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The Emerald Guide to C. Wright Mills

A. Javier Treviño

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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MILLS IN CONTEXT

C. Wright Mills remains the leading representative of the critical style in American sociology and one of the most provocative figures in social science. Though he was felled by a massive heart attack at the early age of 45, Mills packed several lives into one. He was an extraordinarily prolific author, having written over 10 books and over 50 articles on a variety of topics. This impressive body of work has been translated into many languages. As a public intellectual with a principled and political sense of purpose, Mills delivered angry 'sermons' to various educated audiences and wrote bestselling books, in a compelling style, about the moral uneasiness of mid-twentieth century United States. Mentally, Mills was unusually knowledgeable and above all a student of the Enlightenment, forcefully defending its cherished values of truth, reason and freedom. Temperamentally, Mills was gregarious, outspoken and combative, often leading to rocky, and at times tempestuous relations with friends and colleagues.

C. Wright Mills famously declared that neither an individual's life nor a society's history can be understood without

understanding both. Thus, to adequately convey Mills's main ideas, in this book I will follow his directive and locate those ideas in his personal experiences, feelings and reflections as well as in the socio-historical context in which he lived and worked.

CRITICAL APPROACH

Following World War II, the United States emerged as the most economically and militarily powerful country in the world – and Mills emerged as the most influential critic of US society since Thorstein Veblen, who had been active a half-century before, during the Progressive era. Mills contributed to the development of a publicly and politically engaged sociology in two main ways. First, having as his goal to transform the United States into a more egalitarian democratic society by diffusing its centralised power, Mills felt compelled to denounce that country's organised immorality and irresponsibility. Second, Mills took aim at his own discipline and excoriated academic sociology for what he regarded as its lifeless self-indulgence and myopic self-absorption. Whilst hardly a lone voice in the wilderness, Mills was one of few sociologists at the time who was engaged in these initiatives. Nevertheless, his legacy spawned a disobedient generation of social theorists, in the US and the UK, that came of age intellectually some 10 years after his untimely death in 1962.

Beginning with *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* and up to the posthumously published *The Marxists*, Mills produced tough-minded, pragmatic books and essays, many of which he wrote for nonspecialised reading publics. As one of the foremost dissident intellectuals of the Cold War period, during which the Soviet Union was seen as the main threat to peace and security, and as an acerbic critic of the US – it's

foreign policy, power relations and transformation into a mass society – Mills's critical approach, but also his proposed new way of thinking, dubbed 'the sociological imagination', has captivated the minds of scores of students in the social sciences.

Thoroughly American – and perhaps more accurately, *Texan* – in temper and expression, even referring to himself as an 'American aboriginal', Britain and its intellectual community nonetheless held a particular allure for Mills. However, after being offered a professorship at the newly created plate-glass university at Sussex, Mills declined, explaining that because his sociological argument with America lay in America, he had to remain in America. That argument involved scorning the US for its political apathy and widespread conformity, for its rabid anticommunism and unwavering belief in its own 'exceptionalism'. Mills was especially indignant of academic social scientists who partook in a national conceit and self-satisfaction of US society whilst ignoring its cultural and moral deficiencies – with the latter expressly manifested in the country's increased militarisation through nuclear accumulation.

Figuratively associated with the group of disaffected British writers, the so-called angry young men – John Osborne and Kingsley Amis amongst others – who came to prominence in the 1950s, Mills epitomised a similar sentiment in sociology. But Mills specifically faulted Osborne and Amis for their cultural failure and political complacency. Due to their lack of the sociological imagination, Mills argued that they and other such cultural workers did not understand the reasons for their personal anger or that of the fictional characters they created, Jimmy Porter and James Dixon. Their cultural works – *Look Back in Anger* and *Lucky Jim* – were disconnected from the socio-political realities of what was happening in the world. Mills, by contrast, made plain that the general anguish and uneasiness of the post-war period, in both the US and the UK,

stemmed largely from political and class issues. He found it was imperative to fuse the personal and the political. Mills, like Osborne and Amis, was a rebellious writer, but one clearly motivated by political causes.

Mills found himself at centre stage due to the fact that his books, trenchant critiques of the political and social status quo, became wildly popular amongst university students, but were also broadly consulted by politicians, clergy and various other reading publics. Indeed, Mills delighted in the widespread availability of his books, personally seeing copies of the Russian edition of *The Power Elite* on display at small bookstands in Tashkent and Tbilisi and learning that Fidel Castro had read the Spanish edition and discussed it with his guerrilla fighters in the Sierra Maestra. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir published excerpts from the book in their radical journal, *Les Temps Modernes*. His other volume on social stratification, *White Collar*, also became a huge commercial success, selling about 1,000 copies a month. But it was his more political writings that brought him global recognition.

In an era that popularised the mass market paperback, typically sold for pennies per copy, Mills was the most successful sociologist at publicizing his political ideas through that medium. Released by Ballentine Books and Dell Publishing in the US, and by Secker and Warburg and Penguin in the UK, Mills's best-selling pocketbooks, *The Causes of World War Three* and *Listen, Yankee* (published as *Castro's Cuba* in Britain) have been translated into several languages including Spanish, Italian, French, German, Portuguese and Japanese. On its release, *The Causes* immediately sold 100,000 copies. But the softcover that sold more than any of his others and of which Mills was perhaps most proud, was his report on the Cuban Revolution, *Listen, Yankee*. Indeed, whilst convalescing from a heart attack, Mills placed, above his bed, an advertising poster proclaiming there were 400,000

copies of the book in print. He was particularly pleased that such posters were carried on the sides of news delivery trucks in Philadelphia. But a book's success cannot be based on sales alone. And the book by Mills that has made the greatest impression on several generations of sociology students throughout the world is *The Sociological Imagination*, now translated into more than 17 languages. In 1997 the International Sociological Association conducted an opinion survey on the most influential books in sociology published in the twentieth century. *The Sociological Imagination* was ranked second, only after Max Weber's *Economy and Society*.

Mills also contributed reader-friendly pieces to political and opinion magazines of the intellectual left such as *The New Leader*, *politics*, *Dissent,* and *Partisan Review* as well as to popular media outlets like the *New York Times*, *Esquire*, *Harper's Magazine* and *Saturday Review*. In addition, he gave public talks before a variety of audiences including labour leaders, office managers, educators, army officers, Christian clergy, industrial designers, architects and city planners. Noteworthy is that beginning in the late-1940s his writings were rendered in a hybrid style between empirical data and imaginative construction, uniquely suited to communicating about the human condition. It was how Mills brought his experience and expression to bear in reporting the social facts whilst also revealing their human meanings, a literary and expressive style of writing that eschewed the hamstringing academic prose. He called it 'sociological poetry'.

HUMANIST VISION

Besides taking a critical approach, Mills also proffered a humanist vision of sociology as a moral project concerned with people's lives and personal experiences – their self-image,

conscience and emotions – in the context of their social worlds. For Mills sociology is to be the study of all the worlds in which people have lived, are living and might live. Sociology must understand this variety of humans as volitional and agentic actors in reference to historical social structure. Agency notwithstanding, Mills was aware that the place people occupy in the power structure of US society determines their degree of freedom, their opportunity to choose amongst available alternatives and make decisions for their lives. Thus, to secure their freedom, people must have the power, but equally as important they must have the *desire* to control their own destiny. However, in a society where the commercial and political means of manipulation are in full gear, people tended to become passive spectators of their lives. Mills, though, was at bottom an optimist and persistently held firm to the belief that people could be helped to awaken from their political apathy and engage in social action that makes a historical difference.

Mills's particular concern throughout his career was to 'define and dramatize the essential characteristics' of his time. This meant studying various populations – labour leaders, Puerto Rican migrants, white-collar workers, the power elite, Cuban revolutionaries, intellectuals – as 'actors in the drama of the twentieth century'. It also meant creating a new sociology; one that deliberately considers the relation between biography and history and their intersection within particular social structures. Mills pitted his own kind of sociology against the then-current sociological trends that either produced highly abstract conceptual schemes for analysing social systems, in the manner of Talcott Parsons, or else focussed on narrow and technical matters of research, as did the methodologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld. Rather than a comprehensive analytical paradigm, Mills advocated for pragmatic 'working models' of social structures: systematic inventories of findings

that can be used to understand something of social significance. Further, rather than making mundane statistical assertions, Mills promoted research with a high degree of self-reflection, where the ultimate questions that a sociologist asks about a society – especially one very different from one's own – are ultimately personal questions that must be raised explicitly: Could I live and work here? If I believe I couldn't, why not? If I believe I could, how would I get along? What sort of work would I do?

As already noted, Mills was the most widely read public sociologist of his time, due largely to the popularity of his polemical tracts. *The Causes of World War Three,* inspired the international peace movement to take political action against the military-industrial complex; *Listen, Yankee*, was intended to present to US readers 'the truth' about the bourgeoning Cuban Revolution. Later in his career Mills came to be seen as a kind of spokesman for the New Left, the new generation of radicalised students and intellectuals that challenged the legitimacy of political institutions. As such, during the early 1960s, Mills became an inspirational figure for student activists in the US, the UK and around the globe.

INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

The intellectual influences on Mills's work were many and sundry. Two of them that are characteristically American in orientation and that shaped Mills's early academic career include Thorstein Veblen and the pragmatist philosophers. Mills admired Veblen for satirising the absurd competitiveness and decadence of the so-called leisure class. He learned from Veblen that criticism aimed at elites could yield fruitful analytical results. Indeed, it is likely that Veblen had a greater impact on Mills's critical inquiry into US society than any

other thinker. As for pragmatism, the intellectual movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries – particularly as expounded by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey – Mills was intrigued by its marrying of thought and action, intellect and craft. Persuaded by the pragmatist's conviction in the power of people's intelligence to control their destiny, Mills believed that theory must be practically oriented. Not one to be personally involved in partisan politics or collective demonstrations, Mills nonetheless advocated for sociology as a form of *craftsmanship* where knowledge production is intrinsically related to political activity. Thus, for Mills, even the solitary crafting of a book – particularly a lower-priced paperback with the potential to educate various publics – was itself a form of political action.

Another theoretical impression on Mills was G.H. Mead's social psychology, principally his notion of the person as a self in relation to others. Extending this idea, Mills gives the self–other relationship greater structural focus by considering it within social institutions, particularly the political, economic and military. In collaboration with Hans Gerth, Mills developed a social psychology that explicitly examines character – those most intimate features of a person's self – in association with society's structural and historical features; this, at around the same time that David Riesman and William H. Whyte were developing their own typologies of the American character.

In addition to these American sources there was also the European 'classic' tradition in sociology to which Mills was introduced by Gerth as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. Mills regarded the classic tradition – articulated in the works of thinkers in German sociology and philosophy, such as Max Weber, Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim – as a crucial part of Western culture and politics. Within the classic tradition it was the discourses of Weber and Marx that Mills

saw as most significant and that had the greatest impact on his thinking. Thus, throughout his career Mills made considerable use of the Weberian concepts of class, status and power, and relied particularly on Weber's pessimistic analysis of the growing bureaucratization of all aspects of modern life. As for Marx, Mills was generally indebted to the social psychological concepts in Marx's early writings, like that of 'alienation'. However, he vehemently rejected the vulgarisation – the Stalinisation – of Marx's disquisitions on economic materialism that had been transformed into party orthodoxy.

Another representative of classic social analysis was Karl Mannheim who, as an early founder of the sociology of knowledge, put front and centre the public role of the intellectual and of ideology. Like Mannheim, Mills throughout his life, gave much weight to unattached, free-floating intellectuals. He believed that they were the only ones capable of undistorted thought; as such, intellectuals have a moral responsibility to engage in a 'politics of truth' and lay bare the facts about political power relations. Further, and again following Mannheim, Mills maintained that every historical period develops a unique ideology. During the mid-twentieth century the two predominant ideologies were liberalism and Marxism. However, in their *non-classic* forms which they now took, Mills argues, liberalism, with its consolidation of political and military power, had become a conservative force in the capitalist societies, whilst in soviet societies Marxism had hardened into a statist dogma. However, for Mills, the fact that liberalism and Marxism, as interpretations of politics and culture, were irrelevant to the current world scene, did not mean that there was an end of ideology, only that the issues and the context of ideology had changed. This put Mills at odds with colleagues like Edward A. Shils, Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell who, in the 1950s, were asserting that there no longer existed any ideologies that

demanded a commitment to political action. For Bell, those 'causes' that had previously inspired intellectuals, whether of the right or left, had become exhausted by the catastrophic challenges to social and political freedoms by fascism and communism during the 1930s and 1940s. Mills, however, saw this 'end-of-ideology' proposition as nothing more than an excuse for political complacency. Instead, he championed an activist intelligentsia with radical ideas for developmental social transformation.

Though well-versed in the works of the German thinkers, Weber, Marx and Mannheim, Mills was also conversant with the Italian elitist writings of Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels. But in this case, these so-called neo-Machiavellian scholars also had an antithetical influence on Mills's thinking. Indeed, his power elite thesis, that a national triumvirate governs US society, was not only informed by but was also in opposition to, Mosca's belief in the persistence of an organised ruling class, Pareto's proposal of the functionality of the circulation of governing elites and Michels's notion of oligarchical successions.

These and other intellectual influences helped Mills to produce a sociology that defines personal and social realities truthfully and in a publicly relevant way. A sociology that understands people's biographies with reference to the structures within which those biographies are enacted. A sociology that involves adopting an approach to the social world that Mills described as 'taking it big'.

THE POST-MODERN ERA AND MASS SOCIETY

To fully appreciate Mills's ideas it is necessary to briefly consider some of the social conditions and signal trends during the time he produced his most creative work, 1945–1960. This

'post-modern period' as Mills calls it – of heightened Cold War tensions and nuclear proliferation, of McCarthyism and de-Stalinisation, of bureaucratisation and self-alienation – was a singular historical era that fuelled Mills's critical-humanist sociology and political radicalism. This was a time when economic production, political administration and military violence became increasingly amalgamated. It was also a time that witnessed novel developments; the emergence of the new men of power (labour leaders), the new middle class, the new soviet/socialist man, the New Left. Finally, and most disturbing for Mills, it was a time when, in United States mass society, the democratic values of reason and freedom were being threatened as a result of citizens were becoming apathetic and powerless drones who had been side-lined from civic engagement.

All this took place in a larger social context that came to be called a 'mass society' that was involved in the mass production of culture and that was seduced by consumerism. In the post-war US, mass society produced a sameness and blandness that made possible the general population's commercial and political manipulation. It involved a highly bureaucratised and impersonal social structure whose culture was characterised by a uniformity and mediocrity of goods, ideas, tastes, values and lifestyles. Some of the social images that marked the white-bread, middle-class scene included station wagons and Cape Cod, Colonial and Ranch-style houses that comprised the homogeneity of the planned communities in the new suburbs. In the white-collar world of corporate America, the mass society of atomised, deceived and manipulated individuals, produced a lonely crowd of other-directed organization men in grey flannel suits. In Mills's view, commercialised mass society, was creating a population of consumers constantly bombarded with slogans, logos and images that distracted them from events of momentous concern, stifling democratic dialogue.

BOOK'S ORGANISATION

Mills's works may be subsumed under several general groupings. First, there is the book, co-authored with Hans Gerth, *Character and Social Structure*, where they articulate the social psychological theoretical framework that informs many of Mills's other writings. There is also the important trilogy on power and social stratification – consisting of *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* – in which Mills critically discusses the US class system. Next, in his most famous book, *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills presents his vision of what sociology should be and what it has to offer. Finally, there are his polemical 'pamphlets' – *The Causes of World War Three* and *Listen, Yankee* – where he advocates for a politics of responsibility and truth.

My purpose in this book is to examine the works of C. Wright Mills in order to convey his influence on contemporary social thought. In stressing the critical aspect of Mills's sociology, I will focus generally on his concern with the interrelationship between social structure and personality, and with the bureaucratisation of modern society and the power relations it produces. I take a chronological and biographical approach in illustrating the development of Mills's ideas and interests over the course of his career. In doing so, I endeavour to reveal the consistency as well as the evolution of his thinking. I begin, in Chapter 2, with a biographical account of Mills's life and family background, including a consideration of him as a public intellectual. Mills made no distinction between what he was doing professionally and what he was experiencing personally, and readers of his work must consider the inner frustrations and political concerns that shaped that work. Chapters 3–8 trace the various stages of his thinking, from the pragmatist consideration of character formation, through the analysis of US class–status–power relations and his stratification trilogy, to

the treatise where he proposes a sociological imagination and the reflective style of work intended to stimulate it, to the various epistolary-polemical writings, both published and unpublished. Chapter 9 briefly outlines the reception of the legacy of Mills bequeathed to social science and where that legacy may be situated today.

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MILLS: LIFE, CAREER, POLITICS

C. Wright Mills's given name was Charles but throughout his academic life was commonly called by his mother's family name, Wright. The noun 'wright' – with its origins in the Old English word *wryhta* meaning maker or worker – refers to a person who creates, builds or repairs something. The word is used in combination with the thing being constructed, such as a playwright, a shipwright, a millwright. Mills lived up to his name. A larger-than-life figure with extraordinary passion and productive energy, he was a tireless worker who wrote for as much as 6 hours at a time – about 2,000 words every day. But more than an incessant producer, Mills saw himself as a master builder and a skilled craftsman. Indeed, he often referred to 'making an architecture' out of a book, of 'building' lectures and of practicing the 'craft' of sociology. His scholarly designation, *nom de plume,* and the appellation through which he achieved professional recognition was C. Wright Mills.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY LIFE

Born in Waco, Texas on 28 August 1916, Mills was the second child and only son of a middle-class family of Irish, English,

French, Scottish and Dutch ancestry. He grew up in several North Texas cities, including Dallas, and later visited his parents at their home in the South Texas town of San Antonio. Indeed, before Mills turned 12, his family had changed residences seven or eight times. His father, Charles Grover Mills, was an insurance agent who was frequently away on business trips whilst his son was coming of age. From his father the young Mills internalised the Protestant work ethic: the idea of working hard for work's own sake and of having the determination to always do a good job. His mother, Francis Wright, a homemaker, tried to teach him middle-class manners and mannerisms, which he deemed pretentious and readily abandoned them in adulthood. And whilst his mother's bourgeois refinements never made any strong impression on Mills, her deep Texas roots did – and he was not above dramatising, at times, what he called the 'cowboy stuff'. In particular, Mills romanticised stories of his maternal grandfather, Braxton Bragg Wright, who was familiar with Mexican and Indian culture; he presumably possessed a law degree and practiced medicine. Bragg Wright was shot and killed in a violent dispute. Whatever the details, which Mills enjoyed embellishing – shot in the back with a 30-30 rifle for having an affair with a married Mexican woman – the jury acquitted the killer on grounds of self-defence.

Mills attended Dallas Technical High School where, along with the more typical courses in Chemistry and History, he also took several classes in Mechanical Drafting and in Architectural Drawing. He acquired architectural training as a draughtsman, perhaps under James Cheek, the Dallas architect best known for co-designing the first self-contained shopping centre in the United States. A quarter-century later, after delivering a talk at the International Design Conference in Aspen, Colorado, Mills reflected that he should have been an architect. In any event, Mills maintained a lifelong interest in problems of architectural and industrial design.

During summers off from school, Mills, as a young man under 20 years old, took on various jobs including helping to dig a ditch through a long stretch of land in East Texas and driving a tractor in the wheat fields in the Panhandle. One summer, when driving a lorry hauling collapsible houses, Mills had his first encounter with racism. As two African American men were loading the lorry, Mills jumped out to help them. When a White man struck, with a piece of lumber, one of the Black workers on the head for presumably pressuring Mills to help them, Mills kicked the White man's face.

Though later in his career Mills claimed that he had never had an academic and political interest in the so-called Negro problem, it is not the case that he entirely ignored matters of race and ethnicity. In fact, in a couple of his earlier works – a magazine article on the 1943 race riots in Los Angeles and a study on the Puerto Rican migration to New York City – Mills devoted some time to discussing racial discrimination. In the article, which appeared in *The New Leader* magazine, Mills offers a rationally understandable pattern for why the violent clashes between US servicemen and Mexican American adolescents occurred. Mills informed the magazine's editors that his sociological account of the riots was based on his personal experiences with the night life of Mexican Americans and of soldiers in San Antonio. Moreover, whatever his personal interest in racial discrimination, Mills was nonetheless in charge of designing and executing the study published as *The Puerto Rican Journey*, and instructed his research team to categorise the Puerto Rican respondents by phenotype.

MENTORS

After graduating high school in 1934 Mills enrolled as an engineering student at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College (now, Texas A&M University), which at the time was

an all-White male military institution. Two experiences Mills had during his one year at A&M are particularly salient. The first is that he encountered sociology, and himself, through Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess's textbook, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* – no less than by their accounts of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead. It was from reading Cooley and Mead's ideas on the social self, which Mills began to seriously analyse himself. Second, due to his particularly unhappy year at A&M, doubtless because of the relentless hazing that he received from the upper-class cadets, Mills developed a lifelong disdain toward militarism. But there is another lesson that Mills learned from his sociology textbook's discussions on social control along with his militaristic maltreatment at A&M: that leadership based on force is wrong. And thus, abandoning his interest in engineering, the following year Mills transferred to the much less autocratic culture of the University of Texas at Austin.

Whilst at UT, from 1935–1939, Mills's formal training was primarily in American pragmatist philosophy, general semantics and modern logic, all of which would converge with his interest in the sociology of knowledge. The two tutors who had the most impact on his intellectual development at UT were both products of the pragmatist and symbolic interactionist traditions at the University of Chicago. The main one was the philosopher George V. Gentry, who had been a student of Mead at Chicago and who exposed Mills to Mead's social psychology as well as to the pragmatism of John Dewey, Charles S. Pierce and William James. Mills served as Gentry's teaching assistant and Gentry supervised Mills's master's thesis, which critiqued Dewey for failing to adequately situate his methods of inquiry in the context of historical social structures. The other key influence upon Mills was the economist Clarence E. Ayers who instructed Mills on the institutional economics of Thorstein Veblen. Some two decades earlier, Ayers had taught institutional economics to Talcott

Parsons as an undergraduate at Amherst College. Now he introduced Mills to Veblen's exquisite ability to barrack the upper classes for their conspicuous consumption; an ability that Mills later realised prevented Veblen from taking seriously their military, economic and political involvements.

Mills's exposure to the ideas of Mead, Dewey and Veblen – through the teachings of Gentry and Ayers – led him to major in sociology as a confluence of these interests as well as the fact that, by his senior year, Mills had resolved to confront directly the difficult realities of the social world. In 1939, he concurrently earned a BA degree in sociology and an MA degree in philosophy from the University of Texas. Intending to make a career in academia, by the time of graduation Mills had produced three papers on topics located at the intersection of the areas of most intellectual concern to him at the time: sociology of knowledge, pragmatism and social psychology. These essays, with all their jargon and technicality, point, first, to Mills's early interest in a linguistically mediated sociology of knowledge and, second, to the influence that pragmatist ideas would have on his work throughout most his career. But they also demonstrate Mills's boundless ambition that led him to write the articles, whilst still an undergraduate, and have them published by the two leading journals in US sociology: the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*. On the strength of these forthcoming publications as well as letters of recommendation from his Texas mentors, in the autumn of 1939 Mills was admitted into the doctoral programme in sociology at the University of Wisconsin, which then as now, had an excellent reputation for academic rigour.

Wisconsin boasted a world-class staff that included the social theorist, Howard P. Becker, who introduced Mills to the 'classic' tradition in sociology and the labour economist, Selig Perlman, from whom he learned about institutional economics and the

labour movement. But the person who had the greatest impact on Mills's sociological perspective was Hans H. Gerth, a political refugee from Nazi Germany who had studied with Theodore E. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Alfred Weber. Gerth had also been a student of Karl Mannheim and had assisted him in the preparation of *Ideology and Utopia*, which heralded a new sociology of knowledge. Gerth, steeped in knowledge of Weber, introduced Mills to Weber's political and comparative sociology, which led to Mills's lifelong concern with class divisions, social status and political power, as well as with the method of 'ideal types'. He also helped Mills see that Mead's concept of the social self, required a historical-structural focus. However, it was perhaps because Gerth's position in the sociology department was tenuous and because they didn't meet until Mills's final year at Wisconsin, that their relationship was less that of mentor–protégé than of collaborators. Their collaborative efforts, though frequently edgy, resulted in several articles and two classic sociological works. The first was the 1946 publication of *From Max Weber*, a collection in English translation of Weber's essays. The division of labour for this project involved Gerth selecting Weber's essays and rendering them into unidiomatic English, followed by Mills, as stylist, improving Gerth's overwritten prose. The second book, which took them a dozen years to compose, was the undergraduate social psychology textbook called *Character and Social Structure*, which appeared in 1953. Despite the ups and downs in their 20-year relationship, the collaboration succeeded.

ACADEMIC CAREER

A few months prior to the United States' entry into World War II, Mills completed his dissertation, received his PhD in sociology and was appointed associate professor of sociology at the University of Maryland at College Park. Mills opposed

US involvement in the war suspecting that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was leading the country into a permanent war economy. Nevertheless, Mills was not conscripted into the military due to having chronic hypertension and well as too high a pulse rate — a condition likely exacerbated by his working 14-hour days. Thus, contrary to most political public intellectuals of the time, he did not see the war as a struggle for democracy, but as an opportunity for the imperial powers to re-divide the world. Whatever his political beliefs, Mills contributed to the war effort by teaching US history to army recruits and working as a researcher on a government study that compared the influences of big businesses and small businesses on community life.

In early 1945 Mills took a leave from the University of Maryland and was hired as a research associate at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR). Founded just one year earlier under the directorship of Paul F. Lazarsfeld, the BSAR became known for its studies in a variety of human affairs common to mass society: radio research, media research and polling; communication, public opinion and advertising; consumer and voting behaviour. Committed to the investigation, systemisation and documentation of methodological procedures, Lazarsfeld made advancements in statistical relations, multivariate analysis, panel surveys and the use of large data sets. However, because he was typically more interested in the methods of research than in the substantive issues being studied, years later Mills critiqued Lazarsfeld for his 'abstracted empiricism' – the practice of translating social problems into statistical assertions and confusing what is to be studied with the methods for its study. Thus, rather than treating social problems as issues of historical and structural significance, Mills came to assert that Lazarsfeld and the BASR approached them as titbits of statistical information about an assemblage of people within their narrow environments.

Whatever his objections to Lazarsfeld's obsession with rigid methodological techniques, under the latter's supervision Mills served as director of the BASR's Labour Research Division, from 1946 to 1948. During that time, Mills and his researchers conducted a survey of labour leaders to explain how the institutions to which they belonged formed their social characteristics. This research formed the basis of his first book, *The New Men of Power*. For another study, Mills and his research team interviewed middle managers, professionals, secretaries and salesclerks on their thoughts and feelings about various occupational related topics. This information, coupled with statistical data he obtained from government agencies, but also material from novels and literary works, helped Mills sketch the social psychology of the American middle class that resulted in his book *White Collar*. In addition, Mills and two of his BASR associates conducted a study of island Puerto Ricans who had migrated to New York City. It involved content analysis, interviews, participant observations and statistical data and was published as *The Puerto Rican Journey*. But by the time he completed these studies, Mills had become disillusioned with sociology's technical, impersonal, statistical side and began to employ unconventional methods of data collection including first-hand impressions, happenstance personal encounters, newspaper and magazine clippings and other people's empirical findings. These more subjective approaches – including the interview technique, at which he excelled – allowed Mills to present a 'poetic' vision of US society that could be recognised by preceptive Americans as corresponding with their personal experiences.

Mills formally resigned his position at the University of Maryland, and in the spring of 1946 accepted a position as assistant professor of sociology in the undergraduate college at Columbia University where he would spend the rest of his

career. Amongst Columbia's staff were such eminent sociologists and public intellectuals as Robert S. Lynd, Daniel Bell, Robert M. MacIver, Seymour Martin Lipset – and Robert K. Merton and Lazarsfeld who helped to arrange for his employment at Columbia.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As had been the case at the universities of Texas and Wisconsin, Mills's irascible personality and differences of opinion alienated him from many of his colleagues at Columbia. He spurned social posturing, refined manners and artificial politeness. His attire was unconventional given the prevailing tastes of the time, dressing rather like a lumberjack, in flannel shirts, leather jacket, and combat boots. He commuted from his home to Columbia University on his BMW motorcycle whilst toting his books and papers in an army duffel bag. Not only did he present himself as a maverick and outlander, much like two of his intellectual mentors, Thorstein Veblen and C.S. Peirce, he was marginalised, and, in effect, ostracised, from academia. This made it all the easier for him show contempt for the credos and poses in higher learning that he described as 'the higher ignorance' of the received sociological thinking of the time.

Equally fraught were many of Mills's personal, political and intellectual relationships with colleagues, near and far. The near ones, especially in New York City, typically followed a chronological pattern of strong personal rapport, when the friendships were first formed in the 1940s, followed by disaffection, usually in the early 1950s and then either gradual drifting apart or final disaffiliation by the mid-1950s. For example, as Daniel Bell's political positions changed, so did Mills's relationship with the socialist turned end-of-ideologist, also change. In the early 1940s, Bell and Mills had shared the belief that the war was increasing concentration of wealth and

power in large corporations and that liberalism was an outdated and naïve ideology. But by the 1950s, when Bell came to reject all 'ideological flags' as illusions and Mills increasingly placed his hope in participatory democracy, they became political opponents, barely on speaking terms.

Like Bell, the historian Richard Hofstadter, who met Mills in 1942 and the pair became close friends and colleagues at Maryland and then at Columbia, also veered his radicalism to the political and ideological centre. By the 1950s Hofstadter had become sharply critical of Mills's dissident direction, chiding him for psychologically projecting his hostility onto the American middle class in *White Collar*. Mills, in turn, accused Hofstadter of partaking in the new 'American celebration', the self-congratulatory trend that viewed the United States as the ideal contemporary manifestation of democracy, without addressing its cultural deficiencies.

Mills also had connections with the anti-Stalinist leftist thinkers known as the New York intellectuals and that included Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, Irving Kristol and Irving Howe. Of these Mills was perhaps closest to the journalist and critic, Dwight Mcdonald, whom Mills had met in 1943. But in 1952 Mills was deeply wounded by Mcdonald's vicious attack of *White Collar* in a review essay, calling the book boring, unintelligible, and propagandistic. Mills responded by calling McDonald irresponsible and his criticism unfair. Soon thereafter their falling out became complete when Mills declined an opportunity to speak in public with Mcdonald.

This is not to say that Mills did not have close affinities with long-time chums; he certainly did. In addition to Hans Gerth, there were the historian William Miller and the writer Harvey Swados, and Mills's young research assistants Dan Wakefield and Saul Landau, all of whom maintained lifelong connections with Mills. His more enduring friendships, however, were with non-Americans such as the Mexican novelist

Carlos Fuentes, the French journalist, K.S. Karol and the British sociologist and political scientist, Ralph Miliband. But aside from professional swipes and personal slights, it was Mills's fellow intellectuals' slide toward a political liberalism, and eventually neo-conservativism, that led to his estrangement from them. But what was Mills's unwavering political philosophy that instigated these relational strains?

POLITICAL VIEWS

Mills held no party affiliation: he was not communist, nor did he consider himself a 'Marxist', and was only tangentially socialist. His only political self-identification was a vague association with the Wobblies, the radical syndicalist union, the International Workers of the World. Though largely uncertain and ill-defined, his politics nevertheless had strong strains of opposition to capitalist exploitation, authoritarianism and militarism, and support for democracy. He relied on Marxism only as an analytical device, a theoretical system for examining world events. More than anything, his political consciousness was a radicalism – a politics of truth – that used the critical voice of the intellectual to expose the realities of political power. By the mid-1950s Mills had become a complete intellectual outsider, increasingly peripheral to the then-current political philosophies, at least in the United States.

But the situation was different in Great Britain. There Mills forged his closest political affiliations with the intellectuals and activists of the British New Left – Ralph Miliband, Tom Bottomore, Stuart Hall, E.P. Thompson – anti-Stalinists who were also critical of the Labour Party's increasing centrism. In common with the British New Leftists Mills sought a socialist alternative to communism. His closest relationship with members of that clique was with Miliband, who invited Mills to lecture at the London School of Economics in 1957. Indeed, Mills's influential missive

to the New Left, which first appeared in 1960 in the British journal *New Left Review*, was initially written as a letter addressed to Miliband. For his part, Miliband published *The State in Capitalist Society* in 1969 and dedicated it to Mills's memory. After 1957 Mills travelled frequently to visit his friends in England. He appeared in Kenneth Tynan's television documentary series, 'We Dissent', in which he spoke on the imminence of catastrophe unless the power elite is deposed. He was a keynote speaker at a lecture forum in Soho at the Partisan Café. The BBC recorded his 1959 lectures at the LSE and broadcast them on its Third Programme.

CRAFT, STYLE AND DESIGN

I end this chapter by returning to motifs previously mentioned briefly – architecture, design, craftsmanship – to demonstrate how they influenced, substantively and stylistically, Mills's biography. His implementation of these qualities, which extend to several personal and professional areas, serve as the standard of excellence that Mills set for himself and his work in sociology; this was a style and practice of work that he called 'intellectual craftsmanship'.

A 'craft' refers to the manual or mental processes through which workers freely employ their capacities and skills in creating the products of their enjoyment and enjoying the products of their creation. For Mills, craftsmanship, whether manual and mental, had a moral, indeed a religious, character to it. It was premised on the Protestant work ethic, the wilful feeling that the individual can command the future to serve ends, which Mills, early in life, witnessed first-hand in his father's capacity for and love of honest work. Historically, Mills's industriousness had its heritage in the character structure of his English Puritan ancestors who sought to master the world through hard work, self-discipline and

control over external circumstances. Mills's implementation of design and craftsmanship – his artisanal need for doing things with his own hands and on his own terms – extended to motorcycle mechanics, house building, furniture making and photography.

Mills not only rode motorcycles; he also understood the intricacies of their mechanical operations. He took a service-training course on how to assemble his own motorcycle in the BMW factory in Germany, for which he received a diploma as a first-class mechanic. He designed and built a cabin and a suburban house. He remodelled one home, a farmhouse in Pomona, New York. He and his wife also fashioned another house, never built, making an 18-inch model to exact scale, complete with furniture. Imitating a design style of modern furniture popular at the time, Mills made a cabinet out of Luan plywood, with aluminium-angle legs and plastic sides. He was keen to point out that whilst the original was priced at $108, his reproduction cost him only $40 to make. In addition, for his home in West Nyack, Mills constructed bookshelves, storage walls for clothing, a working desk and shelving for his camera equipment.

A lay photographer, Mills touted the advantages of photography as a way of seeing and showing the social world 'as it is'. Compared with the naked eye, for Mills, the camera does several things superbly well. For example, through focusing for atmospheric depth, it can show greater intricate detail, and through the close-up, it can extend the microscopic world. Perhaps with some of these optical advantages in mind, Mills took the grainy black-and-white photograph for the dust jacket of *White Collar*. This image, arguably one of the most recognised in all of sociology, shows a solitary man in long overcoat and fedora, scurrying past the National City Bank on Wall Street. Moreover, in the summer of 1960 Mills took two Nikon cameras and numerous photographs during his travels

though Cuba in preparation for writing *Listen, Yankee*. He initially intended for the book to include up to 100 full-page photos that would show readers the daily lives of Cubans throughout the island. Ultimately, *Listen, Yankee* did not contain any of the snapshots Mills took of Fidel Castro – and of students, construction workers, *campesinos*, farmers and teachers engaged in building the Cuban Revolution.

Aside from these avocations, Mills's dedication to his trade of sociology necessitated intellectual craftsmanship. In communicating his sociology to various publics, Mills endeavoured to master a literary style – sociological poetry – that details the objective truth and through radical political engagement, discloses it in terms that ordinary people can understand.

Mills died of heart failure on 20 March 1962, at his home. Inscribed on his gravestone is his aphorism: '*I have tried to be objective, I do not claim to be detached*'. But more than an aphorism, it was a life principle that allowed Mills to be both partisan and objective in his attempt to tell the plain truth about the realities of the social and political world.

3

PRAGMATISM, SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

The American intellectual tradition that Mills encountered as an undergraduate at the University of Texas, and that resonated over the course of his career – from his early student papers to his writings on the Cuban experience – was the Chicago pragmatist approach. Pragmatism as a system of thought helped him to formulate a historicist and contextualist viewpoint, one that particularly informed his sociology of knowledge and his social psychology. Mills's interest with the social determinants of knowledge means that he relates ideas to specific activity in specific social structures. Thus, for him, there always exists a vital link between intellect and action, mind and society, theory and practice.

THE PRAGMATIST TRADITION

In one of his earliest forays into the pragmatist tradition, his MA thesis, Mills critiques John Dewey for being only quasi-

sociological; that is, for being overly abstract and for not sufficiently considering that ideas – beliefs and ideologies – are contingent on specific cultural and historical conditions. For Mills, pragmatism flounders when it is employed as a purely philosophical activity. In so doing, the pragmatists simply neglected to properly situate the development of knowledge within the context of social, political and economic relations, of 'power arrangements' as he would later come to describe them. But Mills believed that pragmatism had a practical use for the social sciences, which was to clear up confusion about their methods of inquiry. Mills contends that the social sciences need to eschew epistemological questions, systematic abstractions and formalist principles about the nature of knowledge. This is an explicit rejection of what Mills would later call 'grand' theorising. Instead, social scientists must define a specific problem so that it can be understood, and essentially observed, through concrete research.

Mills extends many of the themes articulated in the master's thesis to the three early articles he wrote whilst still a student at Texas and published in the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*. The first of these papers considers the topic of language and its social nature. Here Mills relies on the pragmatism of G. H. Mead, C. S. Pierce and Dewey to propose that language, as the material basis of mind and the embodiment of interpersonal relations, be regarded as a social force. Seen in this way, it is through shared symbolic meaning in situational context that language determines in the thinker's mind the process of logical thought.

Keeping with the theme of the influence of situational context on language, in the second essay Mills explains that people's actual (not imputed) motives for a course of action can only be inferred on the basis of the collective and linguistic

habits of the social groups of which they are members. 'Vocabularies of motive' must be socially situated because different groups anticipate different outcomes and give different meanings to a course for action.

Finally, in the third paper Mills asserts that despite the relativism in knowledge, it is possible to verify the truth of an assertion, even a scientific one, based on the probability – the warrantability – of its criteria; and these criteria, as models of inquiry, are always culturally and historically determined.

Mills carried on with these pragmatist motifs at the University of Wisconsin in his doctoral dissertation, completed in 1942 but posthumously published as *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America*. Here, as the original dissertation title indicates, Mills gives 'a sociological account of pragmatism'. He does so by examining the discourses on higher education of Dewey, Peirce and William James and interprets their biographies, careers and reading publics in the context of the rise of research universities, the emergence of scientific or 'laboratory style' inquiry, and industrialisation. In brief, Mills analyses higher education in the US by explaining the thinking styles of the founding fathers of pragmatism and by rendering a historical account of the institutionalisation – the secularisation and specialisation – of American intellectual life since the Civil War. The upshot is that the pragmatist tradition, with its tough-minded practicality and its reliance on the techno-industrial expert, encouraged the professionalisation of knowledge through the graduate schools; this was the case in the founding of schools of law, medicine and journalism at newer research institutions like Johns Hopkins, Clark and Chicago universities. Mills would later revisit the role of learned professionals, not only in the universities, but in relation to the cultural apparatus.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

In the dissertation's appendix Mills makes a self-reflective critique on his sociology-of-knowledge approach to pragmatism's influence on higher education in the United States and finds it deficient, largely for failing to give a proper account of George H. Mead and of Karl Mannheim. But Mills did not give up on these two thinkers and would repeatedly return to them throughout his career. Indeed, in 1943, the year after he submitted his dissertation, Mills published an article in the mode of reflexive critique where he, following Mannheim, applies the methods of the sociology of knowledge to the ideological implications of work in the subfield of American sociology called 'social pathology'.

Much as he had done with the pragmatist philosophers in the dissertation, Mills again examines the backgrounds, career paths, thinking style and reading audiences of the social pathologists, particularly those who were writing textbooks for university students. He found that because social pathologists came from small-town, middle-class, demographically homogeneous communities, they tended to be biased against all things urban. Further, they made tacit normative judgements about what they were occupationally trained to consider: what Mannheim had called 'situations'. They cast these situations, or processes of interacting individuals, in the guise of medical terminology and 'diagnosed' them as 'pathological'. Moreover, because these sociologists focussed on individuals being socially 'maladjusted', they failed to consider total social structures, much less recognise the need for significant socio-political change. In short, the social pathologists' uniformly narrow interpretation of social problems made for an atheoretical and apolitical sociology that upheld the established order.

In this disciplinary self-reflexive article Mills employs Mannheim's ideological analysis that makes explicit all self-preserving, and self-serving, perspectives. This includes the social pathological perspective of head of department at Wisconsin, John L. Gillin, who had written several textbooks from that viewpoint and who Mills repeatedly names in the article. But in addition to criticising the social pathologists and their 'professional ideology', Mills was also making a political argument that was beginning to be informed by leftist politics.

Continuing with Mannheim's sociology-of-knowledge outlook that intellectuals need to be reflexively self-conscious of their public role in society, in his next essay, published in 1944 in Dwight Macdonald's radical magazine, *politics*, Mills looks to the intellectuals as agents of progressive social change. In his view, intellectuals had a unique responsibility to go beyond simply understanding; instead, they needed to work for a 'politics of truth' and effectively communicate their knowledge to a broad public audience. In pragmatist terms that married intellect and action, knowledge and power, Mills argues that it is through knowledge that individuals can politically control their destiny. The problem was that the means of intellectual production and communication – what he would later call the 'cultural apparatus' – had been, in Marxian terms, 'expropriated', by monopolising bureaucracies of economy and state. Lacking what Mannheim described as a 'free-floating intelligentsia', consumer capitalist society in the US and the UK, did not possess a critically independent thinking class with access to truth. Intellectual workers were therefore politically irrelevant; they were, according to Mills, a 'powerless people'.

But Mills saw a way out of this dilemma in the political sociology of Max Weber. For Mills, intellectuals were duty bound to practice a 'politics of responsibility' to counter the organised irresponsibility that characterised the political and

economic decision-making by individuals at the centres of power – those he would eventually dub 'the power elite'. Such an 'ethic of responsibility' was central to Weber who had argued that the politician who has a true 'calling' for politics as a vocation, must over and above absolutist values, seek practical solutions to anticipated consequences of social actions. By singling out Weber's ethic of responsibility Mills is overly pragmatising and politicising Weber, casting him as one of the last 'political professors' and an intellectual champion of *Realpolitik*, in the German, nineteenth century sense of the term.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, as a postgraduate student at Wisconsin, Mills became acquainted with Weber's sociology through the good offices of Hans Gerth. Together they translated, edited and published several of Weber's writings, beginning with an excerpt from *Economy and Society* in which Weber analyses the concepts of social classes, status groups and political parties. This essay appeared in Mcdonald's *politics* in 1944. However, their larger collaborative project was the coedited volume of English translations of Weber's major sociological essays, *From Max Weber*, which was released in 1946. This book consists of an extensive introduction sketching Weber's biography and the main lines of his thought and contains selections from Weber's historical and comparative investigations. These later include writings organised under the themes of science and politics, power, religion and comparative social structures. One item of salience in Gerth and Mills's introductory narrative is their assertion that Weber expanded Marx's economic materialism by giving equal consideration to 'political and military materialism'. Thus, in Gerth and Mills's interpretation, Weber considered not only the well-known dimensions of power and inequality – class, status and party – but also their location in the distinct but functionally interrelated economic, political

and military institutional orders, which prefigure the power elite thesis. These turned out to be part of five social orders that Gerth and Mills identify in their next project, where they examine the relationship between social structure, from the comparative-historical approach of Weber, and character structure, from the social psychological approach of George Hebert Mead.

SOCIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Whilst Dewey and Peirce had an indelible influence on Mills's thinking about knowledge and institutions, it was Mead, the most socially aware of the pragmatists, who most informed Mills's microscopic sociological considerations. Mead was a colleague of Dewey at the University of Chicago, and as a result, his social psychology – later to be coined 'symbolic interactionism' – took on a pragmatic orientation. Mills's professors at the University of Texas from whom he first learned pragmatist philosophy, George Gentry and David Miller had studied with Mead at Chicago. Mills in turn took a seminar on Mead's philosophy co-taught by Gentry and Miller. By the early 1940s, the philosophy–sociology nexus, no longer mediated by higher education as it had been in the dissertation, crystallised for Mills under the tutelage of Gerth who helped reinforce the pragmatic unity, the functional relation, between self and society. And it is this integral relationship that forms the Weberian–Meadian approach that Gerth and Mills employ in their textbook written for undergraduate students, *Character and Social Structure*.

In 1941, Gerth and Mills began work on what Mills called their 'sociological psychology' book, *Character and Social Structure*, which would only be completed and appear in print a dozen years later in 1953. In general, this pedantic treatise

demonstrates how Weber's typologies, combined with his structural and historical analyses of institutional orders, can be utilised to investigate types of character and conduct. *Character and Social Structure* explores the psychological nature of the economic, political, and military institutional orders, which Gerth and Mills had previously identified in *From Max Weber*, and to which they now add a consideration of religion and kinship. They examine how types of personalities are anchored in these five institutional orders and discuss how the institutional orders are integrated to form historical types of social structures. The effort results in an ambitious social psychology that explains people's conduct and motivations in different societies at different time periods. It also investigates how one person's external conduct and inner life interplays with those of others as well as the types of persons usually found in different societies. In proposing a working model that considers the objective social functions of institutional orders alongside the subjective meanings of institutional members, Gerth and Mills combine key ideas, many of which are adapted from Weber and Mead. In addition, they provide a concatenation of highly specialised terms that makes the book read in parts rather like a lexicon in sociological psychology. Gerth and Mills rely on this technical nomenclature to demonstrate the ongoing, dynamic interrelationship between character and social structure.

They begin by identifying the major components of 'character structure', which they regard as the stabilised integration of a person's psychic structure linked with their social roles. 'Psychic structure' refers to the combination of feelings, sensations, and impulses that are a fundamental part of the person. 'Person' refers to the human being who in reference to emotions, perceptions, and purposes is a player of roles. The linchpin that conjoins person with institutions is the crucial notion of 'role', which for Gerth and Mills refers to a person's

conduct patterns oriented to the conduct of others. They then define 'institution' as that which consists of an organisation of roles that maintain the total set of social roles. Further, an 'institutional order' consists of all those institutions that have similar goals or that serve similar functions. In modern Western societies five major institutional orders predominate.

The 'political order' consists of those institutions within which people acquire, wield or influence the distribution of power. The 'economic order' is made up of those establishments by which people organise labour, resources and technologies to produce and distribute goods and services. The 'military order' is composed of institutions in which people organise legitimate violence and supervise its use. The 'kinship order' is made up of institutions that regulate and facilitate legitimate sexual intercourse, procreation and the early rearing of children. The 'religious order' is composed of those institutions in which people organise and supervise the collective worship of supernatural beings, usually at regular occasions and at fixed places.

Gerth and Mills then introduce the notion of 'spheres' to refer to aspects of social conduct that characterise all institutional orders. They discuss what they see as the four most important spheres operating within any of the five orders. Finding company with Mead's symbolic interactionism, they see 'symbols' as visual or acoustic signs, signals, emblems, ceremonials, language, music or other arts used in understanding social conduct. 'Technology' refers to the implementation of conduct with tools, apparatus, machines, instruments and other physical devices. Hewing to Weber's notion of 'status' Gerth and Mills see this sphere as consisting of the means of distributing prestige, deference or honour amongst the members of an institution. 'Education' is the sphere consisting of those institutions and activities concerned with the transmission of skills and values to those persons

who have not acquired them. Finally, in completing the conceptual lineage from character structure to social structure they see 'social structure' as the set of functionally interrelated institutional orders and spheres in a total society.

In emphasising the social roles people play in various institutions, Gerth and Mills, demonstrate how character structures are moulded by institutional orders to form historical types of social structures. They begin with the premise that a person is composed of a constellation of organised social roles. Because persons are usually involved in several institutional orders, their character traits are shaped by the various roles they enact in these orders. Each of the roles is a segment of the different institutions and interpersonal situations in which the person moves. Persons and institutions have reciprocal effects through the linkage of both by social roles.

Institutions form persons by means of the roles persons internalise through language, including the types of conversation typical of an institutional order. Language is crucial to the operations of institutions because it is the most important means of interpersonal conduct, the major source of knowledge of our selves, and the medium in which social roles are organised. In short, language is used by institutions to coordinate the roles of their members as well as to justify the enactment of these roles. Through language, that is, conversation, we learn what others expect of us. Thus, much of our social conduct is enacted to meet the expectations of others. These expectations provide the basis for the development of our 'self-image', our idea of what kind of person we are, involving our relations to other people and their appraisals of us. Adopting the terminology of Mead, Gerth and Mills maintain that our self-image reflects the appraisals of significant others and the generalised other.

'Significant others' are those intimates, encountered in a given institution, who matter most to us, to whom we pay

attention, and whose appraisals are reflected in our self-image. Institutions form persons chiefly through the circle of significant others established by the institution. The evaluation of those who are significant to us determines the construction and preservation of our self-image. Character traits, therefore, are influenced by significant others. Internalising the attitudes of significant others forms the 'generalised other', the experience of the appraisals of those who are not immediately present but who are authoritatively consequential to the person. For Gerth and Mills the generalised other refers to certain institutional orders in which the person is regularly involved. Thus, contrary to Mead, they promote an *institutionally defined* generalised other, which is to say, the institution, and not necessarily the total society, may represent the generalised other.

Operating as a conscience of sorts the appraisals and values of the generalised other sanction the person's conduct and desires. The generalised other acting as a symbolic model appeals to the members' moral duty in fostering attachments to the institution. In this case, the individual is expected to maintain institutional loyalty regardless of circumstances. When transgressing the appraisals and values of the generalised other, which are essentially the appraisals of many significant others that become internalised expectations of self, the person feels the pangs of conscience and experiences guilt.

To determine which character types can be deduced from the roles individuals play in institutions, Gerth and Mills endeavour to understand the individual's 'motives', or subjective formulations of social conduct. The centre of motivation for persons is in the expectations of others that are internalised from the roles that persons perform. In other words, motivation results from the balancing of self-image and the appraisals of significant and generalised others. Gerth and Mills's general aim is to understand types of

persons integrated with roles in various degrees and in various ways, by knowing something about the motives prompting the acquisition and enactment of these roles in various situations.

Here Mills revisits the concept of 'vocabularies of motive' that he had previously introduced in his *American Sociological Review* article of 1940. Vocabularies of motive – specific terminologies that people employ in given social situations as justifications – become components of the generalised other; they are internalized by the person and operate as mechanisms of social control. Vocabularies of motive are used to persuade others of the moral rightness of our conduct, and to motivate them to behave in a similar way.

Temporarily setting aside their focus on the psychology of the individual actor, Gerth and Mills then turn to institutional orders, which they see as being stratified in terms of class, status and power. Operating within the economic institutional order, 'class' pertains to the amount and source of income as these influence people's life-chances. The 'status' sphere involves the successful realisation of claims to prestige by individuals in any institutional order. It is directly connected to the person's self-esteem. Expressions of prestige claims throw ambitious people into a 'status panic'. Proposing a Weberian definition of 'power', or political influence, Gerth and Mills see it as the realisation of one's will, even if this involves the resistance of others. It is the most important dimension because it typically defines class and status. The power of social classes and status groups translates to power in the political institutional order. To these, which are loose formulations of Weber's elements of power and inequality, Gerth and Mills add a fourth: Veblen's 'occupation' that refers to a set of roles and skills routinely pursued as a major source of income and is usually located in the economic institutional order.

Particular character traits predominate amongst persons associated with the same 'strata', the grouping characterised by an intersection of class, status, power and occupation. As we shall see, many of these themes concerning strata and power form the conceptual basis of Mills's so-called stratification trilogy: *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar* and *The Power Elite*.

Turning next to the problem of structural unity, Gerth and Mills propose that the institutional orders are integrated through the ideal-type 'modes' of correspondence, coincidence, coordination and coercion. A social structure is unified through 'correspondence' when its institutional orders share a common structural principle that operates in a parallel way in each. Reflecting what Weber had described as 'affinity', structural integration through 'coincidence' occurs when different developments in various institutional orders together result in the same outcome for the whole society. Structural unity through 'coordination' occurs when one or more institutional orders predominate over other orders and regulate them. Finally, 'convergence' happens when two or more institutional orders coincide to the point of fusion thus becoming one institutional setup.

These four modes of structural unity also serve as principles for explaining social-historical change. By 'social change' Gerth and Mills refer to the emergence, growth and decline of the roles, institutions and orders that comprise a social structure. When *role* is taken as the unit of sociohistorical change, we ask how many people play a given role and how frequently one role displaces another. When the *institution* is considered as the unit, we ask how many institutions of given types exist and what types of institutions most generally prevail within an order. And when the *institutional order* is the unit of social change, we look at the shifting relations of this order to other orders within the social structure. Finally, the

social structure itself can undergo complete transformation, as in total revolution. In this case the orders comprising the social structure are recomposed so that a new social structure emerges. Most significantly, such revolutions mean that their legitimations and ideologies change. In understanding social change, Gerth and Mills argue, we must see that the various institutions and roles are interdependent, and this interdependence requires a detailed examination of the political, economic and military orders.

Gerth and Mills conclude by identifying what they see as the four 'master trends', or basic transformations characterising the mid-twentieth century United States. In their view, these trends are most readily discernible in the political, economic and military orders (effectively relegating religion and kinship to subordinate positions). Indeed, Gerth and Mills regarded post-war America as a political economy closely linked with the institutions and decisions of the military order.

The first master trend involved the 'coordination of the political, economic and military orders' during the Cold War, an international situation of great socio-political rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union. Made powerful by their possession of highly destructive nuclear technology, these two superpowers centralised their political decision-making through bureaucracies that coordinated all the major institutional orders. The key national decisions of the US and USSR were of global scope affecting the future of humanity. In the United States these decisions were 'coordinated' as they were made by the top leaders in the highest echelons of the political, corporate and military bureaucracies. Mills explores further this basic transformation of Cold War society in *The Power Elite* and *The Causes of World War Three*.

The second master trend that Gerth and Mills identify, the 'psychological aspects of bureaucracy', pertains to society's

increasing bureaucratisation that results in people experiencing great frustration, despair, anxiety and insecurity. White-collar employees were particularly affected given that they lacked the opportunity to critically examine their occupational situation within the large-scale organisations in which they worked. This resulted in their feeling increasingly alienated and powerless. Mills revisits these issues in *White Collar* and *The Sociological Imagination*.

The third transformation recognised by Gerth and Mills, and a theme that Mills would repeatedly examine in which works, is the drift toward 'the decline of liberalism'. In its classic form, this nineteenth-century ideology had its tenets of individual freedom, egalitarianism, liberty, private property, fair competition, a laissez-faire market economy and unlimited opportunities. However, by the mid-twentieth century liberalism had become rife with structural contradictions due to society's centralisation of institutional orders and the rise of the bureaucratic mode of organisation. This new abstracted type of liberalism was now the political language of all mass communications and served as a rationale for administrative policies and practices. Liberalism had turned into banal rhetoric that was politically and morally meaningless; more, it was irrelevant to the major social problems that had to be confronted throughout much of the world. Mills criticises liberalism's role in *The New Men of Power*, *The Power Elite* and *The Marxists*.

Finally, Gerth and Mills analyse 'character structure in a polarised world'. Their concern is with the personality traits and conduct patterns that emerge in an era of extreme ideological division marked by the United States and the USSR's attempt to dominate the world, politically, economically and militarily. This struggle between the two power blocs has a portentous psychological meaning as the world participates in this momentous contest that will decide what types of people

will come to predominate. Mills once again takes up this subject in *The Causes of World War Three*.

Character and Social Structure is Gerth and Mills's sociological psychology filtered through Mead and Weber. It is their attempt to supplement 'milieu' sociology with structural sociology, American pragmatism with European historicism. The main concerns and arguments covered in this volume, but also in Mills's dissertation and indeed all his works of the early-1940s – sociology of knowledge and sociological psychology, biography and power – would preoccupy him for the rest of his career.

4

ORGANISED LABOUR

The three books that C. Wright Mills produced between the late 1940s and mid-1950s came to be known as the 'stratification trilogy', each, in their own way, analyse the class structure and power system in the United States. In these volumes – *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* – Mills endeavours to relate the psychological characteristics of certain groups and their individual members to the stratified milieu of the mid-century United States, a time when liberal social scientists readily accepted the pluralist understanding of American democracy being articulated by Robert A. Dahl and Mills's Columbia colleagues David Truman and Seymour Martin Lipset. Simply put, the pluralist perspective sees political decision-making as a continuous bargaining process between competing non-governmental interest groups ultimately resulting in power and influence being distributed relatively equally. As such, it tends to obscure gradations and differences based on class, status and political influence. Contrary to pluralism, however, Mills's approach was closer to that of the neo-Machiavellians Mosca, Pareto and perhaps particularly Michels's 'iron law of oligarchy' that holds that as

organisations become increasingly bureaucratised, they become less democratic and more oligarchical. Thus, in these three volumes Mills is chiefly concerned with power and the powerful – elites, exploiters, policymakers – as well as the issue of powerlessness and in powerless populations.

Later in his career, Mills reflected on how he came to be technically interested in the topic of 'stratification' and assumed that it must have been on first reading Veblen when taking a class with one of his principal influences at University of Texas, the economist Clarence Ayers. Contrary to neoclassical economics that emphasised formalist principals of market economies, Veblenian institutional economics focussed on pragmatic, real world problems and linked them to historical institutions, but also to *divisions* within those institutions.

In a paper on the sociology of social stratification that Mills prepared for his students at Columbia, he avers that stratification involves the ranking of people in terms of the social distribution of valued things and experiences. In all known societies some people get most of what is valued, some least, and others are in between. Thus, to understand these social strata it is incumbent upon the sociologist to analyse people's chances for obtaining these values. To belong to one stratum means to share similar life-chances with other people in that stratum. Borrowing from Weber and Veblen, Mills lists the four interrelated dimensions on which life-chances are based: occupation, class, status and power. But because life-chances are a structural fact independent of psychological feelings and political outlooks, people in the same strata may not necessarily see themselves as a group of feel that they belong together. Thus, Mills understood clearly that a subjective class consciousness, let alone a 'for itself' revolutionary mobilisation, in Marxian terms, would be difficult to realise among the wage workers of post-war America.

In this chapter I will look at Mills's essays related to stratification, power and organised labour including the book *The New Men of Power*. In the next two chapters I will, in turn, consider *White Collar* and *The Power Elite*.

INTERLOCKING POWER AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Mills claimed that his motivation to write *The New Men of Power*, which is a study of America's trade unions and their leaders, was entirely political. Exactly what these political motivations were, he does not say. But given that by the late 1930s he was recasting Weber's notion of dominance and seeing politics as originating in coercive power, Mills began to consider political power in the context of newly developing centralised bureaucratic organisations. Additionally, he was increasingly being influenced by a Marxian analysis of political economy that inched him closer to politics with a socialist flavour. This is evident in three pieces he published in 1942, a year of national and personal transitions that included America's relatively recent entry into World War II and Mills completing the doctoral dissertation at Wisconsin and starting his first academic position at the University of Maryland.

The first piece was a review essay that appeared in the leftist periodical *Partisan Review* on Franz Neumann's book *Behemoth* that offered a penetrating analysis of Nazi Germany's political-economic structure. Neumann, a German émigré who would later become Mills's colleague at Columbia, saw the Nazi economy as a totalitarian form of monopoly capitalism that was dependent on the interrelationship between four elite elements: the state, the Nazi party, the military and big industry. This type of political economy made for a repressive order of consolidated control – of production and violence – dominated by the industrial magnates that stifled democracy. German monopoly capitalism

was anti-democracy and anti-unionism; it used the Nazi party to control and fragment the labour unions and prevent them from becoming a viable political movement. In direct opposition to the prevailing pluralist theory, Mills warns that Germany's centralisation of the four giant cartels, whose economic and political interests were tied up with the continual preparation and maintenance of war, was only the specific working out of a general trend. He cautions that this trend toward nationalisation and cartelisation could become a reality in liberal democracies like the United States, particularly under conditions of economic recession.

In the second piece, written for the *New Leader*, Mills looks specifically at the political-economic situation in the United States. Here he argues that in corporate monopoly capitalism economic freedom – the freedom to sell and buy and make profit – is not the province of most Americans, but only a handful of big enterprisers. Thus, liberalism's notion that political and personal freedom – the classic conditions of democracy – for the mass of people was safeguarded through economic freedom, was simply naive. Those liberals who advocated for a mixed economy of private ownership of the means of production balanced by governmental welfare schemes lacked insight into the existing reality of the political economy: that corporate business and the state were becoming increasingly interlocked. As such, liberals failed to recognise that in a mixed economy, or a 'mixed-up economy' as Mills puts it, most Americans could not procure democracy, could not be politically free, because they were not economically free. They were, in fact, a labour force who were not only dependent on private enterprisers for their economic security; they also lacked collective control over their work conditions. For Mills, the answer lay with the democratically planned utilisation of collectivised means of production — democratic socialism.

Finally, in another review essay, also of 1942, this one co-authored with Hans Gerth, Mills carries somewhat further the notion of interlocking power relations. Here they posit that in examining the centralisation of military, industrial and governmental organisations under monopoly capitalism it is crucial to understand who in those organisations holds power and for what purposes. Whoever wields that power and makes the important decisions – and here they make some oblique references to 'elites' – it is clearly *not* the functioning managers, production engineers or administrative experts in the plants, industrial properties and business offices. Mills contends that when it comes to political power, bureaucratic structures must be considered in light of class structures. In other words, the political power that resides in large scale organisations is always economically stratified. As for engendering radical shifts in the distribution of power, that hope, Gerth and Mills argue, lies with the rank and file 'masses' and their 'leaders'. Indeed, Mills spent much of the 1940s working on a series of papers in which he set out his critical views on labour leaders and their organisations.

LABOUR LEADERS AND LABOUR ORGANISATIONS

Mills's interest in labour's problems – particularly those with implications in the national context of the political economy – began at the top of the decade when as a postgraduate student at the University of Wisconsin he took courses on institutional and labour economics from the economist, Selig Perlman. From the beginning, Mills rejected Perlman's 'job-conscious' (rather than socially conscious) theory of unionism that emphasises joint employer–employee control of working conditions, for among other things being historically limited. Indeed, Mills never had much interest in the traditional, bread-and-butter labourite issues of collective bargaining. And

whilst Perlman held that labour should shun radical ideologies perpetrated by intellectuals and focus only on wage demands, working conditions and job security, Mills believed that pro-labour intellectuals could play a crucial political role in the emergence of a progressive labour movement.

Despite Mills's departures from Perlman's positions, he was nonetheless much inspired to carry on investigating labour's cause and potential. Indeed, as early as 1943, at the height of United States involvement in World War II, Mills scrutinises contemporary issues of labour and power in two articles that appeared in the leading liberal weekly magazine *New Republic*. In the first of these, Mills makes a 'case for the coal miners' as he critically examines the relationship between the government of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the business sector representing the mine operators and the striking coal miners. The miner's contract with the mine operators had expired and their demands were being negotiated by the labour union, the United Mine Workers of America. The FDR administration blamed the UMWA and its president for hampering the war effort by stopping coal production. Mills, however, places responsibility for the strike squarely on the mine operators who rejected all attempts at collective bargaining. Several takeaways from this article are that Mills is beginning to consider, first, labour unions as power groups with some influence over political and economic policies, and second, the personal character of union leaders as relevant in their decision-making.

In the other *New Republic* article Mills argues that bureaucratised business as a system of power and status is characterised by economic self-regulation and thus transformed into a grotesque entity – a 'political gargoyle' of sorts. Under the ideology of self-regulation, it is not governmental effort through legislation or economic policies that can realistically control the undemocratic power of the private owners

of large corporations. That role, Mills argues, now falls to the independent trade unions and left-wing intellectuals. Indeed, it is with labour as a militant political movement, upon which depends a true egalitarian democratic politics.

By 1944, whilst working as a researcher at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR), Mills and his associates conducted opinion surveys of the characteristics of the highest-ranking, policymaking labour leaders affiliated with the largest conglomerates of American unionism. Much as he had previously studied the pragmatists and social pathologists as social types in the manner of Simmel, Mills does the same with the trade union leaders by examining their biographical information including class origin, place of birth, religious affiliation, educational attainment and political party membership. The 'collective portrait' that emerges is that the typical labour leader is US born, of working-class origins, non-college educated, Protestant and a member of the Democratic Party. Although Mills contends that the collective portrait is presented with a minimum of interpretation, later, in *The New Men of Power*, he uses it in a highly politicised way to explain the labour leaders' mentality: their conservative inclinations and careerist motivations.

But if during the war Mills had tempered his enthusiasm for organised labour's political – and militant – potential as a vehicle for radical change, in the immediate post-war years he held back little. In 1945 he began to actively participate in the Inter-Union Institute for Labour and Democracy (IUI), a consortium of labour officials and left-wing intellectuals whose leader, J. B. S. Hardman, held that the labour movement could play a determining role in American politics. The following year, Mills became a contributing editor to the IUI's, *Labor and Nation*, a magazine that sought to unite labour leaders and intellectuals to create a more politically minded union leadership. Affirming Hardman's promotion

of a politicised labour movement, Mills began to see the IUI as an organisation in which union officials and thinkers could work together for the benefit of working people and, along these lines, contributed several essays and addresses to the IUI, a couple of which were later reprinted in Hardman's co-edited volume, *The House of Labor*.

In remarks he made at a meeting of the IUI in early 1946, Mills discussed how pro-labour intellectuals can help trade union leaders in their policy-making decisions. His argument is that because labour leaders do not know how to effectively use social scientific intellectuals, the latter are presented with a 'no mean-sized opportunity' to reveal how their ideas and research skills can render valuable service to the unions. Though they have much to offer, intellectuals have historically been powerless in influencing labour leaders' plans and policies concerning their large and complex organisations. This had been the case with the free-lance research intellectuals, about whom labour leaders have been largely unaware, but who Mills champions for their technical skills and enlarged thinking, to say nothing of their autonomy: they were neither purchased by, nor had a purchase on, the institutions of labour. Here Mills offers a message to which he would return repeatedly throughout his career: that objective social science research can provide useful information in addressing practical problems.

Following the report rendering a collective portrait of labour leaders that Mills had previously published, a second report derived from the same BASR research project on 'leaders of the unions' appeared in 1947 – the year that marked the apogee of Mills's confidence in the labour movement's radical potential. This time, in addition to examining the background characteristics of American labour leaders (age, education, career trajectory, etc.), Mills endeavours to round out the portrait by surveying the leaders' opinions on several issues of political importance, such as whether they

believe that unions have any long-range economic and political programme, business is stronger than labour, the government is responsible for maintaining full employment, fascism is a threat to American democracy.

That same year, Mills published in the IUI's *Labor and Nation* a preliminary analysis, not on the demographics of union leaders, but of 'people in the unions'. Based on data from a national opinion poll, he deduced that nearly one-third of all US adults were members of trade unions or had close relatives who were; 33% of the country's wage-and-salaried workers were union members, which amounted to about 12 million people; 22% of the white-collar men and 50% of the wage working men in the sample were unionised. Moreover, the largest percentage of union members resided in the West region of the US and in large cities. Finally, union members were likely to be better educated than their non-union counterparts. Looking beyond the statistics, the report's underlying message is that the labour movement has the potential to be a politically powerful organisation, given that never before (or since) had a greater percentage of American workers belonged to unions. Equally as significant is something that Mills does not mention in the report: that a massive wave of general and wildcat strikes and mass walkouts had recently swept the country.

MEN OF POWER

These essays and reviews that Mills produced throughout the 1940s, coupled with the survey research he conducted as director of the BASR's Labour Research Division, culminated in his first book, *The New Men of Power*, which appeared in 1948. Here Mills focuses on the American house of labour and explains the ascendancy of union leaders as a newly empowered strategic elite. The result of empirical studies done with 500 of the most powerful labour leaders in the US, *The*

New Men of Power is a study of the character of America's labour leadership – the positions they occupy, their career lines and the traditions and anxieties that motivate them. Mills holds that union officials, by virtue of their occupation had been recently thrust into positions of power.

In examining the values and backgrounds of the top leaders of the major unions Mills argues that due to their similarity in occupation, class, status and power, they exhibited a sameness of personality. Further, because of their relatively low income, they did not belong to the elite of class or status; rather they were members of the elite of power – a power derived solely from the sheer number of rank-and-file union members they represented. As such, their decisions were guided, not by principled political agendas or lofty ideologies, but by mere expediency. Wanting to quickly attain momentary goals through limited policies and piecemeal agitation, the union leaders were short-sighted political opportunists who pandered to their workers. Indeed, they displayed a mentality that prevented them from developing any kind of socialist political programmes. Their specific and immediate job-conscious demands had no connection to any larger societal improvements.

Following the conceptual model proffered in *Character and Social Structure* that relates social role to social structure, Mills treats labour leaders as a social type formed by the roles they play within *corporate capitalism* – the economy dominated by a few hundred economically and politically unrelated corporations. Accordingly, Mills paints a collective portrait of labour officials as comprising a combination of contradictory roles: army general and parliamentary debater, political boss and entrepreneur, rebel and disciplinarian.

As for the general public's view of labour leaders and their unions, that was the result of bad publicity on the one hand, and of no publicity, on the other. Despite the fact that most

Americans were largely unfamiliar with the leaders of trade unions, they nonetheless saw them as lacking a social conscience and a sense of social responsibility. This perception was largely due to the mass media's negative depictions of unions and their leadership. The press typically ignored the stable and constructive features of the union world and instead reported on the deadlocks, strikes and seizures that cast union officials as selfish chieftains who recklessly abused their power. By Mills's estimation, the media made five times as many unfavourable comments about labour as they did favourable comments. To be sure, the American press of the post-war period held such an entrenched and insidious anti-labour point of view that Mills equates it with the prejudice of anti-Semitism in everyday life.

Whilst unions and their leaders were being disparaged by the newspapers, the entertainment media – the radio soap opera, comic strips, movies, pulp fiction – almost never mentioned them. Even the factory worker was virtually unknown in the popular dramas of the time. Mass culture heroes either had no stated occupation or they were professionals and businesspeople of the white-collar strata. Mills was convinced that by their omissions and their whole manner of dramatizing the American scene, particularly their emphasis upon individual effort and individual goals, the mass media were biased against organised labour and thus made it appear strange and sinister. Mills, however, saw these negative appraisals of the generalised other as providing the way forward for labour leaders to conceive new images of themselves.

THE MAIN DRIFT

Operating from the premise that throughout the first half of the twentieth century the United States economy had been afflicted by a recurrent cycle of economic slump, war and material

boom, Mills's concern is with the 'main drift': those historical and structural trends that were moving the US toward a war-oriented economy consolidated around the Cold War conflict with the communist bloc. To avert a sluggish economy, corporate capitalism needed to promote a nuclear arms race that would bring profits to American businesses. This had been the case with the First and Second World Wars that had pulled the US out of economic downturn. Mills believed that the elites of industrial production and of military violence intended to 'solve' the problems of economic slump either by instigating a militarised form of capitalism or starting a war between the two superpowers.

In Mills's view, only labour unions as the country's most progressive agencies of protest could stop the country's trajectory toward an expanding arms economy that required spending large sums on military hardware. As members of a strategic vanguard and the only potentially liberating mass force, the labour leaders along with the labour intellectuals (i.e., the union's lawyers, editors of the union's newspaper, economists, statisticians and research directors), could form an alliance of power and intellect to repel the master trend coordinating the political, economic and military orders that would turn the US into what sociologist Harold Lasswell had called a 'garrison state'. This consolidation of the three institutional orders would give rise to what Mills, in one of his most convoluted phrases, describes as 'the industry-armed forces-State Department axis' or what President Eisenhower more eloquently labelled 'the military-industrial complex'.

Mills also explores the relationship between union leadership and the 'political publics' that consist of active and informed groups of people (only a minute fraction of the US population) with some influence over labour–management policy. Based on the image these small groups held of labour leaders and their unions, Mills classifies them as being on a political spectrum that

includes the liberal centre, the Communists, the practical right and the sophisticated conservatives – all of whom competed for domination of American politics.

The 'liberal centre' consisted mainly of middle-class salaried professionals, mostly teachers and journalists as well as trade union officials. Because they identified labour with 'the people', liberals were pro-labour and saw unions in largely positive terms as economic interest groups, but not as organisations pursuing radical issues and causes. This meant that liberals tended to favour short-run and small-scale changes. They also generally held a positive image of labour leaders seeing them as engaging in mainstream politics and pursuing job-conscious union policies they could support.

The American 'Communists' were the most important minor party in the union world and had already formed powerful cliques in several unions. Like the other politically minded groups, the Communists also saw the unions as instruments for their aims. However, this was a small group given that only about 12% of the labour officials holding general office in the unions were members of the American Communist Party.

The 'practical right' was made up of middle-sized and small businessmen and constituted a significant segment of the Republican Party. Though not so much politically alert as they were 'economically excitable in a political way', the practical right was the largest, most effectively organised and the most respected of the groups. They championed venture capitalism, and their goals were to maximise their profits and disparage the labour leaders, the Communists and other radicals who opposed them. The practical right was vehemently anti-union and opposed labour because they resented its encroachment on their managerial activities. Mills argues that most Americans' notion of 'politics' found expression in the public and clamorous disagreements between the liberal centre and the practical right.

Lastly, the 'sophisticated conservatives' were a shadowy group composed of the directors and managers of big business and finance capital who shunned public attention. They did not create political tumult, nor did they attempt to arouse the indignation of the masses behind whose back the main drift was taking place. They left this task to the practical right. Instead, the sophisticated conservatives stealthy worked with certain politicians, the chief executives of large bureaucratically managed corporations and the top brass of the armed forces and thus coalesced with the so-called industry-armed forces-State Department axis. Believing that the main drift was to their benefit, the sophisticated conservatives steered the US toward a military economy to prevent a recession. To do this, they had to cunningly manipulate the labour unions and their leadership by convincing them that they were a stabilising force and encouraging them to actively oppose insurgent movements and changes. Moreover, sophisticated conservatives co-opted the labour leaders by having them join their personnel and public relations departments and, at the opportune time, replace them with reliable confederates. The object was to use the union officers to de-radicalize its own workers, or to keep the Communists and other leftists away from them. The sophisticated conservatives reasoned that if they could control the labour leaders and use their unions to keep the rank and file acquiescent, they could hold their own until another war began. In short, Mills regards the sophisticated conservatives and the practical right as critical agents of the main drift.

Mills saw the post-war political scene as being dominated by a power play between the sophisticated conservatives and the liberal centre, with the former having the upper hand. As such, he regards labour leaders as a strategic elite that, in a shrinking economy, could organize the politically passive 'mass public' and spark the beginnings of a democratic polity in which

everyone personally affected by social decisions could have a voice in those decisions and also direct involvement in their execution. In such a society 'politics' becomes so integral to workers' daily lives that political attentiveness becomes a main part of their consciousness.

RADICAL PROGRAMMES

To achieve this democratic society Mills advocates that labour formulate egalitarian goals resulting in worker control of production and social ownership of the economy. He proposes several radical programmes of democratic planning that would halt the trend toward a warfare state.

Inspired in part by G. D. H. Cole's 'guild socialism', which advocated worker control, the first alternative programme that Mills proposes is a shop democracy that required increased union membership and a syndicalist ethos so that workers were given greater influence and governance over the social processes of their work. This meant that in every workshop, plant, or office, union workers would take over the tasks performed by industry owners and managers, with no encroachment on shop organisation by the state. In this bottom-up strategy, the democratic aim of unions involved self-management by the rank and file as a whole. The trade union become the workers' immediate 'political community' within which issues directly affecting their daily lives were openly discussed and decided.

The second programme Mills offers for achieving greater democratisation and avoiding slump without resorting to war, is an economic one that requires the 'nationalisation' of the means of industrial production along with the 'socialisation' of the organisation of work by giving the workers greater control and thus humanising them. This socialisation of the work process had to be demanded by union leadership, for it

was in the workplace, more so than the polling place, that the 'new man' of a democratic society would be formed.

Mills's third proposal requires the formation of a non-sectarian labour party removed from the practical right and the liberal centre and that would provide a link between left intellectuals and the labour movement. More importantly, it would counteract the sophisticated conservatives' desire for a war-oriented economy. Such a political programme would increase workers' autonomy beyond the labour unions and organise a scatter of unions into a true progressive movement. The combined efforts of the labour party and the union provided an 'intellectual forum' in which the political consciousness of the US worker could be aroused. In sum, it was through the workshop, economic, and political programmes that the unions and their leaders could rail against the establishment of a corporate state presiding over a permanent militarised capitalism.

DISILLUSIONMENT

Despite these labour-based radical programmes for democratising the workplace and empowering workers, much of *The New Men of Power* is a general indictment of organised labour. To be sure, Mills pessimistically held that whatever the union leaders did, their actions would inevitably be subject to a coincidence of forces that propelled the impulse toward a military economy. One such force was that labour leaders in their collective bargaining unquestionably accepted the 'rhetoric of liberalism' that encouraged them to cooperate and compromise with business, to ensure their mutual success. Mills views this cartel-like arrangement between business and labour – a partnership that was legitimised by the local political machine but also the national government – as being promulgated by the rhythm of slum, war and boom. Further,

organised labour had transformed unions into profit-making enterprises with union bosses acting more like mob bosses who engaged in dubious practices, including racketeering with local contractors. They treated their members' labour power as a commodity to be sold on the market for narrow gains with no consideration of societal or even industry needs, much less have any aspiration for a radical shift in American politics. Thus, far from being politically radical, labour leaders desired only to stabilise their power and position. To Mills's dismay, they were too conservative politically and too inhibited intellectually to seek the egalitarian, democratic society. In short, Mills holds that labour had been co-opted into a collaborationist policy with business and government, previously made necessary by the war, but that was now paving the way for the development of a corporate type of political economy.

By the end of *The New Men of Power*, Mills's disillusionment with organised labour had become total. He had little confidence that union leaders, who had acquiesced to the world of big business, war contracts and sweetheart deals, could broker any opposition to the main drift. Indeed, he did not believe that they were politically alert to it. They had power but were not entirely certain what to do with it. They abandoned political programmes that gave long-run answers to major political questions, for the expediency of a tough-minded politics based on short-run decisions. Similarly, the labour intellectual discarded ideas and ideals for career advancement and status. Thus, as administrators in a bureaucratic oligarchy, labour leaders and labour intellectuals had not and would not become the vanguard force of any revolutionary change. Rather, they were the rear-guard, defenders of the war economy that was increasingly limiting the country's prospects for achieving a genuine democracy.

In Mills's final statement on the matter, an essay that appeared 6 years after *The New Men of Power*, he closes the door firmly on the possibility that labour leaders and labour unions could play any decisive role in the political economy of the United States. This notwithstanding, he was not yet ready to dismiss them entirely from his sociological analysis of power and social stratification. Mills now argued that it was necessary to situate them within the larger network of reciprocal interactions involving the business corporations and the political state. Thus, the functions of union officials, as leaders of organised interest groups, should be seen in the most general terms: in the context of their membership in a national power elite.

5

THE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASSES

At the time that Mills, as director of the BASR's Labour Research Division, was conducting his studies on the various roles of leaders, unions and intellectuals of labour, he was also amassing a great deal of occupational data for his second book on class-based stratified power, *White Collar*. Pessimistic about the prospect that the labour movement could be a viable contributor to an American social democracy, Mills turned his social psychological observations away from the wage workers and toward the salaried employees that were coming to prevail in US mass society.

Mills's investigations in this direction began, however, with the upper class. This took the form of a socio-historical study he initiated whilst still at Maryland and that appeared in late 1945 after he joined the BASR. The study involved using statistical analysis to sketch a collective portrait of the 'American business elite': those men commonly considered to be successful in business between the Colonial period and World War I. As he had done with the pragmatists, pathologists and union leaders, Mills now examined the character structure – determined by class origins, social status and

father's occupation – of nearly 1,500 of these eminent men of business, most of whom were involved in finance, trade, manufacturing, transport and communication. The general picture that emerged from the data is that the typical member of the US business elite was born of the upper classes, was better educated than most and had a father who was also in business. Particularly significant was that nearly half of these prominent businessmen had held political positions in local, state and/or federal government. This latter finding – that elite men of business had participated quite heavily in the political life of the United States – would become an important factor in Mills's later analysis of overlapping elites of power and wealth.

Mills's second investigation on stratification that moved away from the working class, and the first that pointedly examined the middle classes, came partly from research he did for the Smaller War Plants Corporation, the World War II government agency charged with promoting effective utilisation of small businesses producing war material. In this case Mills analysed the types of businesses that predominated in several US cities. In addition, he also utilised information collected at the BASR for research done in another city on perceptions of small businessmen. These two data sets resulted in a study that Mills published the following year, 1946, in the *American Sociological Review* on the 'white collar strata': those small businessmen and white-collar workers who occupied the ambiguous social position between big business and factory labour. This study, like the previous one on the business elite, also considered the stratification factors of class income and political power; but now he looked more closely at social *status* in the context of mass society.

Mills found that because the small businessmen had relatively high incomes, lower-class wage workers saw them as higher-ups. However, because they did not come from the

right background – in terms of occupational origin, intermarriage, job history and education – the upper-class perceived them generally as clerks and foremen with low status. These polarised perceptions endowed the white-collar workers with an ambiguity of prestige – which compelled them to make as their main goal, a claim for status. Like the shop workers, the office workers were neither class conscious nor politically alert; they were, however, primarily status seekers, a situation that had earlier been recognised by Veblen in his observations of conspicuous consumers.

In another essay of 1946, this one appearing in the *Partisan Review*, Mills describes the new type of 'competitive personality' that was gaining prominence among middle class employees of the state and corporate bureaucracies. In the nineteenth century, in the era of classical liberalism, free and open competition between enterprises for purposes of expansion had been the practice of independent individuals such as the captains of industry. But by the twentieth century, Mills maintains, the white-collar workers were engaging in a different kind of competition; one that was more hesitant and indirect, that took the form of grubbing and backbiting, and that involved using the power of their personality in contending for the good will and favour of their bosses.

With this new focus on white-collar workers, Mills considered their potential as change mechanisms, and in a two-part essay for *Labor and Nation*, he examined the extent of white-collar unionism and its meaning to the white-collar mass. At the time, somewhat over 16% of the white-collar professionals were members of labour unions, as contrasted with 44% of wage workers. Whilst social conditions were propitious for successfully organising the remainder of the salaried workforce, Mills was nonetheless aware that there were several factors in the white-collar employee's work situations that predisposed them against unionising: they had

little personal contact with union personnel or friends or relatives who were union members; their political affiliation frequently encouraged anti-union feeling and rhetoric; they felt that they could improve their work situations on their own individual effort. As for what the unions meant to office employees, their attitudes were mixed: unions signified a rise in the white-collar workers' economic gains, but also a loss in their status claims; they represented the worker's greater dependence on the union as a bureaucratic organisation, but also increased these worker's power in the politics of economic bargaining.

In the essay's second part, Mills analyses white-collar unionism's potential influence on the political character and organisation of US labour and on the country's political economy. He holds that the greater presence of white-collar workers in the unions would expand their mass base into the middle classes thus allowing them, as a set of interest groups, to be involved in bigger and more far-reaching bargains in the democratic political economy. Mills cautions, however, that all this depended on white-collar unionism's relationship with business and government – and in a time of the main drift toward a garrison state, no insurgent tendencies in the unions, whether blue collar or white collar, could be expected. With or without the unions, the trend towards militarisation was threatening American democracy.

THE MIDDLE CLASSES OF MASS SOCIETY

Whatever Mills's personal and political reasons for turning his sociological gaze toward the middle-classes – whether because of his renouncement of labour as the essential revolutionising agent, or because he half-hoped white-collar workers would organise and, driven by their status aspirations, kindle an

insurgent political movement – one thing is certain: post-war America began to increasingly pin its future hopes on the growing white collar strata.

The middle-class scene during the middle of the twentieth century evoked social images of fear and doubt – of what Mills described as people having a sense of being trapped in their own life-situations, of what W. H. Auden diagnosed as 'the age of anxiety'. This was a collective anxiety, frequently accompanied by a tacit rage, as reflected the Anglo-American fiction of the time whose characters and their creators, whether they were looking back in anger or identifying with lucky Jim, exhibited a deep complacency and social consensus.

In the United States, Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* struck a nerve with the middle classes of the 1950s. The novel's anti-hero, the man in the grey flannel suit – that faceless and lonely everyman of mass society – came to be regarded as the exemplary figure of alienation in a frantic white-collar, middle-class world. This was a routinised existence of superficial politeness, sombre conventionality and unquestioning industriousness. In Wilson's telling the figure is depicted by 33-year-old Tom Rath, who had served in the army during World War II and now works as an executive in public relations in New York City. Rath desperately attempts to adapt to the insecurity of post-war civilian life. Each morning, he leaves his home in the Connecticut suburbs to make a living in the big city. Each evening, his wife, Betsy, and their three children meet him at the commuter train station when he arrives home from work. The Raths symbolised the frustrations, tensions, restlessness and discontent of the American middle classes.

The problem of pliant conformity among the middle classes was also being explored in the social sciences. Two books of post-war social analysis, influential in the genre, deserve attention. The first to do so with adroitness was the popularly

acclaimed *The Lonely Crowd*, authored principally by Mills's friend at the time, the sociologist David Riesman. Here Riesman and his associates render a historicist social-psychological depiction of middle-class Americans. Further, in exploring the relationship between societal experiences and their effects on individuals' mode of conformity, Riesman produces a tripartite typification of cultural epochs and their associated social character. Accordingly, he couples the historical transition from folk to industrial to mass society with the transition from tradition-directed to inner-directed to other-directed personality types.

Because social change was minimal in 'folk' societies, they produced 'tradition-directed' people with a conventionalist social character readily accepting of enduring institutionalised roles. In folk societies, conformity was secured by inculcating the young with absolute obedience to tradition. Later, as Western societies expanded through exploration, colonisation and imperialism, this necessitated that people develop individualistic attitudes for exploiting a hostile environment. Required in this case was the 'inner-directed' character structure as the dominant mode of ensuring conformity through internalised controls. Inner-directed people, epitomised by the 'old' middle class of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries – banker, tradesman, small entrepreneur – were indoctrinated to pursue money, possessions, power and fame. This inner-directed personality type, prominent in 'industrial' society, was personified by the rugged individualist who, driven by the Protestant work ethic, sought to succeed through incessant productivity.

Finally, post-war America's 'mass' society, with its highly centralised and bureaucratised social structure, was marked by material affluence and an endless consumption of goods, services and information. Here, large-scale organisations functioned as mechanisms of social control by making people

hypersensitive to the actions and wishes of others. Thus, among the 'new' middle class – particularly those engaged in white-collar work and in the service sector – there was emerging an 'other-directed' social character that valued, not individual achievement, but interpersonal skills. As such, other-directed people sought, above all, admiration and guidance from their peers, colleagues and associates. This made the white middle-class Americans of the 1950s friendly but shallow, unsure of themselves and in desperate need of approval.

Owing to their need to monitor and receive messages from various sources – and to appease and please – the other-directed people were afflicted with a diffuse characterological anxiety. Additionally, they exhibited civic apathy, political indifference and resignation. In their attempt at over-conformity, the other-directed people were neither morally committed to political principles nor emotionally involved in political events. Like the clinical symptom of flat affect, they presented with a political and personal style of tolerance, devoid of all emotion.

The other significant book in that social science genre was William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, which was a study of the ideology, the social norms and values, of the new middle classes, which Whyte identified as those strata that formed the first and second echelons of organisation life. In an age of large-scale organisation – dominated by corporations and government bureaus – these middle-class workers had become the dominant members of society and their values set the American cultural temper. They included the company men, the junior executives, the physician working for a managed care organisation, the physicist in a government laboratory, the intellectual on a foundation-sponsored team project, the engineer in the huge draughting room and the junior partner in a large law firm. These employees, says

Whyte, not only worked for the organisation, they belonged to it. They were deeply beholden to the organisation even as they complained of the 'treadmill', the 'rat race' and their inability to control their own destiny. Indeed, most saw themselves as objects more acted upon than acting.

Whyte holds that with the growth of the organisation society, new cultural norms had become ascendant. These were antithetical to the Protestant ethic that in the nineteenth century had emphasised rugged individualism, personal independence and freedom, and prized the virtues of hard work, thrift and competition. In contrast, the big firms which, by the mid-century, had come to dominate much of American life, underscored cooperation and getting on with people. An ideological shift had taken place in the organisation, and the Protestant ethic had given way to what Whyte terms the 'social ethic': the ideology that endorsed the workaday world's dominance over the individual and that placed a high premium on scientism, belongingness and togetherness.

'Scientism' involved applying the scientific method to human relations to achieve belongingness. In this way industrial-organisational psychologists, group therapists and public relations experts could contribute to a science of human relations that would help all members of the organisation to achieve total integration. The downside, warns Whyte, is that scientism came perilously close to demanding that individuals sacrifice their personal beliefs, initiative and imagination in order to belong. 'Belongingness' referred to the belief that the ultimate and most urgent need of individuals was to feel a part of a group. The organisation presumably created an environment where everyone was tightly knit with one another. The reasoning was that if you were loyal to the company, the company would be loyal to you. This manner of thinking was partly based on the notion that in the rapidly changing world in which the company man or woman was in a state of

anomie, or rootlessness, fealty to the organisation was a logical way to develop stability and security. 'Togetherness' was a belief that people wanted to belong together. Because they usually worked in groups – at the conference table, the workshop, the seminar, on the team project – the organisation people were team players, preoccupied with collaborative work. Whyte argues that in devoting so much attention to scientism, belongingness and togetherness, mass society had come to glorify the bureaucratic organisation and create a highly structured assemblage of sycophantic and obsequious workers of the middle-class strata.

WHITE COLLAR

Mills goes further and deeper than either Riesman or Whyte in his exploration of the middle-class experience under conditions of extreme bureaucratisation in his book, *White Collar*, which appeared in 1951, just one year after *The Lonely Crowd* and five years before *The Organization Man*. Borrowing directly from Weber such concepts as class, occupation, status, power, authority, manipulation, bureaucracy and profession, Mills takes a distinctly Weberian approach in this social-psychological analysis of the 'new' or salaried middle classes, particularly the other-directed white-collar workers in the large firms.

For the study, Mills and his research team at the Bureau of Applied Social Research interviewed 128 white-collar workers in New York City. These respondents – middle managers, professionals, secretaries and shop assistants, many of whom worked in law firms, insurance companies, universities, government offices and large department stores – were asked dozens of questions about various occupation-related topics. In addition, Mills encouraged his interviewers

to endeavour to understand the respondents' deepest thoughts and feelings. This required that the interviewers pose intensive, probing questions, which meant that the interrogations frequently lasted several hours. Mills also relied on the fieldwork he undertook as part of the Smaller War Plants study where he examined the stratification and power structure of various US cities. This information helped him to consider the social psychology – the link between individual character and social structure – of the American middle class. In addition, whilst at the BASR Mills tabulated a wide range of statistical data that he obtained from several government agencies including the US Census Bureau, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labour. All this effort was motivated not only by his professional desire to define and dramatise the essential characteristics of the time, but also by his personal desire to articulate his own experience in New York City since his relocation there six years earlier. More than that, *White Collar* was the book that he had been writing, if you like, since he was 10 years old when he watched his white-collared father getting ready for another sales trip.

Notwithstanding Mills's discontent with the labour movement, he remained steadfast in his search for brokers of social and historical change. By the late-1940s, he began to consider more and more the middle-class leftward intellectuals – professors, journalists, researchers – as the last hope for US society to achieve a true democratic political system. Though they had similar interests to the workers, Mills knew that they and other white-collar professionals would be difficult to win over due to their complacency and alienation. Thus, as he continued his inquiry into the coalition of power and intellect, his exploration of the intellectuals' role in the stratification system led Mills to investigate middle class life in the great metropolis. Above

all, *White Collar* is a social psychological study of the new middle classes and their place in mid-twentieth century urban America.

AN OCCUPATIONAL SHIFT

In *White Collar* Mills commences his analysis of the US class structure with the proposition that the twentieth century's most decisive social transformation was an occupational shift that had begun in the nineteenth century. Before the 1860s business was composed mainly of moneylenders and bankers who were controlled by powerful vested interests in eastern urban centres. These early self-employed enterprisers also included merchants, speculators, shippers and small-scale manufacturers. Further down the occupational ladder was the mechanic or journeyman who hoped to own his own shop; or the farmer for whom manufacturing was a side-line, sometimes operated as a cottage industry. After the US Civil War, increased industrial growth gave rise to the captain of industry, the businessman who was an active owner of the business he created and managed. This was the era of classic liberalism, of laissez-faire and of expanding capitalism. At this point, economic life was largely decentralised.

However, as US society became more bureaucratised during the twentieth century, and as corporate power became more centralised, the 'old' or propertied middle classes of the shop-keepers and independent professionals, began to dwindle in number and importance. As small business became smaller and big business became bigger, that is to say, as the United States was transformed from a nation of small proprietors to a nation of hired employees, the captains of industry and other owner-operators gave way to a different breed of businessmen: managers, corporate executives and 'new entrepreneurs'. These

structural and occupational changes created a world of large-scale organisations inhabited by the new middle class, or those property-less white-collar workers involved primarily in sales and management and whose work situation was bureaucratised by the command hierarchies of business and government.

Mills notes that major shifts in the occupation structure since the late-nineteenth century made it so that fewer workers manipulated things and more handled people and symbols. This change in needed skills was another way of describing the numerical upthrust of the white-collar workers, who were hired for their proficiency in handling documents, money and people: the managerial, technical and professional employees, the office workers and the sales personnel. They were expert at dealing with people temporarily and impersonally; they were masters of commercial, professional and technical relationships. In short, the white-collar workers of the new middle classes – which constituted about one-fourth of the labour force at the time Mills was writing – did not live by making things; rather, they lived off the social machineries that organised and coordinated the people who *did* make things. As dependent employees they planned, administered, recorded, distributed and managed for others.

As an occupational stratum the new middle class included corporate managers, clerical workers and bureaucratic professionals such as salesmen and public relations specialists who managed, designed, sold and kept account of production. Labour markets determined their life chances relative to class, status and power. By the 1950s the new middle class was becoming the dominant reality in American life.

One of Mills's main theses in *White Collar* is that the increased bureaucratisation of modern society that Weber predicted had centralised property ownership and produced an occupational shift from independent property holding to

dependent job holding. In just a few generations, the United States had been transformed from a nation of free and independent small capitalists engaged in craftsman-like work to a nation of employees hired to work in massive organisational structures. Americans had become encased in a Weberian 'iron cage' of the industrial and bureaucratic state in which types of organisation men (and women) emerged.

CHEERFUL ROBOTS

In the social psychology text, *Character and Social Structure*, which Mills was writing concurrently with *White Collar*, he identifies as one of the master trends of modern times the psychological problems of office employees whilst at work in the fragmented environments of bureaucratic organisations. Because these workers did not have the opportunity to take stock of their whole working situation or make decisions for themselves, they experienced feelings of powerless and anxiety. In the case of the white-collar workers working in large firms, their psychological issues were typically those of frustration, despair and insecurity – stemming from the fact that they could not realise themselves in their work, seeing it as no more than a set of sellable skills. For example, Mills contends that as the market became more formally rational, in the sense of Weber, salespeople lost autonomy. They sold the goods of others and had nothing to do with selecting the product or setting the price.

Moreover, power in the giant business corporations was no longer expressed through forthright authority; it was now a matter of impersonal manipulation through management. Bureaucratic management was accomplished through an anonymous system of centralised command that took the form of an administrative summons, an electronic voice, an

illegible signature. At bottom, exploitation of the worker was done subtly, through psychological means.

Because these institutional manipulations stripped the white-collar workers of any determination over their work, they lacked a sense of craftsmanship, of creating their own product. The managers, clerks and bookkeepers of the corporation were cogs in a business-machinery that had routinised greed and made aggression an impersonal principle of organisation. They had become bureaucrats, professionalised occupants of specified offices and specialised tasks. Mills holds that these professionals were forced to accept the meaninglessness of their working life. In Marxian terms, they became alienated from power, work and self.

Further, the more the middle classes experienced their life as one of powerlessness, the more apathetic and indifferent they became to all politics. They were neither radical, nor liberal, nor conservative, nor reactionary. They were 'inactionary', strangers to politics and history was being made behind their backs. This state of affairs – which Mills believed was at the heart of the political malaise of the time – threatened the democratic and liberal spirit of the American past, which assumed that once given political rights, the individual citizen would naturally become politically alert and act on his or her interests. Only by breaking through the white-collar workers' political indifference could their power be mobilised to promote the development of a harmonious industrial society. This was not likely to happen, however, because the white-collar middle classes did not form an independent power base; indeed, they were even less politically organised than the wage workers. Lacking class consciousness, the middle classes had no awareness of their political goals and options. They did not pose a significant

challenge to the power structure of the economic elites. In short, says Mills, middle class white-collar employees had become 'cheerful robots', a mass of confused and unfocused automatons adrift in a bureaucratic world not of their own making. In Mills's view, middle class America was drifting toward a bureaucratic age of organised irresponsibility.

THE MANAGERIAL DEMIURGE

In his 1946 study on the white-collar pyramid, Mills had found that the small businessmen and white-collar workers occupied an intermediate position in the US stratification hierarchy. The images that members of the upper and lower strata had of the different occupational income levels was of big business at the top with labour at the bottom, and everyone else was cast into an amorphous 'middle class'. Indeed, there was no clearly identifiable middle class given that these strata were socially diverse, had opposing interests, held different ideologies and possessed no consistent political base among them. White-collar people could therefore not be properly located on any one dimension of stratification, whether skill, function, class, status or power. Because they were generally in the middle ranges on each of these dimensions, their position was more definable based on their relative differences from other strata.

Mills notes that as the means of administration were enlarged, nationalised and professionalised, the managerial type of person gained crucial importance in the business firms, government agencies and labour unions. What Mills calls the 'managerial demiurge' consisted of those executives, the new entrepreneurs, whose power was ascribed and circumscribed by the hierarchical bureaucracy for which they worked. They

were especially comfortable in the still developing fields of advertising, mass media communication and public relations. The new entrepreneurs were agents of the bureaucracy they served. Their career paths involved regular zigzagging within and between the entangled worlds of big business, the military establishment and politics.

In addition to these three bureaucracies, the managerial demiurge also operated among the intellectuals. Returning to his former interest in the thinking class – the novelists, artists and political writers who constitute part of the middle-class professional entrepreneurs – Mills posits that in the post-war period American intellectuals had begun to experience a loss of political will and moral hopelessness. They felt themselves to be beleaguered and defeated by a private and public malaise. Attempts to reinstate the earlier pragmatic emphasis on the power of people's intelligence to control their own destiny had, by mid-century not been taken up by the US intelligentsia, racked as it was by novel worries and anxieties. The American intellectuals' failure of political nerve and radical ideas stemmed from three social developments related to the managerial demiurge. First, intellectuals were no longer 'free' given that they had been co-opted by the bureaucracies of the popular media and other corporate organisations for which they worked; this denied them freedom of thought and dissent. Second, the big firms demanded that salaried intellectuals create and disseminate ideological messages among the mass publics that supported and justified the interests of those organisations. Third, intellectuals employed in the giant corporations had become mere technicians of existing powers – careerists more interested in living off, rather than for, ideas. These trends, which led to the constraint and rationalisation of the intellect, made the intellectuals impotent.

CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY

Another of Mills's goals in *White Collar* was to analyse and explicate the white-collar workers' character and personality. In so doing he identifies several social types found within the white-collar strata of the big city. As marketing became a pervasive business activity, the art of handling, selling and servicing people transformed US society into a 'great sales-room' preoccupied with the distribution of goods. In the big merchandise stores, corporate executives, supported by an entire salesforce of personnel, were driven by an obsession to peddle a variety of commodities to a customer base.

Further examining the psychological aspects of white-collar work, Mills finds that business employees not only sold their services on the labour market, but also and most grievously, auctioned their self on the 'personality market'. Consequently, customers related to the shop assistant not as a person, but as a salaried mask, ever-ready with a superficial greeting and an artificial thank-you. Kindness and friendliness, as aspects of customer service, became formulaic to make a sale. With insincerity the successful salespersons adapted for economic use their own appearance and personality. Loyalty to the anonymous organisation required that salespeople be perpetually friendly, helpful and courteous, regardless of their true feelings. The fixed smile behind the sales counter, a company rule, was a commercialised lure. The white-collar work-world was inhabited by cheerful robots where everyone feigned interest in others, only to manipulate them. The imposition of a sales personality upon the employees, Mills argues, thwarted their creativity and contributed to their alienation.

Mills further describes the white-collar occupational world as an 'enormous file', an impersonal administrative hierarchy consisting of an army of clerks and a cadre of managers

engaged in specialised and standardised tasks in various divisions and units. The enormous file, with its human mechanisation and social rationalisation, was most graphically illustrated by open-plan offices with rows of identical desks where file clerks, typists or accountants tediously performed repetitive paperwork.

Owing to the alienating conditions of white-collar work – stemming from the bureaucratisation of productivity, the psychological manipulation of employees, the managerial demiurge, the personality market and the enormous file – for the mass of employees, work was experienced as a largely unpleasant task. And because there existed a separation between the product and the processes of work, white-collar professionals could not acquire a sense of craftsmanship – of meaning and gratification – from their jobs. As such, the white-collar personnel of the enormous file, that uniform mass working in an office or salesroom where the day is regulated by an impersonal work schedule, sought instead to derive meaning and gratification from their leisure time.

The Protestant work ethic, which had previously made no distinction between work and leisure, had been supplanted by a 'leisure ethic' that segregated the two spheres. This meant that the white-collar people pursued amusement and distraction outside work only to be bored at work and restless at play. For Mills the white-collar workers' dilemma was that each weekday they sold little pieces of themselves in exchange for pleasure and enjoyment at the weekend. The cycle of work and leisure gave rise to two different images of self: the everyday image, based upon work, and the holiday image, based upon leisure. The leisure and consumption of the white-collar middle classes diverted them from the restless grind of their jobs by the absorbing grind of passive enjoyment of glamour and thrills. To the modern worker, media-inspired leisure was the way to spend money; work

was the way to make it. When the two compete, says Mills, leisure wins decisively.

Mills's bleak and pitiful portrait of white-collar life reveals the ethos of what was, at the time, becoming more typically American. It is a sociological depiction that provides insight into the structure and meaning of US society, as well as the hopes and status-related anxieties that gripped the new middle classes in the middle of the twentieth century. Their frantic and routinised world gave rise to the social type that Mills calls the 'new little man'. Too concerned with being industrious, conforming, and practical, the new little man had no firm roots, no definite loyalties to sustain his life and give it a centre.

ADDRESSING WHITE COLLAR AUDIENCES

About a year after the publication of *White Collar*, in a final effort to further scrutinise the unionisation of the middle classes, late in 1952 Mills spoke at a conference of the American Management Association and took a concluding 'look at the white collar'. Addressing an audience of office managers and personnel officers, who were themselves white-collar people, Mills tells them that due to their white-collar employees' tension and uneasiness about lowered status, decreased income and job routinisation, it was only a matter of time before offices became significantly unionised. Further, he informs his audience that their efforts to stave off the unions by dealing with the personnel problems of the white-collar employee through various incentives would not succeed because, as was the case with shop workers, unionisation would solve many of the office workers' income and security concerns. Even at this late date, Mills had not quite given up on organising the white-collar strata.

During the late 1950s Mills turned his attention to the occupational challenges of white-collar workers in the designing arts: engineers, city planners, landscape designers, artists and architects. In a talk he delivered at the International Design Conference in 1958, Mills explains that because designers worked in a consumerist economy that emphasised mass distribution and commercialisation, they were experiencing guilt, insecurity and frustration. Whatever the designer's aesthetic pretensions and engineering abilities, they were under intense pressure to sell their work with all the marketing techniques available to them. Rather than servicing a variety of publics with the arts and skills and crafts, designers were instead creating needless wants in a vast consuming public. Their designing and redesigning of products contributed to the debasement of imagination, taste and sensibility. This mass marketing of culture was turning designers into commercial hacks, second-rate mass producers of commercially established banal and formulaic slogans, pulp fiction, blueprints and jingles. In short, Mills told them, they were losing their sense of craftsmanship.

In another talk he delivered the following year, 1959, at a conference sponsored by Canada's Couchiching Institute on Public Affairs, Mills directed his comments at 'the big city' in the context of mass culture. Cities, Mills informs his audience of city planners, landscape designers and architects, were not real communities; rather they were largely unplanned monstrosities in which people were trapped in mindless, repetitive routines and in their own narrow, everyday milieus of home, workplace and neighbourhood. Not only did city dwellers become habituated to the built-in inconveniences and nagging frustrations of urban life, they normalised them.

The main forces that have a determining influence on the city, Mills continues, are the real estate, land development and advertising interests that had been involved in the

expropriation and profitable misuses of the urban environment. These commercial powers, concerned only with capital gain and material accumulation, had created ugly wastelands because of the civic incompetence and apathy to which the people of a mass society and mass culture had fallen.

Mills charges city planners, landscape designers and architects with lacking a view of the larger structural issues and of subordinating their talents and skills to the service of the rich and powerful. Architects, he argues, were largely involved in beautifying and polishing up the isolated environments of the wealthy and of corporations. They must become autonomous professionals that demand a voice in decisions of structural consequence. Professionals of the aesthetic arts must stop contributing to the chaos of the commercial frenzy, the banalisation of sensibility and the deliberate planning of obsolescence. All who are interested in the city as a place for human living, says Mills, needed to develop reasonable ideas for reshaping the urban built environment into one that attended to human needs.

Mills was now ready to turn his attention from the masses of white-collar workers to the high and the mighty – the ruling circles of wealth and power in America.

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THE HIGH AND THE MIGHTY

C. Wight Mills's most influential and provocative book, the last one in his trilogy on class structure and power relations, *The Power Elite*, appeared in 1956. A social psychological exposition of stratification focussing on a tripartite ruling stratum in the United States, *The Power Elite* extends issues that had previously been raised in *The New Men of Power* and *White Collar*. The book's central theme is that, as the means of decision making became more concentrated, there had arisen a national group made up of a governing triumvirate – a power elite – with tiers and ranges of authority and influence that was undermining American democracy. Briefly put, the power elite group comprised those individuals in the corporate and government institutions that collectively had the most clout to make coordinated decisions about events of historic consequence. Together, these individuals and institutions formed what Mills had previously identified as the industry-armed forces-State Department triangle of power.

In two precursory essays – both of which appeared in popular magazines during late 1952 and portions of which

were reprinted in *The Power Elite* – Mills advances ideas fundamental to understanding the operations of people wielding enormous influence. In the first piece, published in the *New York Times Magazine*, Mills addresses the American public's moral uneasiness with the structural corruption that was widespread in many institutions, particularly in high places in government and business. This higher immorality, Mills explains, was the result of the older moral values – of willpower, of honesty, of work – being hollowed out, along with the failure to create new and viable ones. Powerful people, Mills states, had acquired a blunted moral sensitivity and became ruthless in their pursuit of wealth and influence.

In the other article, which appeared in the monthly magazine, *Pageant*, Mills and his wife, Ruth (who was his chief researcher and editorial advisor on *The Power Elite*), made available the results of their original study on the social backgrounds and careers of the 495 most successful men in US national politics between 1789 and 1952. From this statistical data there emerged a portrait of those leaders who enjoyed the most authority and prestige – the national political elite – that held the positions of President, Vice-President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Cabinet Member and Supreme Court Justice. The composite indicated that they tended to come from an upper-income family of English or Dutch descent, had relatives in politics, were educated at an Ivy League college, practised law prior to entering state politics, and rose to national office before reaching the top, innermost circle of the political directorate.

In another statement preliminary to *The Power Elite* that he wrote for the first issue of the left-wing intellectual magazine, *Dissent*, in 1954, Mills examines the roles of the top leaders of the major unions as members of the national power elite. His main point is that only by considering the labour leaders in interaction with businessmen and politicians – and

their unions in interplay with corporations and government agencies – can they be understood as a going concern of the US political economy.

In yet another pre-*Power Elite* essay of the following year, 1955, which also appeared in *Dissent*, Mills notes that, (1) alongside the capitalist elite – the very rich – were the celebrities of national glamour whose role was to distract from moral issues of the economic, military and political power, (2) because knowledge and power were not united inside the higher circles, this meant that the elite of power, wealth and celebrity were not the elite of culture, knowledge and sensibility and (3) because knowledge was equated with being 'smart', in a society that prized power and economic wealth, cleverness was valued as their instrument. In both essays for *Dissent*, Mills frames his observations on the elite circles of power around the general theme of a 'conservative mood' that prevailed in post-war US mass society that had been indoctrinated by the media. This was a mood characteristic of people living in an economic prosperity, a nationalist conceit and a political vacuum who not only readily accepted the pluralist, or interest-group understanding of US democracy but also the rhetoric of liberalism. As such, Americans were unwilling to recognise, much less confront, the existence a network of power that was national in its pervasiveness.

In an address he delivered in Detroit in the spring of 1955, Mills proffers an *institutional* conception of what he means by the 'power elite'. Acknowledging that previous definitions lacked clarity – including, for example, Pareto's idea that the elite were those who disproportionately possessed valued things – Mills provides a coherent picture of the power elite as a whole and defines them according to their institutional *position* as heads of America's major hierarchies and organisations: state, industry and army. He notes that all previous

descriptions of the elite consider it about the three items of greatest social value: power, money and status.

Concerning power, Mills relies on a Weberian understanding of it and argues that the elite can realise their will, even if others resist them. Going further, he adds that because they have access to the institutional means of management and manipulation, the elite leaders make *decisions* that have the greatest immediate and direct influence on the course of events in the United States and the rest of the world. Concerning money, here again Mills looks at institutional position, which in this case involves the legal and managerial relations that the richest families have with the largest business firms from which they derive their vast fortunes. Finally, the power elite's high prestige and celebrity is also anchored in the top positions they occupy in the polity, economy and military. Mills's institutional definition suggests that the elite's unity is largely dependent on the degree to which the pivotal institutions were interconnected. In short, the power elite group consisted of those people who occupied the paramount ranks in the big institutions that were the major bases of power, wealth and celebrity. Put another way, they were the most powerful, wealthiest and most celebrated people in America.

THE POWER ELITE

In a letter Mills penned one year after *The Power Elite* was published, he candidly admitted to having a long-time constitutional inability to sympathise with, and a temperamental distrust of, the 'upper dogs'. Mills identifies the upper dogs – the power elite of US society – as those individuals and families of the upper stratum who possessed a disproportionate amount of power, money and prestige. They occupied the top levels of the three large-scale institutional

hierarchies – the political machinery, the big corporations and the military establishment – and, as such, monopolised the means of public administration, economic production and of martial violence. As members of the political directorate, the corporate rich and the high military, the instituted elite presided over the strategic command posts of a global superpower, which meant that what they decided, or failed to decide, had consequences of national and international significance.

The American power elite consisted of related cliques unified on certain points of agreement and mostly during crisis periods of war and economic recession. Although their continued association was marked by shared beliefs and social congeniality, these decision makers nonetheless experienced an uneasy alliance between the polity, economy and military. This notwithstanding, it tended to form a coherent grouping with an inner core made up of select personnel who interchanged commanding roles at the peak of one dominant institutional order with those in another, as when, for example, the soldier-statesman became a corporate chairman of the board. The correspondence was particularly concordant with the movement of corporate officials into and out of top political positions, as happened when the chief executive officer of a major industry also served as a member of the president's cabinet. We now look at each of the three highest circles of wealth and power in America and the social types of decision makers involved in each domain.

The 'political elite' was comprised of key officials in the main sections of the federal government, but particularly the president, vice-president and cabinet members. It also included the White House staff as well as the most important appointed heads of major federal agencies and commissions, such as the National Security Council. Indeed, the executive branch of government (the Eisenhower administration at the

time) was far more influential than at any previous period in US history. Mills attributes the political directorate's increased administrative and legislative power to the expansive growth of the federal bureaucracy and the president's greatly enhanced role in making foreign policy.

Rather than relying on career politicians who pursued a true 'calling' for 'politics as a vocation', in the sense of Weber, the political elite largely consisted of political appointees. Mills notes that the Eisenhower administration was mainly made up of members and allies of the corporate rich as well as of generals and admirals who were assigned to their political posts. Though a sizeable number of the higher politicians in that administration were elected officials, most were not, and several had never previously held public office. Aside from occupying the executive command posts in the high councils of state, the political elite were also the legal, managerial and financial members of the corporate elite.

The 'corporate elite' consisted of persons who occupied the top command posts in the giant enterprises, like General Motors, General Electric and Gulf Oil, whose assets and revenues were in the billions of dollars. It also included top-level management, the major stockholders and the corporate lawyers representing the largest financial institutions and business firms in the country. At the upper-most stratum of the mid-century US economy were the high-ranking executives, the 'corporate rich', who managed the conglomerates and made the key economic decisions. These CEOs received high salaries and bonuses, either in stock or cash, paid out in long-term instalments. As such, they inhabited a business world of privilege and prerogative replete with impressive country houses, sizable farms; they rode to hounds and flew in private planes.

Behind this corporate wealth were 'the very rich', the owners of the larger companies and the recipients of the

greatest monetary rewards. Amongst these affluent individuals of the 1950s were industrialists and oil tycoons who were worth billions. At that time, the wealthiest individuals and families were identified with the largest corporations through property ownership. The corporate rich were members of the great inheriting families who possessed the great American fortunes, as well as chief executives of the major companies. Most of their income derived from dividends, capital gains, estates and trusts. Mills maintains that no one could become or remain rich in America without somehow being involved in the affairs of the corporate rich.

Mills further argues that the corporate rich had politicised their ownership of corporate property, given that many of them had historically served as unofficial advisors to the politicians in Washington. As business became more intricately involved in the political order, corporate executives became intimately associated with the key politicians who formed the political directorate of the federal government. In addition, as increasing numbers of corporation chieftains entered government directly, the result was the emergence of a new political economy at the apex of which were situated the political elite that represented the interests of the corporate rich.

Finally, Mills observes that as military commanders became more powerful during the wars and during the war-like interludes between, they also joined the elite circles. Consequently, the third sector of his ruling triumvirate, the 'military elite', oversaw the largest and most expensive feature of the US government, the military order. At the pinnacle of the military bureaucracy, just below the president and the secretary of defence, were the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top leaders of the US armed forces. Immediately below them was a higher circle of generals and admirals who presided over an extensive network of overseas military bases, as well as the

economic and political liaisons necessary to maintain them. Thus, alongside the corporation chieftains and the political directorate, the professional warlords of the Pentagon had increased power for dealing with issues of the gravest consequence for humanity.

Mills notes that the United States had become a militarised society with millions of armed troops stationed throughout the world and frequently taking an aggressive posture in geopolitical affairs. The United States' militarisation had been the result of its rise to international political prominence since World War II; and the subsequent Cold War with the communist bloc had further increased the country's military might through the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. The Joint Chiefs of Staff in partnership with the munitions contractors comprised a potent force in making sweeping decisions regarding US foreign policy and international relations. Indeed, the corporate, finance and army leaders became political insiders who served as the president's most influential advisors. Mills describes this movement of the most senior commanding officers into diplomatic and political circles as the 'politicalisation' of the high military.

As he had previously cautioned in *The New Men of Power* about the United States' transformation into a garrison state, Mills again warns of a new corporatism – directed by the political, industrial and military leaders – that sees continuous war preparation as the way to manage capitalism's cycle of contraction, war and expansion. The merger of the military bureaucracy and the corporate economy – the military-industrial complex – first occurred during World War II as the top personnel of the armed forces intervened decisively in political and economic matters. Mills explains that given the nature of modern warfare, the leading generals and admirals were compelled to become politically and economically involved, just as they

had to invite the most influential business, financial and industrial leaders into the military. For unless the military participated in industrial decisions, they could not ensure that their schemes would be executed; and unless the weapons manufacturers knew something of the military operations, they could not plan war production. Thus, as generals advised corporate executives and as corporate executives advised generals, the economic and military hierarchies became structurally and deeply interrelated. The result was that the US power elite was engaged in the implementation of a perennial war establishment, alongside a privately incorporated economy.

Mills further contends that the global situation was principally interpreted from the perspective of the military's tactical and operational thinking. This led to the broad adoption of a military definition of political and economic reality, a *military metaphysics*, where international affairs were primarily seen in terms of military force: the number of battalions, nuclear weapons and so on. The military metaphysics not only resulted in the elite shifting its focus from domestic problems to 'defence', it also resulted in the elite considering issues of war and peace more comprehensively as political problems. In addition, Mills saw the high military's greater involvement in major political decisions as threatening American democracy in two ways. First, the military metaphysics of warfare was so pervasive as to impede dissent from and disagreement of military policy. Americans had come to believe that international conflicts could be resolved only by martial violence or its threat and that no further diplomacy was necessary. Second, Mills argues that much unclassified military information provided to the secretary of defence, the president and his advisors, was withheld from the American people. Such secrecy made it difficult to have a politically informed citizenry.

THE MIDDLE AND BOTTOM LEVELS OF POWER

Those echelons below the three dominant institutional orders faded off into what Mills describes as the 'middle levels of power', which included the various regional, state and local interest groups that were not vested in the power elite itself. Further, as Congress was regularly circumvented on matters of international scope, the presidency had become more dominant and the restraining influence of checks and balances was compromised. In fact, these mid-level sections – that in addition to Congress and the US Supreme Court, also included the labour unions, farm organisations and white-collar professionals – being gridlocked and disunited, became increasingly impotent. Furthermore, at the bottom of the stratification hierarchy, the politically fragmented American 'public' was in danger of becoming a mass society that subverted any hope for a democracy free of domination and manipulation.

America's subtle transformation from the 'community of publics' – circles of face-to-face citizens discussing their public business in the spirit of direct participatory democracy – into an apathetic society of masses, allowed the power elite to dominate, not through coercion, but through manipulation, without people's awareness or participation. By using the mass media, the power elite deceived US citizens into thinking that, through the democratic process, they had been involved in making key political decisions, when in fact they had not. Rather, it was the power elite that determined the course of historical events. The decisions that the political directorate, the corporate rich and the top military officers made or failed to make had greater consequences for larger populations of people than had previously been the case in human history. This coordination of power and decision making in the three interlocking directorates – the political apparatus, the major

conglomerates and the military establishment – instigated a trend toward a totalitarian state. Thus, Mills avers, it was the political intellectuals' special responsibility to practice a politics of truth – to be the moral conscience of society – and hold the US power elite accountable for a decisive range of historical developments that led to current world events, including the possibility of nuclear war. However, given the rampant conservative mood amongst end-of-ideology intellectuals of the 1950s, it was fashionable to pretend that there was no power elite, and thus little chance of exposing its higher immorality.

THE HIGHER IMMORALITY

As he had done with other publics he studied, Mills also renders a social-psychological depiction of the American power elite in general. He holds that they form similar personality types whose values and policies derive from shared social origins; education; the bureaucratic institutions' influence on them; as well as the intersection of the four stratifying elements of class, status, power and occupation.

In Boston, New York, Philadelphia and other large cities, there flourished a recognisable coterie of wealthy families from which the national power elite was derived. Based on their money, surname and lifestyle, these families and their scions were established in metropolitan high society. They were predominantly White, Protestant, urban and well educated. Given that they were largely recruited from the upper classes, the power elite's socialisation depended upon a network of select public schools, exclusive universities, social clubs and holiday resorts, which most of them experienced before being co-opted into the higher circles of power. The boarding school became a training ground for

the socialisation of the children of the power elite. There they were instructed in the proper style of conduct and in how to acquire the upper-class character. The prep school was the most important agency for transmitting upper-class traditions as well as for regulating the admission of new wealth and talent into the power elite. The same held true for higher education, and the CEOs of the major business enterprises, for example, were likely to have graduated from the prestigious Ivy League colleges of Harvard, Princeton and Yale. Similarly, many of the top brass of the Pentagon had attended the armed forces training schools of West Point and Annapolis. Education at these character-forming military academies produced a common outlook and an uncritical adherence to the military metaphysics.

Because they shared certain psychological, ideological and demographic traits, the power elite consisted of a largely homogenous group of individuals. Their similar backgrounds were important to their psychological and social affinities, which meant that they cultivated specific character types. Mills further posits that the power elite coalesced around their personal and official relations with one another, which were coordinated by shared conventions and criteria of admission. That is, through their continued association with one another, they felt responsible to each other. What bound the American power elite together, was an internal discipline and a coincidence of interests.

Mills's pointed indictment against the wealthiest and most powerful members of the United States' political, corporate and military echelons concerned their pervasive malfeasance: their reckless foreign and military policy decisions provoked by their unethical and corrupt conduct that had terrible consequences for the underlying population of the world. This emanated from the American system of organised irresponsibility that had eroded the old middle-class values and codes of

uprightness. For Mills, the monied and powerful were irresponsible, predatory and morally ruthless in their involvement in white-collar crime, typically inspired by their indefatigable pursuit of quick money-making schemes and property acquisition. Because the power elite was engaged in fraud, extortion and dodgy transactions, it failed to produce individuals with an inner moral sense, a conscience and personal integrity. Despite the power elite's widespread corruption, the mass public was completely unconcerned about their higher immorality.

CRITICISM

Shortly after publication, a flurry of critical reviews assailed Mills and *The Power Elite*. These came from a variety of quarters, including from critics deemed as liberal, radical and 'highbrow' (Mills's term). The largest group, the liberals, included Robert A. Dahl, William Kornhauser, Talcott Parsons, Dennis H. Wrong and A. A. Berle Jr. They faulted Mills for, amongst other things, ignoring the decision-making process, inadequately distinguishing between corporate owners and corporate managers, and relegating particular groups to the middle power sectors. The radicals – Robert S. Lynd, Paul M. Sweezy, Herbert Aptheker – agreed with Mills's critical approach and attacks on liberalism but were uneasy with his conceptual reliance on anti-socialist thinkers as Weber and Pareto. The highbrows, which consisted of Philip Rieff, Richard Rovere and Daniel Bell, were concerned more with tone and taste, than thesis; more with sentiment, than substance. Reviewers of all persuasions found the book too pessimistic and negative, particularly in light of the ongoing uncritical celebration of American virtue.

One of the most incisive negative appraisals of *The Power Elite*, from the liberal-pluralist camp, was made by Talcott Parsons, the preeminent sociological theorist of the time. In general, Parsons's critique was two-pronged. First, he charged Mills for failing to supply empirical evidence in proving his contentions and second for failing to employ any coherent theoretical perspective in his analysis. Parsons then provided a litany of shortcomings: Mills conflated power and status but ignored that whilst some groups (e.g. physicians) did not exercise great power, they nonetheless possessed high prestige; the corporate rich were no longer primarily an elite of property-owners, as Mills claimed, but were largely involved with financial management; Mills neglected the influence that party politics had on the presidency; the military metaphysic was not as absolute as Mills made it out to be. Moreover, Parsons assailed Mills's tendency to make generalisations about major trends from recent short-run developments. Parson's biggest criticism, however, was that Mills applied power to the entire political process in limited *zero-sum* terms. That is, he saw power only as a coercive, self-interested force that one group exerts over the actions of others. The result, according to Parsons, was a highly selective treatment that conveniently allowed Mills to treat power as an event-determining factor in history-making. Mills had focussed almost exclusively on power as a fixed resource and on its unequal distribution: on who had power and which section's interests were being served. Treating it in either–or terms, Parsons concluded, Mills could not see that power is a fluid medium that is not only sectionally distributed, but also divided, allocated, and balanced throughout a pluralist liberal democracy like the United States.

A year after *The Power Elite* and amid the ongoing barrage of largely negative reviews, Mills wrote a rejoinder to his critics that appeared in *Dissent*. Here he takes on several

reviewers – radical, liberal and highbrow – one by one and defends himself against their onslaughts. Perhaps Mills's most interesting assertion is that many of the criticisms against the book had an angry character to them, due largely to his attacks on liberalism, to which he had devoted an entire chapter titled, 'The Theory of Balance'. Liberalism, with its romantic pluralism, was the post-war consensus; it was the prevailing – but for Mills, outmoded – tone of American politics to which most US intellectuals, including his critics, subscribed.

Mills's final and comprehensive remarks on the structure of power in American society appeared in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 1958. Here he summarises many of the themes covered in *The Power Elite* but ends by stating that the developments that led to the formation of the upper-, middle- and lower-tiers of the US power structure revolved around the denial of freedom and reason: the freedom of people to reason and then to decide amongst available choices in life.

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POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND TRUTH

In previous chapters I discussed Mills's substantive studies on power and stratification in mid-twentieth century America. In this chapter I examine his global political activities during the most productive and significant years of his career, 1955–1960. These include his activist pamphleteering – the production of his polemical bestsellers, *The Causes of World War Three* and *Listen, Yankee* – and his peregrinations throughout Europe, the Soviet Union and Latin America. In all these activities, he exhorts engaged thinkers on both sides of the liberalism–Marxism ideological divide to practice a politics of responsibility and of truth. Such engagement was necessary to counter the higher immorality of the power elite in both the United States and the Soviet Union. It meant speaking truth to power: holding the ruling structures, whether corporations or central committees, accountable for their concentrated influence and irresponsible policies – economic, political and military. It also meant presenting the truth, the plain facts, to a broad public – those American and British consumers of politics and culture.

THE POLITICS OF CULTURE AND THE CULTURE OF POLITICS

During the five years of this chapter's focus, Mills produced 11 essays toward a book he planned to call *The Cultural Apparatus*. The project was intended as a reworking and synthesis of his ideas on the power of the intellect in cultural politics. Though the manuscript was never completed, during January 1959 Mills delivered three of those essays as a series of University Lectures in Sociology at the London School of Economics (LSE). The lectures were then aired on the BBC's Third Programme radio broadcast and subsequently reprinted in its magazine, *The Listener*.

In the first of the LSE lectures, Mills begins by situating mid-twentieth century social events in the post-modern era, or the 'Fourth Epoch'. This was a period during which the two global superpowers – the USA and the USSR – saw their ideologies of liberalism and Marxism fail to adequately explain world developments in political culture. In both ideologies the Enlightenment values of freedom and reason, broadly understood, had become moot because the impersonal bureaucracies in which decision making was monopolised by elites denied citizens the chance to reason and the capacity to act freely. Due to this 'rationality without reason', people were becoming cheerful robots and the human mind was deteriorating in quality and cultural level. Further, Mills charges that the intelligentsia of both power blocs had abdicated their socio-political role of being responsible for knowledge, reason, and sensibility.

In the second lecture, Mills explores the notion that power relationships were involved in an interplay between 'the culture of politics', on the one hand, and 'the politics of culture', on the other. For Mills, understanding the culture of politics – the scholastic, artistic, and scientific work that influenced political

decisions – required an understanding of the politics of culture – the political decisions that influenced cultural work. As producers of cultural work, intellectuals (or 'cultural workmen', to use the term that Mills began employing to also include artists and scientists) presided over the 'cultural apparatus', which consisted of the think tanks, writer's workshops, publishing houses, studios and laboratories. Because the cultural apparatus defined the standards of credibility, sensibility and experience, cultural workers were particularly powerful in shaping the images and ideas of social reality. But in the politics of culture the cultural worker's political role was authorised and manipulated by the elite circles of power. In an overdeveloped society like the United States, with its corporate monopoly economy, scientific activity was oriented to the military metaphysics, and artistic activity was merchandised to a mass public of consumers. In the Soviet regime, where the state controlled the cultural apparatus, all scholastic, artistic and scientific endeavours were to serve the Party's political and military machines. In neither the capitalist nor the communist political-cultural establishments were intellectuals autonomous from the influence of their respective national elites.

In his third and final LSE talk, Mills examines the decline of the opposition, or 'left' intellectuals, in both the West and the Communist bloc, neither of whom he considered to be international in scope or insurgent in effect. From the onset of Stalinism in the 1930s, all opposition circles in the Soviet Union had either declined, collapsed or become reactionary due to the Communist Party's domineering force. As for the US left-leaning intellectuals making a new beginning since Stalin's death a few years earlier, in 1953, Mills was not optimistic. These communist-based 'old' left intellectuals of the 1930s had, by the 1950s, turned into dogmatic anti-communists, too involved in the nationalist celebration to be

engaged in any criticism of established culture. As for Britain, it was characterised by the fashionable mood of literary writers, the 'young complacents', who affected a posture of sophisticated weariness, bored with all politics. Thus, whether due to political or commercial pressures or to voluntary withdrawal, cultural workers in the West and in the Soviet bloc, were losing control of the production and distribution of their cultural work. Nowhere were there scholars, artists, and scientists directly involved in history-making decisions, independent of businessmen and commissars. Mills calls on cultural workers to repossess the means of information and knowledge and use it to clarify the close connection between bureaucratised culture, with its irrational, 'crackpot', definitions of world reality, and the politics of truth, which requires responsible thinkers to contact their cold war counterparts and make their own separate peace to forestall nuclear war.

REFLECTIONS ON WAR AND PEACE

Along with Sidney Hook, David Reisman, Arthur Schlesinger Jr and other apologists for a cold war liberalism, Mills was invited to contribute to a symposium sponsored by the *Partisan Review* on the theme of 'Our Country and Our Culture'. Here Mills took the opportunity to attack not only these de-radicalised thinkers, but also the magazine's editors, all of whom were now part of the growing national conformity and committed to self-congratulatory interpretations of American democracy. The editors posed four general questions to the symposium participants.

To the first question of how American intellectuals had changed their attitudes toward the United States, Mills states that a shift had occurred between the literati previously taking a political and critical orientation toward life and letters to now adopting a deferential posture toward the status quo.

Additionally, American intellectuals were making a feeble attempt to justify their compliance, without seeking politically viable alternatives. Concerning whether American academics and artists needed to adapt themselves to mass culture, Mills replies that given that mass culture involved a capitalist commercialism that manipulated consumers into standardised tastes and then exploited those tastes as marketable brands, academics and artists could not adapt to that. To do so would mean ceasing to be intellectuals and artists in any meaningful sense. To the question of whether the American literati could find their source of thought and inspiration in the US or in European cultural life, Mills replies that they should seek that source, not in any particular region but internationally, in the best scholarly and artistic traditions of the West. Finally, the magazine editors asked if the critical non-conformism tradition could be maintained, and Mills asserts that such a tradition had faded and would continue to fade; it simply had no public representation in the US society at the time.

To contextualise his responses, in the remainder of the essay, Mills articulates his own views on current socio-political conditions in the United States. He begins by stating that because there was no true democracy through which critical ideas could be freely formed and expressed, much less any left-wing political movement to practically realise them, intellectuals had become indifferent to politics. Second, liberalist intellectuals no longer held any moral orientation that could inform their ideas, values, and principles. They were left with merely empty rhetoric. Moreover, no programmatic statements for insurgency could take hold because in the US there was no audience attentive to such statements. Under the circumstances, American thinkers had two general choices available to them: modify or temporarily shelve their ideas and in the meantime form mutually beneficial alliances with existing powers for short-term gain, or, alternatively, retain

their convictions and defer their realisation until a time when socio-political conditions were opportune. As a committed radical, however, Mills states that, in his own thinking and writing, he has opted for the latter direction: to adhere to his older left-wing values, utopian as they may seem, and wait for them to become implementable. Until then, he uses his work to issue a call, not to mobilised action, but to *thinking* – to a clear-headed analysis of what was happening in the world.

Whatever conditions impeding incitements to political activism may have existed at the time of the *Partisan Review* symposium, a few years later and in light of the escalating nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, Mills was compelled to go public with a programme for peace in two essays that appeared in the left-wing periodical, *The Nation*. In the first of these Mills extends the power elite thesis to the Soviet case and holds that in both nuclear superpowers their ruling elites were possessed by a metaphysics of militarism that was incrementally getting them closer to a third world war. Under the circumstances, Mills put forth a peace plan that consisted of several intellectual, cultural and diplomatic proposals – some more practicable than others – that largely place the onus on the US government to implement the following unilateral strategies: abandon militarist thinking and allocate military funds to the economic aid and industrial development of underdeveloped countries, build first-class educational centres in underdeveloped areas emphasising the humanities and social sciences, ease travel restrictions and increase contact between citizens of different countries, allow the free exchange of scientific information throughout the world, cease all further production of nuclear weapons and abandon all military bases and installations outside the country, announce and instigate an incremental peace programme and invite the Russians to join in. The goal was to negotiate

political new beginnings for peaceful coexistence between the two superpowers and avoid nuclear annihilation.

Originally delivered as a lecture to the United Church of Canada in Toronto, in the second essay for *The Nation*, Mills addressed a much different public than he had previously; not labour leaders nor intellectuals, not power elites nor the general public, now he was writing to Christian clergy, with the purpose of politically activating them. In this piece, which Mills called a 'sermon', written by himself, a self-styled 'pagan', he takes aim at preachers and pastors for their moral insensibility: their complete failure to denounce – more, their willingness to abet – the ongoing preparations and testing for full-scale nuclear confrontation and World War III. Mills admonishes ministers to become religiously conscious and speak out totally and dogmatically – to preach – with a moral conscience against the political and militarist assumptions being followed by the leaders of the nations of Christendom. Pacifism, Mills tells the religious spokesmen, was the test of their Christianity and of their own moral centre of responsible decision.

Released in 1958, on the 10th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, *The Causes of World War Three* was printed by commercial publishers, Simon & Schuster and Ballantine in the United States and Secker and Warburg in Britain. It incorporated rewritten material from the two *Nation* articles as well as from lectures Mills had delivered at several campuses including Howard University in Washington DC and the London School of Economics. Recently returned from his Fulbright scholar-exchange lectureship at the University of Copenhagen and his travels through Europe, Mills's objective in writing this mass-market paperback was to inspire a broad audience – but particularly an international peace movement – to radical political engagement. Mills main thesis is that the power elites in Washington and the Kremlin, through nuclear

arms build-up, were leading their two nations into a total war and mutual destruction. Indeed, the Eisenhower administration's main foreign policy at the time was the 'containment' of Soviet expansion through 'brinksmanship'. This meant that, given its superior nuclear arsenal, the United States would push the Soviet Union to the threshold of war to exact concessions. The end game was for the USSR's inefficient economy to collapse in its attempt to keep pace with the arms race.

Because the United States and the Soviet Union were both gripped by the military metaphysic – the idea of militarisation as an end in itself – Mills issues an urgent plea to the clergy, scientists and the intellectual community to take a responsible and moral stand on world peace and nuclear disarmament. He also calls for a rational response and a commitment to the task of overcoming widespread public apathy and elite irresponsibility concerning humanity's extermination through nuclear holocaust. In addition, he endeavours to rally the American and Soviet intelligentsia to prevail over the higher immorality and 'crackpot' realism of their respective national elites and to sue for a separate peace. Mills believed that only through a global peace activism could the thrust toward World War III and mass destruction be reversed. In this anti-Cold War 'pamphlet', as he called it, that initially sold 100,000 copies, Mills renders his bleakest, most apocalyptic diagnosis of the human condition's condition.

CONTACTING THE SOVIET INTELLECTUALS

Though press reviews of *The Causes of World War Three* were largely mixed, Mills received a torrent of fan mail from supportive readers. One unexpected critical assessment, however, came from Irving Howe, a leading light of the left-wing and anti-Stalinist circle of thinkers, the New York intellectuals. Cofounder and long-time editor of *Dissent*,

Howe, in that magazine, reprimanded Mills on twin moral grounds; first, for allegedly making a moral equivalence between the Soviet Union and the United States in regard to human freedom and, second, for urging that the US negotiate a moral coexistence with the communist dictatorship.

Dissent published a reply from Mills in which he accused Howe of failing to understand his political strategy that involved taking a 'balance of blame' attitude concerning Russia and America's policies and practices, specifically about war and the arms race. Mills acknowledges ideological differences but stresses, indeed, intentionally exaggerates, parallel developments in these two 'overdeveloped' societies (a term that he was increasingly using to refer to industrial nations where production and consumption dominated people's lifestyles). Their world antagonism furthered similarities between the US and the USSR, which consisted of the fact that they had amalgamated great varieties of peoples and cultures; their power was based on technological development, which itself was made into a cultural and social fetish; their people were subjected to formal bureaucracies; neither had a senior civil service composed of free intellectuals; neither had voluntary associations linking people with the political, economic and military hierarchies of power. Mills also notes cautiously that he takes seriously the possibility of new beginnings since Stalin's death that may usher liberalising changes in the Soviet bloc – toward democratisation and the availability of classic Marxism's humanist values. The goal, Mills concludes, is for the leftward thinkers to propose alternative programs that the United States can take to obviate the risk of nuclear war. This, Mills held, was the intellectuals' last chance – in the both the United States and USSR – to help their overdeveloped societies make politically responsible decisions about the use of destructive technologies.

Believing that American intellectuals needed to establish communication with their counterparts in the Communist bloc, Mills, for his part, began writing the manuscript bearing the evocative title, *Contacting the Enemy: Tovarich*. Never completed or published, it consisted of a collection of introspective letters addressed to a fictional Soviet colleague (called 'Tovarich', the Russian word for comrade or friend), who served as Mills's alter ego, a dissident and public intellectual, on the other side of the Iron Curtain. These letter-essays, which Mills penned between 1956 and 1960, during the height of the Cold War, were a political statement meant to go beyond *The Causes of World War Three* in fostering dialogue and understanding – and ultimately, peace – between the American and Soviet intelligentsia. Highly personalised, several of the missives are autobiographical and thus intended as an exercise in self-scrutiny. Most were crafted by Mills during his extensive travels abroad. In an early one, which Mills composed in Sarajevo, he (in the self-assigned role of unattached American social thinker) explains to Tovarich that he is writing to begin a conversation to make their own separate peace. In establishing this correspondence Mills tells Tovarich that he is assuming that there will soon be zones of real freedom in the Soviet Union. Much of what Mills writes about how culture and politics affected his life, and that of Tovarich, is framed by the combination questions posed by Lenin – What is to be done? – and by Tolstoy – How should we live?

In the spring of 1960 Mills was given the opportunity to come in contact with his *real*, not imaginary, Soviet counterparts, as he accepted an invitation by the publisher of the Russian translation of *The Power Elite*, to tour the Soviet Union for three weeks. During that time, he conducted interviews with Soviet scholars and party officials to ascertain, first, the character and role of the Soviet intelligentsia and,

second, Soviet developments in Marxist theory – particularly concerning the transition from socialism to communism – since the deaths of Lenin and Stalin. Mills also kept a detailed journal of nearly 300 typed pages, entitled *On Observing the Russians*, which was a miscellany of first-hand observations, questionnaires, draft notes for *The Marxists*, reflections and transcripts from Mills's interviews with the Soviet intellectuals.

The itinerary took Mills to four cities in three Soviet republics: from Moscow (Russia) to Tashkent (Uzbekistan) to Tbilisi (Georgia) to Moscow to Leningrad, and back again to Moscow – all in a matter of 20 days. The cultural workers who Mills interviewed were largely publishers, editors, writers, publicists, literary critics and academics. These included the editor-in-chief of the journal, *Inostrannaya literatura*; the director of the Foreign Languages Publishing House; several professors at Moscow State University, Tbilisi State University, and the University of Tashkent; the secretary of the writers' union in Tashkent; the secretary of the central committee of Komsomol (Young Communist League); the editor-in-chief of *Kommunist* magazine and the editor-in-chief of Tashkent's leading newspaper.

Mills discovered that attitudes toward the Stalin cult – in a bloc of over 200 million people still undergoing de-Stalinisation – were highly ambivalent and ranged extremely. He also found that Marxist-Leninist theory was so administratively and politically established that no 'antagonistic contradictions' were accepted, only society's harmonious perfection. Mills saw this as making for an optative political mood on the part of the Soviet cultural workers that was exemplified most blatantly in 'socialist realism' – the official artistic style imposed on painters, sculptors, novelists and poets. This mood, Mills believed, led to his respondents abstaining from any fundamental social criticisms.

Limitations on critical thought largely stemmed from two factors considered in connection to the modest democratic reforms that were being implemented as part of the de-Salinisation campaign: that the cognoscenti had not yet learned how to ably express social and political criticism and that many of them were wary of a potential reversion to Stalinist repression. Mills recognised that the Soviet intelligentsia's acceptance of state-organised optimism had to be put in context of the societal goal of transitioning from the present socialist society to communism. He also understood that whilst the policies and strategies implemented under Stalin's despotism had been disastrous, the current transition to communism, as a new beginning, was seen by many as a definite guideline. Though the optative image of themselves and their tasks, coupled with their identification with the state, made the intellectuals impermeable to anti-Soviet controversies, Mills did not find them to be dogmatic. Indeed, he saw them as eager to confront arguments and to learn about Western events and theories to benefit of their own Soviet system.

The Soviet notion of the ideal human being, Mills discovered, was the polytechnical, fully cultured person who combined brainwork with manual labour. This was the reason that the universities were training an unparalleled number of technicians and engineers, to say nothing of the high level of literacy that had already been attained among farmers and factory workers. Taking the lead in realizing the New Soviet Man, the intellectuals, through a vast cultural apparatus, aimed to raise the educational, cultural and skills level of the entire population.

Mills found that whilst the intellectuals' educational and cultural work was indeed influenced by Marxist–Leninist propaganda, much of it was not directly political. Indeed, major changes had transpired since the rigid criticism of the

Stalin era toward music, film, dance and literature. Mills, however, was unsure whether there existed among the literati an opposition attitude. If it did exist, it likely affected very few of them because most were prohibited from taking independent action, artistically or politically.

According to Mills, two main impediments hindered the Soviet intellectual's views about the United States and about their own society. The first concerned the substandard calibre of the Western writings and scholars available to them – alongside their inability to discern their quality. Moreover, Mills believed that the Russians' ignorance of the high-quality assessments by Western writers on the USSR prevented them from seeing the realities of political power and social life in Soviet society or from developing a conscientious academic inquiry of their own. The other handicap imposed on the Soviet intellectuals' ability to think critically about their own societal realities was their automatic rejection of Trotsky, who Mills regarded as the only Marxist theoretician of note to have produced original work on the Soviet Union. After his interactions with several scholars, Mills concluded that Trotsky's role in Soviet society was such a burden to them that they simply did not wish to think, much less talk, about it.

Mills noted that most of the Soviet intellectuals were becoming more explicit about the unpleasant legacy of Stalinism and beginning to make public their even-handed judgements about this long era of Soviet history. But in general, they ignored that dismal past, preferring to focus on the present and the future. However, it was obvious to Mills that a complete disavowal of the Stalinist orthodoxy that had ruled over the minds and bodies of the Russian people for nearly 30 years, had not yet occurred in 1960.

Concerning the Soviet intellectuals' distinctive character and role during the era of tenuous de-Stalinisation, Mills notes that they were circumscribed by the political apparatus of the

Communist Party and by the optative political mood informed by the societal goal of transitioning to communism. As such, he found the Soviet intelligentsia to be affected by an externally imposed optimism, which meant toeing and parroting the official party line. Moreover, they possessed bureaucratised personalities characterised by ridged self-censorship. Thus, the cultural workers of the Soviet bloc readily rejected all literary, artistic and academic products that were deemed by the party leaders to be anti-Soviet. As for their role in the cultural apparatus, they were largely curators of a socialist realism – in language, music, arts – that was used to guard the ideology behind it.

In the end, Mills compares the Soviet intellectuals' role and character to that of Boffins, using the wartime British slang term referring to hard-nosed scientists and technicians engaged exclusively in research and development in helping the war effort. In this sense, the intellectuals of the Soviet Union were not engaged in effecting radical cultural and social change. Moreover, they were not acting as free agents, nor was this part of their self-image. They were, in fact, members of an elite stratum charged with the practical task of protecting and perpetuating a statist ideology, a 'vulgar' type of Marxism.

THE GLOBAL NEW LEFT

Upon his return from the Soviet Union, Mills penned 'Letter to the New Left' that first appeared in the British journal *New Left Review*. Here he notes that the intelligentsia's role and character is regionally distinct and historically specific, depending on whether the intelligentsia is of Europe, North America, the Soviet Union or the low-income countries of the 'hungry-nation bloc'. But in this regard Mills sees some close parallels between the Western and Soviet intellectuals. For example, he examines the end-of-ideology thesis that, through

its promotion of political complacency, was preventing American and British intellectuals from confronting issues of international significance: the Cold War, the Soviet bloc, the politics of peace and any new beginnings at home and abroad. In Mills's view, the end-of-ideology of the richer countries was functionally similar to the socialist realism that he had observed amongst the Soviet intellectuals who, because they saw no antagonistic contradictions, could not engage in any real structural criticism of their society. Indeed, he found that the cultural workers he interviewed in Uzbekistan, Georgia and Russia exhibited comparable styles of thought and expression as those of the American end-of-ideologists such as Daniel Bell and Arthur Schlesinger Jr: all were opposed to radical criticisms of their respective societies.

For Mills, to be 'left' signified a cultural-political alternative to American end-of-ideology and Soviet socialist realism. It meant having programmes and strategies guided, not by nationalism or centralised power, but by reason, freedom and justice. Thus, a left-wing politics required two considerations. First, a political philosophy that went beyond the details of small-scale milieu and considered structural realities. Second, a revisiting of the idea that the radical agency of structural change was indeed the political *intelligentsia* (and not 'the working class' of the Marxist tradition on which the British left had relied since the Victorian era). This forward-looking agency of social, indeed, of global, transformation, as Mills saw it, was the emerging 'new' Left: the international movement – in the overdeveloped countries as well as in the hungry-nation bloc – of university student activists and young thinkers and dissident writers who were already mobilising for peace and civil rights and against tyranny and imperialism. And it was the Cuban Revolution – with its young, independent intelligentsia and without any labour as agency – that would provide Mills with a radical model of anti-imperialist social change.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Prior to his Soviet sojourn, whilst teaching a seminar on Marxism at the National University of Mexico earlier that year, Mills had been queried about his position on Fidel Castro's new government in Cuba. Embarrassed not to have any firm attitude about it, shortly after returning from the Soviet Union Mills set out for the Caribbean island to experience first-hand its transition to a new sovereign state – some 18 months after the triumph of its revolution. Equipped with an audio recorder and a couple of cameras, he met with most of the leaders of the revolutionary government, including the president of the national bank, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara as well as Castro's aide-de-camp and personal physician, René Vallejo. He also took dozens of photographs of Cuba in revolutionary transition; among them scenes of militiamen drilling, Guevara and Castro reviewing troops, workers building roads and outfitting houses, women soldiers at a military establishment, impoverished occupants of a *bohío* (palm-thatched hovel), children at work and play at a school city. Mills spent three and a half days travelling with Castro and had at least three separate conversations with him: in Mills's hotel room in Havana, trekking through the Viñales Valley in Pinar del Río province and riding with Castro in his car through the Isle of Pines.

Though Mills had not previously met the Cubans with whom he spoke, many of them were familiar with his reputation, or at least with *The Power Elite*. In addition to the government officials Mills recorded his interviews with his interpreter – a journalist with the official government newspaper, *Revolución* – as well as with three captains and a major in the rebel army. Mills also recorded conversations with a clinical psychologist, a university professor and a mechanic and a head housekeeper at a dairy centre. He was

extraordinarily busy, having to jam all discussions and interviews into about two weeks' time, during August 1960.

Mills's purpose in going to Cuba was straightforward: to find out the truth about what was really happening on the island and tell it to the North American people. Mills's politically informed notion of truth meant that he, as a public intellectual, was morally obligated to disclose the facts about the Cuban Revolution through eyewitness, real-time testimony; particularly since what was being told about it in the United States was distorted by its mass culture and manipulated by its mass media – in television programming, newspapers and magazines.

Mills held that, when it came to truth, engaged thinkers needed to be involved in the struggle between enlightenment and obscurantism, and his task was to politically enlighten North Americans about the achievements, aspirations and aims of the Cuban Revolution. This was in opposition to the 'liberal obfuscators', as he called them, in the Kennedy administration – namely, A. A. Berle, Jr, the president's advisor on Latin America; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, the president's special assistant and Adlai Stevenson, US ambassador to the United Nations – who were misleading the US public about what was really happening on the island.

But Mills recognised that revolutionary truth could be volatile, mutable, and dangerous. Moreover, he understood that, given the current military and economic conditions with which the Cuban government had to contend, events could quickly turn into a moment of political and cultural deceit. Indeed, Mills made clear that he did not like Cuba's dependence on Castro and the virtually absolute power that Castro possessed.

Nevertheless, Mills felt he needed to defend the potential for a true democratic freedom that he believed was coming into existence in Cuba for the first time in its history and that

would allow the Cuban people to determine their own life-chances. Cuba under the revolution, Mills asserted, was transforming into a 'properly developing society' where the Cubans would know where they stood, where they may be going, and what they could do about the present as history and the future as responsibility. It may be said that Mills both accurately reported the truth about Cuba as he saw it as well as bestowed his convictions and values onto its revolution. In short, he was objective – scholarly and rigorous in his methodology – and engaged.

Even before leaving for the island, Mills had produced a preliminary draft based on what he regarded as the best recent material on Latin America, the Cuban Revolution and the history of US–Cuba relations. Upon returning to New York, he re-wrote the manuscript completely and in a frenzy. Working 16-hours days, from notes and the taped interviews, he had, by mid-September, completed a preliminary draft under the title *Listen Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba*.

Released in paperback, *Listen, Yankee* is written in a sardonic, accusatory tone and consists of eight 'letters' in which Mills uses direct speech, the first-person plural, in addressing the US citizenry. This epistolary account was meant to convey a synoptic viewpoint of how the Cuban revolutionaries saw their revolution as well as how they defined their aspirations and relationship to the United States.

About a year after the book's initial publication and three months following the US-engineered armed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, the Spanish translation of *Listen, Yankee* included an update. Serving as the afterword to the book's third Mexican printing, it allowed Mills to speak up, resolutely, about US neo-colonial foreign policy toward Cuba and the military invasion. He singles out specific US government officials and exposes their complicity and hypocrisy. He gives a chronological account of the Bay of Pigs assault by the

CIA-armed mercenaries and the events leading up to it. Mills admits that it is possible that, concerning the Bay of Pigs debacle, Kennedy had been misadvised by CIA Director, Allen Dulles; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lyman Lemnitzer; former US Ambassador to Cuba, Earl E. T. Smith and advisors, Berle and Schlesinger. According to Mills, these cold warriors, under the banner of liberalism, had become obfuscators and partook of a fanatical anticommunism more suitable to the Stalinist era. Because of their subversive aggression towards Cuba, the liberal obfuscators had squandered the moral prestige of the United States before the world and had lost all influence in Latin America – except that based on intimidation, violence and trade embargo. Above all, states Mills, it was evident that in its aggression toward Cuba, the United States was not a government of laws and treaties.

Mills also decries the US anti-Castro press and charges that after the military intervention, when it was no longer possible to cover up the mercenary's defeat, American newspapers continued printing misinformation, likely disseminated by the CIA. Indeed, there was an expropriation of the cultural apparatus as North American newspapers, magazines and television were as censored, and self-censored, as those in the Soviet bloc. Mills not only blames the media but also President Kennedy who had pressed them to censor themselves.

As Mills travelled to the USSR and Cuba and focused his research on issues that, at first glance, appeared to counter US interests, he was increasingly seen as a security threat by federal authorities, perhaps even as someone who could be gathering intelligence for unfriendly governments. He came under the scrutiny of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) when a confidential informant apprised the New York field office of Mills's travel plans and other comings and goings. In September 1960, whilst he was intensely working on *Listen, Yankee*, the informant told the FBI that Mills had visited Cuba

the previous month and conducted interviews with Cuban officials, which he intended to publish.

Prior to publication, the FBI had obtained a mimeographed copy of the manuscript to *Listen, Yankee* and a special agent in the New York office described the document as an artfully written piece of pro-Castro and pro-communist propaganda. Special Agents in Philadelphia and Washington, DC, also obtained mimeos and submitted their assessment. Upon the release of *Listen, Yankee* FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover ordered a discreet preliminary investigation on Mills, with a complete background check. The New York field office was to inquire whether Mills was being directed or financed by Cuban officials and engaged in intelligence activity. After an exhaustive probe, no evidence was found to support any of the allegations. An FBI stakeout of Mills's residence was nevertheless initiated. His movements in the United States and abroad continued to be monitored by both the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Despite the government surveillance, in April of 1961 Mills and his family departed for Europe and a second visit to the USSR. That same month Mills met Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Paris. The two French philosophers had twice visited Cuba the previous year and, with Mills, speculated about what was happening there at the moment. They worried that Communist Party members had filled the administrative vacuum that existed in the revolutionary government and about which Mills had assiduously inquired in his Cuba interviews. Unfortunately, the Party contained a clique that were threatening the Castro regime. Sartre expressed disenchantment with the direction the revolution was taking; he conveyed to Mills that if the revolution were forced into an ideological rigidity, Castro would lose some of his power and the sectarians and the United States would then drive Cuba into the Soviet orbit.

A few days after Mills, Sartre and de Beauvoir met in Paris, Fidel Castro gave his historic address, 'Words to Intellectuals' in Havana to a group of artists and writers of the Cuban cultural apparatus. He told them that politically progressive writers from abroad who had previously visited Cuba – specifically Sartre and Mills – had persistently queried him on the issue of the freedom of artistic expression. But that, at the time, he had been at a loss as to how to answer them given that a national artistic policy concerning the cultural revolution had not yet been clearly articulated. However, in 1961 after Castro publicly declared himself a Marxist-Leninist (a euphemism for Communist), all aesthetic and intellectual creations would be adjudged as being within or outside the interests and boundaries of the revolution, only by Castro himself. In the end, Mills *did* tell the truth about Cuba. Not the whole truth, just the *plain* truth.

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In the previous chapter, I discussed those activities of C. Wright Mills pertaining to Cold War international relations and United States foreign policy. In this chapter I look at his writings that criticise the conceptions and procedures that he saw as characterising mainstream American sociology. Of central significance in this regard is his most enduring work, *The Sociological Imagination*, the book for which he is today most remembered. Part primer, part polemic, it was composed mostly in Copenhagen, Denmark and Innsbruck, Austria. *The Sociological Imagination* reached publication in 1959 and has remained in print ever since. Because Mills had previously introduced some of the book's main programmatic statements in a couple of articles published in the early 1950s, in the following section I briefly examine those articles.

MACROSCOPIC, MOLECULAR AND THIRD CAMP SOCIOLOGY

The first article was a highly technical piece, published in an academic journal, where Mills expressed his disagreements

with the two main styles of sociological research of the time. The 'macroscopic' style, Mills states, was exemplified in the theoretical work of nineteenth-century German thinkers like Weber and Mannheim, who took a historical-comparative approach to total social structures; they then systematically connected various institutions and related them to prevailing character types. The other style, the 'molecular', was developed from twentieth-century American marketing and mass media research techniques; it concentrated on small-scale problems and utilised statistical models of verification. Epistemologically, the differences between the two styles of inquiry were that the molecular was more methodologically standardised and the macroscopic was more theoretically abstract. Because both had major conceptual and procedural limitations, sociological research should ideally shuttle between the molecular's empirical focus and the macroscopic's theoretical orientation.

Whilst his criticisms of the research styles were relatively measured and balanced, the following year Mills produced an essay in which he was more explicitly condemning of the current state of professional and policy sociology. In this better-known piece, which appeared in the popular men's lifestyle and health magazine, *Saturday Review*, he informs a lay readership that American sociology was currently divided into three main camps and that he, Mills, belonged squarely in the third.

The first camp, which he had previously identified with molecular research, was that of the 'scientists' who endeavoured to study society through the scientific method that frequently involved statistical computational analysis. They typically conducted studies for scientific foundations and corporations like the multinational technology company, IBM. Utilising big data, these research technicians nonetheless tended to focus on small-scale problems that were free from

political or public controversy. Given that the scientific sociologists were ignorant of the historical role of ideas, the relation of power and knowledge and of knowledge-informed moral action, they succeed only in trivializing people and society. To date, they had not contributed anything of substance to sociology.

The second camp, previously identified with the macroscopic approach, consisted of the 'grand theorists' who described human conduct and society in extremely general and arbitrary terms, thus making it difficult to understand the real problems of human experience. Moreover, because they communicated in turgid prose, they added to sociology's verbal obscurity and confusion.

Finally, the third camp, was composed of sociologists who, whatever the issue under investigation, asked three questions in the tradition of classic sociology: What is the meaning of this issue for society as a whole? What is its meaning for the types of people that abound in that society? How does the issue fit into the current historical trend and what is its trajectory? If the scientists and grand theorists acquired the 'humanist concern' – if they communicated their work with greater clarity and gave their subject matter greater meaningful human expression – sociology, Mills maintains, could become the signal feature of cultural life. He proposes that despite everything, sociology was, in fact, already becoming that.

A MOST NEEDED QUALITY OF MIND

Whatever restrain Mills may have shown in his fault-finding of the dominant intellectual styles or camps, and their proponents, he amplified those criticisms in *The Sociological Imagination*, this time naming names. It was, in fact, the book

that completed his break with the sociological establishment. Mills explicitly describes *The Sociological Imagination* as a defence of third camp, or humanistic-critical, sociology. This technical text – a kind of sociology of sociology – was likewise an offensive manoeuvre against the banality of establishment sociology that cemented Mills's reputation not only as a *social* critic, but also a *sociological* one.

Mills begins by advocating for a mode of thinking that allows people to gain agency and become active participants in history making. He holds that a most needed quality of mind in the post-modern era is the 'sociological imagination': a way of reasoning that helps people use information to arrive at clear conclusions of what is happening in the world and, consequently, within themselves. It involves an approach to life Mills called 'Taking it big'.

In employing the sociological imagination individuals cope with their personal difficulties by managing the broader anonymous forces that impel those difficulties. This form of self-consciousness permits people to transcend their private orbits – of home, workplace, neighbourhood – and gives them greater understanding of societal conditions.

The sociological imagination's practical task and intellectual promise, Mills states in the book's opening chapter, are to enable individuals to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. For only by seeing the interconnection of *biography*, or socially situated personality, and *history,* can people understand their life ways, gauge their fate by locating themselves within their time-period, and estimate their life chances. Consequently, in utilising the sociological imagination people must endeavour to answer three basic questions like those he had previously articulated in the *Saturday Review* article: (1) How, in general, is this society structured, or institutionally organised? (2) Where is this society historically located? (3) What sorts of

biographies predominate in this society and in this historical period? The sociological frame of mind, therefore, empowers people to apprehend where they may be going – biographically and socially – and to recognise their options for taking responsible action. Only in this way can they overcome their existential traps.

When used properly, Mills explains, the sociological imagination frees people to be involved in the rational making of history. But to be free, to have the chance to formulate choices and then choose between them, people must make the connection between their 'private troubles', that arise in close interpersonal relations, and those 'public issues' that reside at the level of historically located social structure. It is the task of those who employ the sociological perspective to continually convert troubles into issues and cast issues in such manner that they become personally significant. Individuals must be aware that their unique worries and frustrations are frequently linked to crises in institutional organisation.

Mills believed that although the apathetic cheerful robots of the mass society were gripped by private troubles, they were oblivious of their true meaning and source. By contrast, the informed, critical and active citizens within a community of publics are not only able to confront public issues, but they are also alert to the issues' significance and origins. As such, Mills contends that persons within the community of free and knowledgeable publics can transform their most personal experiences into societal issues and see these issues' relevance for their community and their community's relevance for them. These intellectually attentive citizens understand that what they experience as intimate anxieties and concerns are typically collective matters shared by many others and that can only be adequately handled through structural reform.

To illustrate the connection between life's discontents and larger institutions, Mills considers several social trends of the

fifties-era United States, including failed marriage. For many couples contemplating a divorce or undergoing a divorce, the event may be traumatic, stressful and uncertain. They may feel that their life, or a part of their life, is collapsing and coming to a painful end. They perceive the event as afflicting only them and those in their private orbits, of children, relatives, and friends. At the time Mills wrote *The Sociological Imagination*, the US divorce rate during the first 4 years of marriage was 25%. This incidence and prevalence of divorce indicates factors pertaining, not to individual idiosyncrasy, but to the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them. Mills's point is that societal forces directly impact individuals' lived experiences. When people see structural strains and contradictions as the source of their personal difficulties, it is then that they are thinking sociologically.

Within the framework of advocating for his own type of sociology, Mills next excoriates the two main tendencies that were prevalent in US academic sociology during the 1950s: grand theory and the molecular research that he now characterises as 'abstracted empiricism', and their foremost representatives, Talcott Parsons and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, respectively.

Mills begins by denouncing Parsons's systems theoretic scheme on four counts. First, he accuses Parsons of being so preoccupied with creating concepts that he could not clearly and precisely identify empirical problems of pressing import, much less guide efforts to solve them. Second, Mills maintains that Parsons's general theory presents a static view of society and condemns him for failing to account for social change. Third, Mills rejects the notion that one sweeping macroscopic framework can be used to analyse the unity of social structure. Grand theory is, for Mills, too abstruse and lacks empirical referents and practical application. Indeed, he was quite

averse to universal conceptual schemes and instead favoured a pragmatic 'working model' – a somewhat systematic inventory of findings employed to comprehend events of social significance. Finally, Mills insists that owing to Parsons's preoccupation with the problem of order, coupled with his unwillingness to accept any radical analysis of American society, his grand theory provided ideological support for the status quo in that it legitimated forms of domination and maintained established social institutions.

Mills then turns his attention to sociologists, like Lazersfeld, his erstwhile supervisor at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research, who treated sociology merely as a methodological specialism. These sociologists were engaged in abstracted empiricism, an approach that converted the urgent social issues of the day into mundane statistical assertions. In these assertions, they frequently confused whatever was to be studied with the set of methods for its study. Mills accuses the abstracted empiricists with being so obsessed with technical procedures of research and with minor observational facts, such as public opinion and voting behaviour, that they were incapable of inquiring about the larger societal problems pertaining to the trends and tendencies that directly affected people's personal and social realities. Due to their fascination with researching trivia, they neglected such crucial problems as, for example, dealing with the legitimacy and use of the existing distribution of power. Like the grand theorists, the abstracted empiricists were also ahistorical and non-comparative. Moreover, they were apt to explain social phenomena only in terms of the personal characteristics of individuals. Mills explicates that the psychologism of the abstracted empiricists was premised on the notion that if they studied a representative population of socially situated individuals, their research findings would lead to the cumulative development of knowledge of casual structures. One major

drawback that Mills sees with this building-block approach to social scientific progress was that it never actually grappled with actual dilemmas of human significance.

Mills further contends that regardless of whether social scientists undertook grand theory or abstracted empiricism, values were always involved in their selection of the social problems studied, their conceptualisation and solution. But neither the theorists who were focused on grandiose conceptual frameworks nor the empiricists who were preoccupied with data gathering disclosed the values that informed their work. Mills holds that in both sociological styles, the moral and political values that governed their assumptions were inherently conservative. Grand theorists tended to become celebrants or defenders of their society and abstracted empiricists conducted research that was increasingly client oriented. The latter were becoming mere technicians, servants of power, co-opted by those who bought their services and used their findings for bureaucratic and commercial purposes. The result was a social science executed by technical specialists who had ceded their autonomy to the corporate and government organisations for which they worked. This meant that abstracted empiricists were inclined to assume the political and moral perspective of their sponsors.

Taking a sociology of knowledge approach, Mills then contrasts the epistemologies of grand theory, abstracted empiricism and the 'classic' sociological tradition. For Mills, the principal feature of the classic tradition is its concern with social problems that are directly relevant to urgent public issues and insistent individual troubles. In other words, it relies on the social imaginary. The classic social thinkers – Herbert Spencer, Edward A. Ross, Auguste Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Veblen amongst others – sought to persistently develop and employ the sociological imagination. Eschewing grand theory's obsession with concepts and

abstracted empiricism's with methods, classic social analysis forges a middle path and focuses on historically situated social problems. In this way, every study, inductively-deductively, formulates and reformulates substantive problems and proposes their structural solutions.

Mills next discusses what he considers to be the proper study of sociology: the 'human variety' and its uses of history in that endeavour. Sociology's focus on the human variety means that it engages in an orderly examination of all the social worlds in which people have lived, are living, and might live their private and public lives. This includes the full spectrum of individual human beings imaginable: from an Indian Brahmin of 1850 to a pioneer farmer in Illinois; from a Chinese peasant of 100 years ago and a feudal knight in France to a politician in Bolivia today and an English suffragette on hunger strike in 1914. A contextual understanding of the vast assortment of personal narratives requires considering the basic question, What types of people prevail in this social structure and in this period in history? Without a historical sense of the social-psychological issues that affect individuals, sociologists cannot adequately state the kinds of problems that ought to guide their investigations.

Mills maintains that because people are social and historical actors, their biographical trajectories must be considered with reference to their lived history. Indeed, all the features of an individual's character – social roles, self-image, conscience and mind – are best formulated as problems within specific historical social structures. Only in this way can the sociologist accurately understand the causes of individual conduct and feelings.

Addressing the other question posed by the sociological imagination – Where does this society stand in human history? – requires treating sociology, as did Weber, as comparative and historical work. Without the historical-comparative study of

societies, sociologists cannot understand or explain the developmental phases through which any modern nation has passed, the salient trends it is experiencing, or the shape it may assume in the future. It is for this reason, declares Mills, that sociology must, by definition, be historically oriented.

Mills next employs the sociological perspective in analysing his own post-modern historical period, the Fourth Epoch (so called by Mills because it follows, first, Antiquity; second, the Dark Ages and third, the Modern Age). It is in the Fourth Epoch that the Enlightenment values of freedom and reason were being contested. Since about the eighteenth century, reason – as intelligence and independent judgements – had been regarded as the main driver of freedom. But in the Fourth Epoch, with its heightened rational social arrangements in the spheres of work and consumption, reason no longer engendered freedom. The extreme complexity of the post-modern era made it so that most people could not adequately reason about the vast macro dynamics that shaped their lives. The Fourth Epoch's high level of bureaucratic rationalisation did not lead to more individual or societal freedom; to the contrary, it contributed to greater domination and manipulation. This massified social structure made for 'rationality without reason', which meant that people lacked the capacity to devise their life choices and, consequently, lacked the freedom to select from amongst those choices. The mass society of the Fourth Epoch transformed individuals into cheerful robots, who, on the one hand, were quite happy to be entertained and distracted – manipulated – by the mass media's machinery of amusement but, on the other hand, experienced deep down an uneasy feeling of being trapped and powerless.

The feeling of being trapped and powerless leads to political illiteracy and apathy amongst the cheerful robots. But, says Mills, given that sociologists understand the interplay of peoples' lives with large social problems, they possess the

intellectual capital – more, they are morally obligated – to address three audiences: (1) those who have the power to act and are *aware* of the structural consequences of their actions, (2) those who have the power to act but are *unaware* of the structural consequences of their actions and (3) those who are both *powerless and unaware*. The sociologists' political and intellectual task as regards the first audience is to hold them responsible for their decisions and actions. Sociologists must also call to account the second audience, but in addition, they must educate them about society's structural operations. Finally, as to the third and widest audience, sociologists are to make freedom and reason cherished values for that populace. In this way, they get ordinary people to become intellectually attentive and civically engaged and thus contribute to the democratic process. Sociologists can accomplish this as scholars, educators and citizens by equipping this mass public with a sociologically imaginative mind; by making social problems personally meaningful to them. Sociology's political task is to define personal and social realities truthfully and in a publicly relevant way. To practice such a humanistic-critical sociology is to practice the politics of truth.

INTELLECTUAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

Included as the appendix of *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills's famous essay, 'On Intellectual Craftsmanship' offers practical advice on how to stimulate the sociological imagination and engage in meaningful scholarship and research. Originally written in 1952 and mimeographed in 1955 for distribution to his students at Columbia University, it was intended particularly for postgraduates in sociology. Nevertheless, this short piece has also been highly influential across the humanities and social sciences more broadly.

Here Mills states that those affiliated with classic social analysis should shun using received theories and research techniques in an unreflective manner. To guard against the pitfalls of abstracted empiricism and grand theory, he advocates a continuity between what sociology students pursue intellectually and what they, as persons, observe and experience in their everyday lives. He encourages students to rely on their own lived experiences to inform their sociological work, which may be described as a 'craft' – the mental process in which skill and artistry are employed in creative production. Mills uses the term 'intellectual craftsmanship' to refer to a literary style of work, a combination of art and science, that communicates ideas through clear and concise writing. At bottom social science involves the practice of *writing*, for presentation and discovery. But for Mills writing was also a personal matter; it was another name for creating and for maintaining a somewhat organised mind of one's own, and so a sense of one's identity.

Mills states further that every academic endeavour requires keeping a 'file', a reflective journal, in which notes are regularly taken in relating personal experience and professional activities, in recording current and future studies. The file should consist of a continually growing collection of facts and ideas that include personal impressions, excerpts from books, bibliographies and project outlines. Later, the file is rearranged by playfully combining ideas and jottings on different topics and discovering previously unnoticed connections between them. Rearranging the file increases receptivity to unforeseen and unplanned linkages. Then, employing various heuristic devices – ideal types, polar types, cross-classification techniques – the intellectual craftsman catalogues the findings into a working model, which is subsequently used to explain and resolve the problem under study.

THE CLASSIC TRADITION

As a kind of supplement to *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills edited a reader in social theory, *Images of Man: The Classic Tradition in Sociological Thinking*. In determining which selections to include, Mills sought advice from the British sociologist Ralph Miliband, asking him to suppose having to be isolated and incommunicado for a decade and could only take 10 books in social science with him, which would they be? Miliband's response is not known but Mills ultimately included 18 excerpts of works by some of the leading representatives of the classic tradition in sociology. Initially proposing the working titles, *Great Sociologists* and *Classic Sociology*, before settling on the more commercially viable, *Images of Man*, the anthology featured those later nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century thinkers, Marx and Weber chief amongst them, who continued to influence critical reflection and social inquiry.

Mills's main goal in presenting these thinkers' writings was to locate the sociological imagination within the classic tradition. Indeed, the main features of classic Marxism that Mills especially admired, were its concern with social structures, historical specificity and built-in agency. In other words, Marx, Weber and the other classical workmen exhibited the sociological imagination and did so more frequently and vividly than other social scientists. Their great ideas took the form of working models that identified, first, the key elements of a society and, second, the relative strength of the interconnections among these elements. They then used these models to develop various theories about people, society and history.

The classic thinkers' whose work Mills chose to reprint were largely European. These included Spencer for his development of the concept of social structure and its

connection to character structure; the neo-Machiavellians Mosca, Pareto and Michels for their focus on power; and Durkheim on his concept of anomie, which connects society to the individual. The few Americans represented were Veblen, who Mills regarded as the best social scientist America had produced; W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, for their sociological view of personality; and perhaps most surprising of all, the collection opened with an excerpt from the journalist Walter Lippmann on his ideas on public opinion.

Within the European classic tradition, it was German sociology, that he first learned from Gerth, that had the dominant influence on Mills. In his view, Weber and Marx stood out as the most important classic social thinkers due largely to their pervasive use of history, and Mills reprinted two selections from each of them. However, Mills particularly valued Weber for several reasons. First, because Weber took an eclectic approach, he was able to study various social phenomena within the context of different cultures, at several time-periods, and at the subjective as well as the objective levels of social reality. Second, Weber appreciated the humanist tradition of Western civilization that was politically informed by liberalism and Marxism. Finally, Weber attempted to blend his analytic conceptions with an encyclopaedic knowledge of epochal history. Indeed, he consistently analysed specific historical periods and events in addressing a wide range of issues – from religion, to law, to the economy, to the city.

At bottom, concludes Mills in his short introduction to the anthology, one result of reading sociology as part of a liberal education ought to be to learn how to read a newspaper (or any other written news source for that matter) by relating reported events to the general society and to societal trends.

THE THREE MARXISMS

Another point that Mills makes in *Images of Man* is that sociology was experiencing a crisis of social reflection and inquiry. That crisis stemmed largely from the fact that neither liberalism nor Marxism could any longer provide moral guidance in accordance with the values of Western civilisation: humanism, freedom, democracy. The way out of the crisis, Mills explains, was to make relevant classical sociological knowledge, particularly the ideas of Karl Marx, when confronting issues of culture and politics. Indeed, within the classic tradition of sociology, Marx provides the most basic theoretical model for political and cultural contemplation. However, because Soviet scholars were not free to pursue the classic tradition, it was incumbent upon American sociologists to help by forging intellectual ties with them. Such was Mills's thinking in late 1959 when he completed *Images of Man*; in early 1960 when he gave a seminar on Marxism at Mexico's national university; and in the spring of that same year while in the Soviet Union, during which he did research for his final book, published shortly after his death, *The Marxists*.

Initially working with the tentative title, *The Marxians: Thinkers and Politicians*, the inexpensive softcover, which Mills described as 'a primer on marxisms', is part text, part reader. The book's text portions, about half of the chapters, consist of Mills's extensive commentary in which he critiques all Marxist orthodoxies from the Bolsheviks to the social democrats to the anti-Stalinists, and others, all of which depart in significant ways from classic Marxism. The remaining chapters contain selections from the writings of political leaders and theoreticians including Mao, Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky.

While in the USSR, Mills noted in his journal, On Observing the *Russians*, that in comparing the theoretical

quality of practical politicians with that of Marx, three things must be kept in mind. First, that unlike these leaders, Marx was not addressing millions of people. Second, that whilst Marx had no political power, these leaders held enormous powers in party and in state. Third, Marx wrote at a time when there was no post-capitalist or socialist society, but these politicians were in the middle of socialist construction. Such experiences made those that acted politically in Marx's name more primitive in their formulations, more ideological and more practical than Marx. The Soviet intelligentsia and the party people, Mills records in his journal, saw Lenin as the embodiment of the unity of theory and practice and thus found in him the image of the ideal Soviet person. As for Trotsky, Mills states that he was the only Marxist theoretician to have made original contributions since Lenin's death. But Trotsky's works, particularly those concerning Soviet society, were widely unknown in that regime. Further, Mills found that Soviet scholars were largely ignorant of developments derived from the conceptions and theories of Marx, by such thinkers as, for example, anti-Soviet scholars, E. H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher.

With these considerations in mind, Mills in *The Marxists* identifies and appraises three intellectual types of Marxism in terms appropriate to the early 1960s: what he calls vulgar Marxism, sophisticated Marxism and plain Marxism. For Mills, 'vulgar Marxists' seize upon certain ideological features of Marx's political philosophy and identify these aspects as the whole. They are usually apologists for the Soviet Union, exhibit a strong party allegiance, and operate within the strict confines of Marxism as a dogmatic ideological system. 'Sophisticated Marxists', by contrast, display greater flexibility as they are mainly concerned with Marxism as a model of society and with the theories developed with the aid of this model. They nonetheless remain loyal to a Marxist form of

analysis and are unlikely to completely break away from that system. Finally, 'plain Marxists' – amongst whom Mills numbers himself along with Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg and Jean-Paul Sartre – utilise Marxism chiefly as a method of critical inquiry to advance current human concerns. According to Mills, plain Marxists emphasize the human being's freedom in the making of history and they confront in Marx's work the unresolved tensions of humanism and determinism, of human freedom and historical necessity. Plain Marxists, therefore, take a critical stance toward other social theorists including Marx. Whilst Mills sees Marx as a political thinker that social scientists must endeavour to understand, he nonetheless critiques many of Marx's doctrinaire principles.

It is the case that Mills was not a 'Marxist', except in the limited sense of being a plain Marxist. Indeed, Mills always rejected identification with ideological Marxism. In his Soviet journal, in thinking about an introductory statement for *The Marxists*, Mills is compelled say that he had never been and was not then a member or follower of any political party – including the Communist party. Insofar as he had been political, it was only as a writer. And in an effort at self-scrutiny, Mills attributes this biographical fact to his socio-historical circumstances and temperament. He recognises that had he been older during the 1930s and lived in the Eastern bloc he would likely have joined some political group. But the fact that he did not, Mills believes, provided him with several advantages as a political observer and analyst, especially in the 1950s, and even in 1960 while observing the Russians and drafting *The Marxists*.

As a plain Marxist Mills rejects Marxism as ideological dogmatism and statist orthodoxy but employs it pragmatically as a working model. Even while revealing certain inadequacies in Marx's working model of society (e.g. the historical inevitability of socialism), Mills also praises him for providing

social science with the basic tenets of the sociological imagination. Mills holds that what is important is not the truth or falsity of the theories based upon the Marxian model, but the model itself. Marx's model could be used for constructing different social theories as well as for correcting those made with its aid. Simply put, for Mills, Marx's model is a signal and lasting contribution to the sociological imagination.

9

MILLS: LOOKING BACK, FORWARD-LOOKING

C. Wright Mills's literary output – which includes books, monographs, pamphlets, articles, essays, introductions, reviews, commentaries, lectures and letters, both published and unpublished – is prodigious. Though much of it has been culled, complied, edited and translated into various languages, there is doubtless more material that has yet to be made available to an interested reading audience. The total number of Mills's substantive writings has been calculated at somewhat over 200 publications.

UNFINISHED WORK

At the time of his death, Mills was working on four books, all of them at least halfway written. In the hands of a highly skilled researcher and editor, Mills's unfinished work could potentially see publication in some form. One is the expansive undertaking, provisionally titled *Comparative Sociology*, intended as a historical comparative analysis of types of social structures

found in 124 countries. Mills hoped that this venture would yield a broad orienting framework to support subsequent smaller studies. The other projects, all of which were mentioned in Chapter 7, consist of the manuscript, *Contacting the Enemy*, which was to be a collection of missives that Mills wrote to an imaginary Russian correspondent. Many of these letters already appear in Kathryn and Pamela Mills's, *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings*. Another unfinished book, *The Cultural Apparatus*, consists of about a dozen essays, at least three of which have already been published in collections of Mills's writings. A tentative outline of the book reveals its organisation into three sections: the first entails a description of the scope and variety of cultural activities and their place in society; the second focusses on the place of the cultural apparatus in American society; the third section examines how culture and politics are indispensably related. Finally, there is Mills's journal *On Observing the Russians*, which could be produced as an intellectual period-travelogue.

INFLUENTIAL WORK

Mills's more politically inspired, and politically inspiring works, *The Power Elite*, *The Causes of World War Three*; *Listen, Yankee* and 'Letter to the New Left', had a pervasive impact on movement politics of the 1960s and 1970s: the antinuclear protest movements, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the anti-imperialist movements in the hungry-nation bloc and the campus-based left-wing movement.

His most successful book, *Listen, Yankee*, was nothing less than a worldwide literary sensation. With sales of nearly half a million copies, only three other bestsellers by American sociologists – David Riesman's et al., *The Lonely Crowd*,

Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner* and Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness* – with much longer print runs, have surpassed it. Some regard *Listen, Yankee* as one of the key radicalising texts of the Sixties generation, along with Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Martin Luther King's 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' and *The Port Huron Statement*. With *Listen, Yankee* Mills brought to the world the true voice of the Cuban Revolution, which throughout much of the twentieth century represented the archetypical case of defiance of monopoly capitalism, and more specifically, of the manipulations and machinations of US imperialism. And it is the symbol, the message and the image of Cuba's revolution as exemplar to the hungry-nation bloc, especially in Latin America, that Mills understood well.

Moreover, all the leaders of the campus activist movement's most prominent organisation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) – Alan Haber, Sharon Jeffrey, Bob Ross and Tom Hayden – were inspired by Mills's political writings, particularly 'Letter to the New Left'. In 1963, Ross devoted his undergraduate senior thesis to a discussion of American democracy and Mills's theories. The following year Hayden wrote his master's thesis, ultimately published in 2006, on Mills's thought and times. The SDS manifesto of 1960, *The Port Huron Statement*, drafted in part by Hayden, Haber and Ross, was written in conscious imitation of Mills's writings, including 'Letter'.

Despite disagreeing with Mills that the working class was not the revolutionary agency of social change, the British new leftists, including Stuart Hall, E. P. Thompson and Ralph Miliband, were much attracted to his ideas about the cultural apparatus; ideas that found public expression in his 1959 lectures given at the London School of Economics. Moreover, the British New Left relied on *Listen, Yankee* for information about the Cuban Revolution at a time when they had no correspondents who had visited the Caribbean island.

MISSTEPS AND BLIND SPOTS

Despite his promotion of political movements as live agencies of social transformation, Mills's sociological imaginary, of linking individual experience and the larger social context, failed to consider the lived realities of women and of people of colour in depth. Indeed, he undertook only a few early examinations on the issues of race and ethnicity. Though he shunned 'the racial business', as he referred to it, Mills early on rejected the idea of racial superiority and inferiority that was a core component of the cultural life of the Texas of his youth. Mills acquired his sentiment of multicultural acceptance from his mother who had spent her early childhood on a South Texas ranch cared for by Mexican women as well as her mother. As already relayed in Chapter 2, as an adolescent Mills intervened during the physical assault of a Black man by a White man. Further, his writings on ethnicity and race consist of two social-psychological studies focussed on the character structure of Latinos. In a 1943 article for *The New Leader* Mills expounded on the violent confrontations, the so-called Zoot Suit Riots, between White sailors and Mexican Americans teenagers in Los Angeles. A few years later, in *The Puerto Rican Journey,* Mills examined the individual and collective experiences of Puerto Rican migrants to New York City.

Notwithstanding these personal involvements and professional productions, and the fact that he regarded the United States as 'a white tyranny', Mills acknowledged that he had neither a scholastic nor a political interest with race relations. For all his writings on social and economic inequality, racial inequality was not a main concern. Put another way, identity politics held little attraction for him.

Though in 'Letter to the New Left' Mills identifies the Black and White university students protesting racial segregation in the US South as amongst the various groups of young

intelligentsia agitating for reform, he does not mention the Civil Rights movement, nor any of the pivotal events of historic significance that had brought and were bringing structural changes to US society: the 1954 US Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* that ended racial segregation in public schools; the 1955 brutal murder of 14-year-old African American Emmett Till for allegedly flirting with a White woman; the civil disobedience of Rosa Parks that led to the Montgomery bus boycott; the Greensboro Four who, in the spring of 1960, refused to leave a 'Whites only' lunch counter without being served.

Much as Mills neglected structural issues related to racial inequalities, he also failed to problematise, much less politicise, male hegemony. For Mills gender discrimination was best explained by commodification and competition in meso-level *markets*. Indeed, in *The New Leader* article he identified the wartime 'sex market' as the catalyst to the conflict between White soldiers and Latino civilians. As he saw it, the sexually available young Mexican women were attractive to the sailors who competed with the Latinos for 'their girls'. Group lines were drawn between the sailors and zoot suiters and the situation became a riot. As a practical solution to the unregulated sex market Mills suggests establishing houses of prostitution specifically for sailors and soldiers on leave. While he does not completely ignore racial tensions and inequalities, his proposal of creating licensed brothels was hardly based on striving for racial or gender justice.

Reference to markets is also made in a brief essay of 1952 in which Mills describes a new type of prostitute, the 'expense account girl' (the escort sex worker), and attributes her emergence to certain social and cultural trends in post-war US society. One of these was the public eroticism exhibited by mass media celebrities – chief amongst them the newest sex

symbol of the time, Marilyn Monroe – who were imitated by women in all walks of life. Another trend, related to the 'employment market', involved the pervasive sexual harassment and exploitation of female employees, with little or no power in the workplace, by their supervisors in the corporate world. Yet another trend, this one occurring in the 'marriage market', was the devaluation of women's premarital virginity, which was no longer required for marriage. While Mills acknowledges men's superior position over women, he does not condemn the concentration of patriarchal power like he did the concentration of bureaucratised power.

The following year, 1953, in a review of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Mills lauds her use of sociological psychology in interpreting women's character, and in this way inviting readers to think deeply about their own personal lives and problems. However, in her attempt to explain women's subjugation and oppression – and how they can attain freedom, fulfilment and dignity in society – Mills criticises Beauvoir for confusing woman's condition with the human condition more broadly. He faults her for not being systematic about men's situation and about humans in general. Indeed, Mills maintains that many men have similar life opportunities and frustrations as those that de Beauvoir attributes to women only. And in some exceptional cases, privileged women, like the 'American suburban queen', who Mills sees as a parasite and exploiter of her husband-provider, are better situated than men. In the gender struggle, Mills continues, people exhibit different forms of power: men are authoritarian, women manipulative; men command, women seduce. To avoid the vague explanations that de Beauvoir makes about 'woman' and 'the woman condition', Mills contends that she should have worked with *classifications* and written about the various *types* of women in historically specific situations.

Mills's missteps and blind spots notwithstanding, his advocacy of a post-modern sociological consciousness, and self-consciousness, is becoming, if not yet the major common denominator of cultural life, at least increasingly prevalent. As the public at large considers more and more the micro–macro nexus, there is no longer talk only of racists and sexists, but of *structural* racism and *institutional* sexism. Indeed, it may be that due to catastrophic problems of global consequence and world history – like the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change – people, whether or not they are familiar with Mills's sociological vision, will be following his advice to 'Take it big'.

LEGACY AND TRIBUTES

Between 2000 and 2002, *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar*, *The Power Elite* and *The Sociological Imagination* were each re-issued with new introductions written by prominent scholars. It is, however, *The Sociological Imagination* that has had the most lasting and significant influence on a variety of intellectual and cultural fields. The quality of mind that Mills proffers in that book has been adopted in and adapted to many fields including International Relations, Design and Architecture. As such, there have been calls for an international imagination, a design imagination and an architectural imagination. In employing the sociological imagination designers can comprehend the impact their work has on consumers' needs, values, interpersonal relations and identities; international relations scholars can show how international actors and processes are the ongoing products of human agency constituted in specific historical forms; and architects can practice a socially responsible architecture that improves the quality of life for the socially disadvantaged.

Indeed, the theme of 'Imagining', for the 2010 conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, was inspired by Mills's notion that historical events and people's everyday experiences are intricately connected to the sociological imagination. Conference participants were asked to describe an architectural imagination in the context of C. Wright Mills.

Another example of Mills's continuing legacy in the aesthetic arts is reflected in filmmaker Zaheed Mawani's 2011 documentary 'Three Walls', that explores the reality of the office cubicle. Inspired by *White Collar*, the film is a social commentary on the absurdity of work centred around the cubiclizing of workers in modern corporations.

As noted in Chapter 1, *The Sociological Imagination* has been ranked by world sociologists as the second most influential sociology text of the twentieth century. Since the year 2000 there have been no fewer than 15 books written in English with 'sociological imagination' in their titles or subtitles. Indeed, it has now become de rigueur for textbooks for courses in introductory sociology and in social problems to discuss the sociological imagination in their opening chapter. In addition, dozens of journal articles and book chapters, as well as conference themes, have employed the phrase. A Google search of 'sociological imagination' yields nearly 15 million results.

Since 1964 the Society for the Study of Social Problems has given the C. Wright Mills Award to a book that is consistent with Mills's dedication to a search for a sophisticated understanding of the individual and society. The book is to critically address an issue of contemporary public importance; bring to the topic a fresh, imaginative perspective; advance social scientific understanding of the topic; display a theoretically informed view and empirical orientation; evince quality in style of writing and explicitly or implicitly contain implications for courses of action.

Shortly after *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings* was published in 2000, and nearly four decades after his passing, Mills's younger daughter, Kathryn, organised a public reading called 'Tribute to C Wright Mills' at the New York Public Library. Many of Mills's friends, former students, and admirers – including Todd Gitlin, Norman Birnbaum, Dan Wakefield, Tom Hayden – read passages from the book or reminisced about him. Video of the ceremony can be seen at https://www.c-span.org/video/?161481-1/tribute-c-wright-mills.

In 2004, Mills was rediscovered as a pioneer of public sociology. That year the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association were devoted to public sociology, in correspondence with Mills championing for a sociology that engages publics and speaks truth to power. However, ASA president, Michael Burowoy, decried Mills's 'traditional' type of public sociology – taking an elitist, intellectualist, position of talking down to publics. (Mills's mode of speaking to, for, and at people was due mainly to his desire to challenge their political complacency and apathy.) Instead, Burowoy espoused an 'organic' public sociology in which the sociologist takes part in an unmediated dialogue directly with pockets of civil society – neighbourhood associations, communities of faith, labour movements and prisoners – in a way that Mills never did.

In 2009, a conference in honour of the 50th anniversary of *The Sociological Imagination* was held at the City University of New York. In 2012, several events were held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Mills's death, including a special panel at the British Sociological Association conference, and an international symposium at the University of Bergen, Norway.

Since the year 2000 about a dozen books, monographs and edited editions, devoted to Mills's life and work have been published. These include John D. Brewer's *C. Wright Mills*

and the Ending of Violence; Rick Tilman's *Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, C. Wright Mills and the Generic Ends of Life*; Tom Hayden's *Radical Nomad* and *Listen, Yankee!*; John D. Summers's *The Politics of Truth*; Keith Kerr's *Postmodern Cowboy*; Daniel Geary's *Radical Ambition*; A. Javier Treviño's *The Social Thought of C. Wright Mills* and *C. Wright Mills and the Cuban Revolution*; Stanley Aronowitz's *Taking It Big*; John Scott and Ann Nilsen's *C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination*; Guy Oakes's *The Anthem Companion to C. Wright Mills*, with more to come.

MILLS TODAY

Clearly, many of Mills's analyses of post-modern society, and of sociology, have been outrun by history, whether due to strategic human action or, more likely, to the blind drift of events. In a post-soviet world, communism is no longer seen as an existential threat and nuclear annihilation no longer appears as imminent, at least not with Russia. The singular crisis that brought the world to the brink of Armageddon was the deployment by the USSR of missiles in Cuba, which transpired shortly after Mills's death. But today nuclear threats are less likely to come from superstates, than from rogue states like North Korea and Iran. And while there may still be a thrusting toward war, total global war is not as likely as it once was. Of relevance today is not the clear-eyed military definition of reality that concerned Mills; now, conflicts are hazier as they take the form of 'terrorist' attacks, and state-sponsored proxy wars and cyberwars that typically result in collateral damage, of civilians and infrastructure.

The economic determinism of corporate capitalism remains as much a potent force as it did in the 1950s. However, giant corporations – in retail, health care, information technology –

now dominate international and internet markets, economically and culturally, on a scope that Mills could not have foreseen. In today's global economy financial capital is still nationally concentrated amongst the 1%, but also internationally diffused amongst major conglomerates. And while American militarism continues apace in the name of national security, the warlords of the Pentagon are not the major players in the organisation of power that they were in Mills's time. Moreover, aside from the imperial presidencies of Nixon and Trump, with their normative, statutory and constitutional abuses of power, the executive branch is checked (or deadlocked) frequently enough by Congress, public interest groups, and political publics; in contradiction to Mills's eschewal of the pluralistic theory of balance. Also, increasingly significant has been the US Supreme Court, which has become more politically and culturally active since Mills's death. Thus, the Court can no longer be relegated to the middle levels of the American power structure.

The American and British publics and political parties are considerably more polarised than they were at mid-twentieth century, as evidenced by the electoral margins in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections and in the 2016 Brexit referendum. This epoch of highly contested politics makes it exceedingly difficult to achieve Mills's 'properly developing society' where issues are openly debated by a community of free and knowledgeable publics with common purpose and common ground. Also, some of today's publics are much less politically informed, or rather, more *misinformed*, than they were in Mills's time. This is due largely to the prevalence and influence of highly partisan media markets (cable news, political talk radio, social media); the distrust of the courts, the press, science and the electoral process, thus setting up a legitimation crisis of democratic institutions; and the questionable credibility of the polling industry.

Just at the world has changed significantly since Mills's time, so too has the condition of sociology. While Marx, Weber and Durkheim survive as the canonical three, many of the other classic theorists, if not unknown, are now certainly unread. Who now reads Spencer? or Veblen? or Pareto? Indeed, Mills's *Images of Man* would today not sell well given that the writings included in that reader no longer represent the sociological 'core'. These classic thinkers are coming to be seen, and rightly so, as racist, sexist, classist and Eurocentric. Today, of greater interest are global South theory, post-colonial theory, standpoint theory and intersectionality. While Mills would have approved of these reflexive and critical approaches, he would have been wary of any wholesale rejection of the classic tradition given that it still compels us to ask questions about total societies, their structural trends and their corresponding effects on people.

Particularly dramatic in the discipline's transformation since Mills's time is its fragmentation into myriad conceptual perspectives and specialities. This proliferation of sociologies is accompanied by the proliferation of academic journals in various fields and subfields within the discipline. This hardly bodes well for Mills's injunction to take it big and see the big picture.

Further, present day sociological theory does not hew as closely to the historical specificity that Mills had urged. This is not because it assumes that transhistorical and invariant generalisations can be made about human nature; rather, it is because many theorists offhandedly ignore history, particularly *world history*. Today, the focus is often exclusively on *contemporary* social life and on *current* events, with little regard for their past. Whilst Mills made frequent use of the term 'nowadays' as a literary device to call the reader's attention to certain pressing issues, he was careful not to 'celebrate the present', and thus always placed those issues

within specific historical contexts. Also eschewed today, with a few outstanding exceptions, is the *comparative* study of societies that Mills championed since his early introduction to Weber.

More numerous now are the sociological styles of work beyond the two that Mills decried in the 1950s. The conceptualisations of Jurgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann and Pierre Bourdieu, and their popularity, if largely in Europe, aptly demonstrate the continuation of grand theory. As for the impenetrable prose that Mills railed against, it cannot be said that today's grand theorists are any more intelligible or less jargonistic than was Parsons.

The empiricist methodology of data gathering that Mills scorned has become a basic component in sociology as evidenced by the multitude of quantitative and narrowly focussed studies published in major journals such as the *American Sociological Review*. Indeed, abstracted empiricism has gained greater popularity since the increased use of high-speed computers, advanced statistical analysis and prominence of large-scale data sets that produce studies devoid of sociological meaning and that ignore or deny the existence of social structure.

Whilst Mills's preoccupation with power, social stratification (now articulated as class, race and gender inequality) and to a lesser extent, freedom, are now pervasive sociological themes, there is perhaps less discussion of reason and democracy. But by far the greatest challenge to Mills's humanist-critical sociology comes as a threat to his politics of truth: his belief that ideas could be a force for progressive social change. Mills's moral mandate to public intellectuals – to serve as the conscience of society, to reveal the facts of things, to give a true image of reality – has become meaningless in a *post-truth* political culture. As such, Mills's admonition takes on greater urgency, particularly in countries in the throes of

tyrannical populism; where authoritarianism, isolationism and tweeted conspiracy theories trump the values of freedom, reason and justice. Looking back, many of Mills's concerns – with the vocabularies of motive that stifle social criticism; with the commercial manipulation of mass society; with the liberal obfuscation of foreign policy – now seem quaint, if not completely irrelevant. This is particularly the case in the face of declarations that '*truth isn't truth*', proposals of '*alternative facts*', and the Stalin-like treatment of the press as '*the enemy of the people*' – made by, as Mills described them, 'mindless' public officials.

At bottom the question for us is, Can Mills be read as a forward-looking guide to understanding the social forces operating today? The answer is 'yes', at least in the sense that his best work compels us to ask the big questions on how to think and live. Thus, whatever structural and cultural changes have transpired since Mills's time, his books and essays still bear re-reading. But not so much for his social scientific analysis, which is largely an interpretation of post-war America's mass society, power elite, and drift toward slump and war. Nor for his programmatic radical politics, which tend to focus on what *must* be done, not on what *can* be done. Indeed, rather like his intellectual mentor, Thorstein Veblen, it may be that, despite never developing a 'system' or a 'school', Mills will maintain canonical status in the classic tradition due mainly to his *social criticism*, with its colloquial nomenclature of crackpot realism, higher immorality, and cheerful robots. It is the social criticism of C. Wright Mills that will continue to orient and inspire a new generation of social thinkers who desire to procure a more egalitarian, peaceful and just world.

Appendix 1

CONSPECTUS OF MILLS'S PRINCIPAL WORKS

This Appendix lists Mills's major writings, both authored and co-authored, in chronological order. The Reference numbers M1–M60 are those used in Appendix 2 to show the relationship with the chapters in this book.

Year	Title	Source
1939	M1 Reflection, Behavior, and Culture	Unpublished MA thesis, University of Texas at Austin
	M2 Language, Logic, and Culture	*American Sociological Review, 4*, 5, 670–680
1940	M3 Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive	*American Sociological Review, 5*, 6, 904–913
	M4 Methodological Consequences of the Sociology of Knowledge	*American Journal of Sociology, 46*, 3, 316–330

(*Continued*)

Year	Title	Source
1941	M5 A Sociological Account of Some Aspects of Pragmatism	Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Published as *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1964
1942	M6 Locating the Enemy: The Nazi Behemoth Dissected.	*Partisan Review 9*, 432–437
	M7 Collectivism and the 'Mixed-Up' Economy	*New Leader 25*, 5–6
	M8 Marx for the Managers	With Hans Gerth, *Ethics 52*, 2, 200–215
1943	M9 The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists	*American Journal of Sociology, 49*, 2, 165–180
	M10 The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican	*New Leader, 26*, 5–7
	M11 The Case for the Coal Miners	*New Republic* (May 24) 695–698
	M12 The Political Gargoyles	*New Republic* (April 12) 482–483
1944	M13 The Powerless People: The Role of the Intellectual in Society	*Politics*, *1*, 3, 68–72
	M14 Class, Status, Party	With Hans Gerth, *Politics*, *1*, 272–278
1945	M15 The Trade Union Leader: A Collective Portrait	With assistance from Mildred Atkinson, *Public Opinion Quarterly 9*, 2, 158–175
	M16 The American Business Elite: A Collective Portrait	*The Journal of Economic History*, *5* (Supplement), 20–44

(*Continued*)

Year	Title	Source
1946	M17 *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*	With Hans Gerth, New York, Oxford University Press, 1946
	M18 The Middle Classes in Middle-Sized Cities: The Stratification and Political Position of Small Business and White-Collar Strata	*American Sociological Review 11*, 5, 520–529
	M19 No Mean-Sized Opportunity	*The House of Labor: Internal Operations of American Unions*, Eds JBS Hardman and Maurice F Neufeld, New York, Prentice-Hall, 515–520, 1951
	M20 The Competitive Personality	*Partisan Review 3*: 433–441
1947	M21 Leaders of the Labor Unions	With Helen S Dinerman, *The House of Labor: Internal Operations of American Unions*, Eds JBS Hardman and Maurice F Neufeld, New York, Prentice-Hall, 23–47; 546–549, 1951
	M22 What the People Think: The People in the Unions	With Thelma Ehrlich, *Labor and Nation 3*, 28–31
1948	M23 *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders*	New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company Inc, 1948
1949	M24 Notes on White Collar Unionism	*Labor and Union 5* (March–April) 17–21; (May–June) 17–23

(*Continued*)

Year	Title	Source
1950	M25 The Sociology of Mass Media and Public Opinion	*Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, Ed Irving Louis Horowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 577–598, 1963
	M26 *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants*	With Clarence Senior and Rose K Goldsen, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950
1951	M27 The Sociology of Stratification	*Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Works of C. Wright Mills*, Ed Irving Louis Horowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 305–323, 1963
	M28 *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*	New York, Oxford University Press, 1951
1952	M29 A Look at the White Collar	*Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Works of C. Wright Mills*, Ed Irving Louis Horowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 140–149, 1963
	M30 A Diagnosis of our Moral Uneasiness	*New York Times Magazine* (November) 10, 55–57
	M31 What Helps Most in Politics?	With Ruth Mills, *Pageant 8,* 5, 156–162
	M32 Our Country and Our Culture	*Partisan Review 19* (July, August) 446–450
	M33 Plain Talk on Fancy Sex	*Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Works of C. Wright Mills*, Ed Irving Louis Horowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 324–329, 1963

(*Continued*)

Year	Title	Source
1953	M34 *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions*	With Hans Gerth, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.
	M35 Two Styles of Research in Current Social Studies	*Philosophy of Science*, *20*, 4, 266–275
	M36 Women: The Darling Little Slaves	*Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Works of C. Wright Mills*, Ed Irving Louis Horowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 339–346, 1963
1954	M37 The Labor Leaders and the Political Elite	*Roots of Industrial Conflict*, Eds Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin, and Arthur M Ross, New York, McGraw-Hill, 144–152
	M38 The Conservative Mood	*Dissent, 1*, 1, 22–31
	M39 IBM Plus Reality Plus Humanism = Reality	*The Saturday Review 37,* 18 (May), 22–23, 54
1955	M40 On Knowledge and Power	*Dissent 2*,3, 201–212
	M41 The Power Elite: Military, Economic, and Political	*Problems of Power in American Democracy*, Ed Arthur Kornhauser, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 145–172, 1959
1956	M42 *The Power Elite*	New York, Oxford University Press, 1956
1957	M43 'The Power Elite': Comment on Criticism	*Dissent 5*, 22–34
	M44 Program for Peace	*The Nation 185* (December), 419–424

(*Continued*)

Year	Title	Source
1958	M45 The Structure of Power in American Society	*British Journal of Sociology 9,* 1, 29–41
	M46 The Man in the Middle: The Designer	*Industrial Design 5* (November) 72–76
	M47 A Pagan Sermon to the Christian Clergy	*The Nation 186* (March) 199–202
	M48 *The Causes of World War Three*	New York, Simon and Schuster, 1958
	M49 The Complacent Young Men: Reasons for Anger	*Anvil and Student Partisan* (Winter Issue) 13–15.
1959	M50 The Big City: Private Troubles and Public Issues	T*he Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C Wright Mills*, Ed John H. Summers, New York, Oxford University Press, 185–191, 2008
	M51 Culture and Politics: The Fourth Epoch	*The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, Ed John H. Summers, New York, Oxford University Press, 193–201, 2008
	M52 The Cultural Apparatus	*The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills,* Ed John H. Summers, New York, Oxford University Press, 203–212, 2008
	M53 The Decline of the Left	*The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C Wright Mills*, Ed John H. Summers, New York, Oxford University Press, 213–222, 2008
	M54 Intellectuals and Russia	*Dissent 6*, 295–298

(*Continued*)

Year	Title	Source
	M55 The Intellectuals' Last Chance	*Esquire 52* (October) 101–102
	M56 *The Sociological Imagination*	New York, Oxford University Press, 1959
1960	M57 *Listen Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba*	New York, Ballantine Books, 1960
	M58 Letter to the New Left	*New Left Review, 5*,18–523
	M59 *Images of Man: The Classic Tradition in Sociological Thinking*	New York, George Braziller, 1960
1962	M60 *The Marxists*	New York, Dell Publishing Company, 1960

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Appendix 2

SOURCES AND FURTHER READINGS

This Appendix lists the main original sources for each chapter, using the cross references listed in Appendix 1. It also presents further reading of secondary materials in which Mills's social and political ideas are applied, interpreted and extended in various ways. For an exhaustive listing of Mills's literary output that includes everything from monographs to poems, from undergraduate papers to memoranda, the interested reader is directed to the bibliography found at the end of John H. Summers's *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). A similar bibliography, though not as extensive, is found in Irving Louis Horowitz's edited volume *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Typescripts and drafts, notes, notebooks and journals, research reports by Mills and others, from his days as a University of Texas undergraduate during the 1930s until his

death in 1962, can be found in the 'C. Wright Mills Papers' archived at the Brisco Centre for American History, University of Texas at Austin. An online guide to these papers can be found at https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/01094/cah-01094.html

Another collection of Mills's papers is available in the Horowitz Transaction Publishers Archives housed in the Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University. The collection includes correspondence with and about Mills, typescripts and research files by and about Mills and books by and about Mills.

The best single source on Mills's life and career is Daniel Geary's *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). This is an intellectual biography written by a historian, not a sociologist. It must be complemented by the indispensable volume on Mills's own autobiographical writings compiled and edited by his daughters, Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills, *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Also of help in this regard is the unpublished PhD dissertation by Richard A. Gillam, 'C. Wright Mills: An Intellectual Biography, 1916–1948' (Stanford University, 1971). Another intellectual biography is Irving Louis Horowitz's *C. Wight Mills: An American Utopian* (New York: Free Press, 1983).

In addition to these sources much of the information for Chapters 1 and 2 was derived from A. Javier Treviño's *The Social Thought of C. Wright Mills* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2012). Also consulted were Stanley Aronowitz's *Taking It Big: C. Wright Mills and the Making of Political Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), Rick Tillman's *C. Wright Mills: A Native Radical and His American Intellectual Roots* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 1984), and Keith T. Kerr's *Postmodern Cowboy: C. Wright Mills and a New Twenty-first Century Sociology*

(Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009). On the relationship between Mills and Hans Gerth see Guy Oakes and Arthur J. Vidich's *Collaboration, Reputation, and Ethics in American Academic Life: Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). For an alternative perspective see Russell Jacoby's 'False Indignation' (*New Left Review*, March/April 2000).

Books that may be consulted for an analysis of the historical period in US society during which Mills was living and working are Tom Hayden's *Radical Nomad: C. Wright Mills and His Times* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2006), David Halberstam's *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman's *Seeds of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Dan Wakefield's *New York in the 50s* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992). For an insightful account of Mills's experiences in England see John H Summer's 'No-Man's-Land: C. Wright Mills in England' in his *Every Fury on Earth* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group Publishers, 2008). See also Mills's 'The Complacent Young Men: Reasons for Anger' (*Anvil and Student Partisan*, Winter Issue, 13–15, 1958).

The most extensive collection of critical pieces written on Mills's social thought is Stanley Aronowitz's three-volume *C. Wright Mills* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), which contains 93 contributions originally published between 1948 and 2001. Also of importance is Guy Oakes's *The Anthem Companion to C. Wright Mills* (London: Anthem Press, 2016) and the forthcoming Jon Frauley's *The Routledge International Handbook of C. Wright Mills Studies* (London: Routledge).

CHAPTER 3

Basic sources for this chapter are M1–M5, M9, M13, M14, M17, M34.

For a good overview of pragmatism's influence upon Mills see the chapter, 'The Dilemma of the Mid-Century Pragmatic Intellectual' in Cornel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). In his *Toward a Pragmatist Sociology: John Dewey and the Legacy of C. Wright Mills* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018). Robert G. Dunn argues that the ideas of Dewey and Mills provide a philosophical and theoretical foundation for the development of a critical public sociology. Also of relevance is Rick Tilman's *Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, C. Wright Mills, and the Generic Ends of Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), which examines the contributions of these three thinkers to the development of a critical social science in the United States.

CHAPTER 4

Basic sources for this chapter are M6–M8, M11, M12, M15, M19, M21–M23, M27, M37.

A good general introduction to Mills's book is Nelson Lichtenstein's 'The New Men of Power' (*Dissent*, Fall, 121–130, 2001). Also of relevance is Dan Geary's 'The "Union of the Power and the Intellect": C Wright Mills and the Labor Movement' (*Labor History*, 42, 4, 327–345, 2001).

CHAPTER 5

Basic sources for this chapter are M13, M16, M18, M20, M22, M24, M28, M29, M46, M49, M50.

Other portraits of middle-class life in mid-twentieth century America – fiction and non-fiction – are Richard Yates's novel, *Revolutionary Road* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961) and

Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* (New York: McKay, 1959). See also, Richard Gillam's '*White Collar* From Start to Finish: C. Wright Mills in Transition' (*Theory and Society 10*, 1, 1–30, 1981) and A. Javier Treviño's 'C. Wright Mills as Designer: Personal Practice and Two Public Talks' (*American Sociologist, 45*, 4, 335–360, 2015).

CHAPTER 6

Basic sources for this chapter are M25, M30, M31, M37, M38, M40–M43, M45.

Insights into Mills's motivations and ambitions for *The Power Elite* are found in Richard Gillam's 'C. Wright Mills and the Politics of Truth: The Power Elite Revisited' (*American Quarterly 27*, 4, 461–479, 1975), Alan Wolfe's 'The Power Elite Now' (*American Prospect*, May, 90, 1999), and John H. Summer's 'The Deciders' in his *Every Fury on Earth* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group Publishers, 2008). A useful compendium of liberal, radical and highbrow critiques of *The Power Elite* is G. William Domhoff and Hoyt B. Ballard's *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). This chapter's section, 'Criticism', relies largely on this anthology. See also Talcott Parsons's 'The Distribution of Power in American Society' (*World Politics 10*, 1, 123–143, 1957). One book largely inspired by Mills's power elite study is Domhoff's *Who Rules America?* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

CHAPTER 7

Basic sources for this chapter are M32, M44, M47, M48, M51–M55, M57, M58.

For a consideration of the cultural context, in Europe and America, in which Mills wrote *The Causes of World War Three* see John D. Brewer's chapter, 'C. Wright Mills on War and Peace' in John Scott and Ann Nilsen eds, *C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar, 2013). A satisfying historical analysis of American intellectuals' differing positions on 1950s public affairs and of Mills's *Causes* is provided in the chapter, 'A Candidate of Intelligence' in Michael J. Brown's *Hope and Scorn: Eggheads, Experts, and Elites in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020). Another account that considers the effects of Mills's peace policy into the 1960s is found in the chapter, 'Old and New Left Internationalism and the Search for World Peace' in Petra Goedde's *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

A good history and examination of the content of *The Cultural Apparatus* manuscript is given in Kim Sawchuk's article, 'The Cultural Apparatus: C Wright Mills's Unfinished Work' (*American Sociologist 32*, 1, 27–49, 2001).

Approximately one-fourth to one-third of *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings* is made up of Mills's letters to Tovarich. The information on Mills's visit to the Soviet Union is taken from his unpublished manuscript, *On Observing the Russians*, which is a miscellany of firsthand observations, questionnaires, reflections and transcripts from Mills's interviews with the Soviet intellectuals. A summary of these events and experiences is provided in A Javier Treviño's essay, 'C. Wright Mills on the Character and Role of the Soviet Intelligentsia' in John Frauley's *The Routledge International Handbook of C. Wright Mills Studies* (forthcoming).

Sources on Mills and the New Left include Daniel Geary's '"Becoming International Again": C. Wright Mills and the Emergence of a Global New Left, 1956–1962' (*Journal of American History 93*, 3, 710–736, 2008); Tom Hayden's

Radical Nomad: C. Wright Mills and His Times (Boulder, CO; Paradigm Publishers, 2006); the chapter, 'The Prophet of the Powerless' in James Miller's '*Democracy is in the Streets': From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) and A. Javier Treviño and Robert J. S. Ross's 'The Influence of C Wright Mills on Students for a Democratic Society: An Interview with Bob Ross' (*Humanity and Society* 22,3, 260–277, 1998).

Most of the section on Mills's involvement with the Cuban Revolution is based on A. Javier Treviño's *C. Wright Mills and the Cuban Revolution: An Exercise in the Art of Sociological Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Also of relevance are the chapter 'C. Wright Mills, Cuba, and the New Left' in Tom Hayden's *Listen, Yankee! Why Cuba Matters* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2015) and Rafael Rojas's *Fighting over Fidel: The New York Intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

CHAPTER 8

Basic sources for this chapter include M35, M39, M56, M59, M60.

An excellent collection of essays on Mills and the sociological imagination is John Scott and Ann Nilsen's *C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar, 2013). For a retrospective on *The Sociological Imagination* see Todd Gitlin's 'C. Wright Mills, Free Radical' (*New Labor Forum 5*, 78–81, 1999) and his 'Afterword' to the Fortieth Anniversary Edition of *SI*. A statement on the biographical context of *SI* is found in John D. Brewer's 'Imagining *The Sociological Imagination*: A Biographical Context of a Sociological Classic' (*British Journal of Sociology 55*, 3, 317–333, 2004).

CHAPTER 9

Basic sources for this chapter include M10, M26, M33, M36.

On Mills's public sociology see Michael Burawoy's 'Open Letter to C. Wright Mills' (*Antipode 40*, 3, 365–375, 2008). On the international imagination see Justin Rosenberg's 'The International Imagination: IR Theory and "Classic Social Analysis"' (*Millennium: Journal of International Studies 23*, 1, 85–108, 1994).

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