historiography is less on economic exploitation than the politics of guilt. Thus Johnson's willingness to grant pardons to Southern whites, in order to restore their voting rights, and his veto of a comprehensive civil-rights bill for black freemen in 1867 because of his opposition to federalized law enforcement, are now viewed as evidence of Johnson's stubborn racist character. Foner believes the attempt to remove Johnson from the

TODAY THE EMPHASIS OF LEFT-WING HISTORIOGRAPHY IS LESS ON ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION THAN THE POLITICS OF GUILT.

the big question"—namely, why the Left defended one of the most murderous regimes in history. In his opening statement, Genovese said that he "expected Foner ... to do everything in his power to obfuscate the issues, for he ranks among the leaders of the thinly disguised [Stalinist] totalitarianism in which the American Left wallows." Genovese was a Marxist historian himself and a former Communist supporter.

Foner responded that although Genovese "refers to himself as part of the left, his current outlook has far more in common with a long tradition of elitist antiliberalism, including Tory romanti-

cious," Genovese had hidden for years behind outmoded Marxist theories in order to resist pressing issues. It was Foner, not Genovese, who stood for where the Left was now going.

That much, at least, was true. Foner represents the politically correct Left, which should not be confused with theoretical Marxism or, for that matter, with any other Left. In fact, the revisionist turn in Reconstruction studies, of which Foner's work has been so great a part, is clearly non-Marxist, as another left-wing revisionist, Kenneth Stampp, observed in 1966. W.A. Dunning, an early 20th-century authority on Reconstruction who is

presidency in 1868 was fully justified, and it is Johnson, not steel barons like Thaddeus Stevens and others who profited from the South's defeat, who is the true villain in this narrative.

More is at work here than the condemnation of the American past as racist or the call for a new, government-imposed direction in race relations. By the 1980s, the Left in general had changed in such a way that all references to Foner as a "Marxist" or "neo-Marxist" had become misleading. The Left had ceased to be interested in Communism, even if leftists continued to defend it as an unfairly vilified or mostly irrelevant phase in their own development. After the 1960s, what was most important was combating "fascism," "racism," "sexism," and "homophobia."

Foner's work was on the cutting edge of this trend. It was henceforth important to underscore how bigoted white Americans had been in the past and why it was essential to retrain the majority population so that they would acknowledge the social guilt of their forefathers. While the older Marxist history had emphasized social consciousness and class conflict, the new line, exemplified by the Reconstruction revisionists, would be the politics of indignation.

This is a narrative that is useful to others beyond the Left—not limited to Karl Rove. Whether out of a desire to curry favor with left-leaning media or to beat the politically correct revisionists at their own game of blaming all America's faults on the South, neoconservatives have accepted much of Foner's account. Victor Davis Hanson, Richard Brookhiser, and Max Boot have all presented the American Civil War as a necessary trauma in achieving a democratic transformation. In particular, Hanson has spared no venom in applauding the physical and political destruction of those who backed the Confederacy. Recently Ira Stoll, the former managing editor of the *New York*

Sun, ferociously attacked Jimmy Carter in the *New York Daily News* for having dared to suggest that slavery might have been abolished peacefully, without the bloodbath of the Civil War. Stoll's response might have been taken from Foner or John Brown: "How much patience should Lincoln have had with the immoral institution? How many more lashes should have fallen on the backs of American blacks during Carter's hypothetical waiting period for slavery to terminate 'peacefully'?"

Neoconservatives, including Ronald Radosh writing in *National Review*, have criticized Foner's reluctance to come to terms with the evils of Communism. But they have not attacked, and indeed have tended to embrace, his work on Reconstruction and his politically correct condemnation of all things Southern. Foner's work has made strange ideological bedfellows—just as, conversely, today the traditionally critical account of Republican rapacity during Reconstruction is championed not by old leftists but by paleo-libertarian authors such as Thomas DiLorenzo and Kevin Gutzman.

Foner's revisionist history is not more accurate than the work of his Marxist and right-wing critics. But it is more useful to those who hold power: to the politically correct leftists who dictate the terms of discourse in academia and to the Republicans and neoconservatives who exercise a parallel hegemony over the Right. Just as the truth of Communism's crimes is discarded by a Left that sees evil only in America, Rove and his ideological enablers are happy to use long-dead Southerners as scapegoats to justify their own democratic crusades. ■

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Mailer

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ment of the City" might have been written yesterday:

... the old confidence that the problems of our life were roughly equal to our abilities has been lost. Our authority has been handed over to the federal power. We expect our economic solutions, our habitats, yes, even our entertainments, to derive from that remote abstract power, remote as the other end of a television tube. We are like wards in an orphan asylum. The shaping of the style of our lives is removed from us—we pay for huge military adventures and social experiments so separated from our direct control that we do not even know where to begin to look to criticize the lack of our power to criticize. We cannot—the words are now a cliché, the life has gone out of them—we cannot forge our destiny. ... We wait for abstract impersonal powers to save us...

In an age when evolving problems need new approaches perhaps more than ever, one hopes that the artists and the businessmen, the plumbers and the architects, the house-painters and the restaurant owners, rather than wait for their problems to be solved from above, might look to the Mailer-Breslin campaign for inspiration. They can make their city a better, more interesting place, one block at a time. ■

John Buffalo Mailer recently produced a documentary adaptation of Naomi Wolf's best selling book, The End Of America. He is editor at large for Stop Smiling magazine.

The Harding Way

The president infamous for Teapot Dome knew that cutting government was the best way to end a depression.

By Thomas E. Woods Jr.

WHEN BARACK OBAMA urged passage of his so-called stimulus measure in February, he claimed that only bold government action would prevent the economy from slipping into a deep depression. In making that argument, he was only repeating the conventional wisdom, according to which markets are not self-correcting—except in the very long run—and state intervention is necessary to revive economic activity.

Economic theory can tell us why these claims are incorrect and why, in fact, even the appearance of prosperity that those measures can produce causes still greater damage and leads to a more severe correction in the long run. But we can also refer to the testimony of history. In particular, the depression of 1920-21, which most people have never heard of, is an example of the resumption of prosperity in the absence of government stimulus, indeed in the face of its very opposite. If economies cannot turn around without these interventions, then what happened in this instance should not have been possible. But it was.

During and after World War I, the Federal Reserve inflated the money supply substantially. Once the Fed finally began to raise the discount rate—the rate at which it lends to banks—the economy slowed as it started readjusting to reality. By the middle of 1920, the downturn had become severe, with production falling by 21 percent over the next 12 months. The number of unemployed

people jumped from 2.1 million in 1920 to 4.9 million in 1921.

From 1929 onward, Herbert Hoover and then Franklin Roosevelt tried to fight an economic depression by making labor costlier to hire. Warren G. Harding, on the other hand, said in the 1920 acceptance speech he delivered upon receiving the Republican nomination, “I would be blind to the responsibilities that mark this fateful hour if I did not caution the wage-earners of America that mounting wages and decreased production can lead only to industrial and economic ruin.” Harding elsewhere explained that wages, like prices, would need to come down to reflect post-bubble economic realities.

Few American presidents are less in fashion among historians than Harding, who is routinely portrayed as a bumbling fool who stumbled into the presidency. Yet whatever his intellectual shortcomings—and they have been grotesquely exaggerated, as recent scholars have admitted—and whatever the moral foibles that afflicted him, he understood the fundamentals of boom, bust, and recovery better than any 20th-century president.

Harding likewise condemned inflation: “Gross expansion of currency and credit have depreciated the dollar just as expansion and inflation have discredited the coins of the world. We inflated in haste, we must deflate in deliberation. We debased the dollar in reckless finance, we must restore in honesty.”

And instead of promising to blow unprecedented sums, he called for cutting back:

We will attempt intelligent and courageous deflation, and strike at government borrowing which enlarges the evil, and we will attack high cost of government with every energy and facility which attend Republican capacity. We promise that relief which will attend the halting of waste and extravagance, and the renewal of the practice of public economy, not alone because it will relieve tax burdens but because it will be an example to stimulate thrift and economy in private life.

The economy, Harding explained in his Inaugural Address the following year, had “suffered the shocks and jars incident to abnormal demands, credit inflations, and price upheavals.” Now the country was enduring the inevitable adjustment. No shortcuts were possible:

All the penalties will not be light, nor evenly distributed. There is no way of making them so. There is no instant step from disorder to order. We must face a condition of grim reality, charge off our losses and start afresh. It is the oldest lesson of civilization. . . . No altered system will work a miracle. Any wild experiment will only add to the confusion. Our best assurance lies in efficient administration of our proven system.