

Worldly Ambitions

The Emergence of a Global New Left

For American left student activists of the early 1960s aiming to practice their own politics of truth, Mills's "Letter to the New Left" of 1960 provided inspiration. Attacking the liberal notion of an "end of ideology," Mills suggested that radical ideals could once again affect the course of history by stirring the masses out of their apathy. Defending "utopian" thinking, he showed the necessity of a New Left that would break through the limits of the cold war consensus politics of the 1950s. Most important, Mills proclaimed to the emerging white student movement that "new generations of intellectuals" could be "real live agencies of social change."¹ To readers who already revered Mills for his trenchant social analysis, "Letter to the New Left" legitimated the notion that relatively privileged university students could be pivotal agents of social transformation. Shortly after its publication, Mills's "Letter" was reprinted in the foremost intellectual journal of the American New Left, *Studies on the Left*. It was also published in pamphlet form by its most prominent organization, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), whose 1962 manifesto "The Port Huron Statement" heralded a New Left social movement of those "bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in the universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit."²

Though "Letter to the New Left" is best known for its influence on the American student movement, Mills conceived of the New Left in international terms. In fact, his "Letter" was originally published in the

British journal *New Left Review*. It was the product of the final phase of Mills's career, from the publication of *The Power Elite* in 1956 to his untimely death in 1962, which was marked by the internationalization of his thought and his discovery of a New Left. In 1956, Mills traveled to Europe for the first time, earning a Fulbright teaching fellowship in Denmark that allowed him to tour the continent. It proved to be, as Mills remarked at the time, a "pivotal year" for him, during which he expanded the horizons of his political activity and social analysis. Intellectuals, he now argued, must "become international again" when thinking about radical social change and "attempt to get in touch with our opposite numbers in all countries of the world."³ Encountering a diverse range of intellectual networks and political movements abroad, Mills reconceived the possibilities for radical social protest in the post-World War II world. No longer looking to the working class as the most promising agent for social change, as he had during the 1940s, he theorized the galvanizing effects of middle-class intellectual and cultural dissent in the United States and Europe in his unpublished book-length manuscript *The Cultural Apparatus*. No longer focusing primarily on American society, Mills enlightened U.S. and world audiences on issues of international significance by publishing two influential books, *The Causes of World War Three*, which grew out of his engagement with the peace movement in the United States and abroad, and *Listen, Yankee*, a defense of the Cuban Revolution.

In his "Letter to the New Left," Mills asked, "Who is it that is getting fed up with what Marx called 'all the old crap'? Who is it that is thinking and acting in radical ways? All over the world . . . the answer's the same: it is the young intelligentsia."⁴ To illustrate his point, Mills cited the revolution in Cuba, the antinuclear march at Aldermaston in Britain, the civil rights movement in the American South, and protests in Turkey, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, all of which involved a younger generation taking a leading role. Mills's identification of the "young intelligentsia" as the New Left agent of change actually conflated two different groups. The term suggested a broad-based middle-class movement of cultural producers. As he explained in a 1960 interview, "I am using this word 'intelligentsia' in the East European sense to mean the whole white-collar pyramid, as well as artists, scientists, and intellectuals in our sense."⁵ But if Mills's use of the term *intelligentsia* reminded readers of the Bolshevik Revolution, it is because it also encompassed another distinct group. In an unpublished 1959 note, Mills wrote, "the historic lever has been and is now the politi-

cal intelligentsia of pre-industrial countries,” adding in the margins, “Lenin is correct.”⁶ To this end, Mills hoped that global change could emerge from revolutionary yet non-Communist socialist movements in the third world.

Mills’s New Left engagements opened up new opportunities for intellectual and political development and revealed much that was of value in his radicalism. Neither dogmatic nor sectarian, Mills looked for sources of left-wing social change from whatever corners of society they might arise. Yet his new role as herald of the global New Left was fraught with difficulties. Though Mills never became a political activist as such, neither building organizations nor organizing protests, he was drawn into commenting more directly on timely political issues. While this enhanced Mills’s influence, it also proved perilous, for he now took public positions without the benefit of time for sociological reflection. As a result, Mills’s later work lacked the subtlety and sophistication of his earlier works of social criticism. Unlike Mills’s major sociological works, *The Causes of World War Three* and *Listen, Yankee* hold only historical interest today. What was to be Mills’s primary theoretical contribution to the New Left, *The Cultural Apparatus*, remained unfinished, largely because of his pressing political engagements. At times, Mills seemed to be abandoning sociology and crafting a new role for himself as an unofficial spokesman for the left. In 1961, he concluded, “I have a big responsibility to thousands of people all over the world to tell the truth as I see it and to tell it exactly and with drama and quit horsing around with sociological bullshit.”⁷ Yet sociology was too deeply ingrained in Mills for him to truly abandon it; consequently, he juggled his newfound role as prominent radical spokesperson with the demands of more sustained intellectual work.

The wide-ranging intellectual and political engagements of Mills’s later career cast light on the emergence of an international New Left. To interpret Mills’s relationship with the New Left in terms of his seminal influence on the student leaders of SDS, as prior scholars have done, is to miss much of what is most interesting and important about this phase of his career.⁸ Mills’s case enables us, as very few others do, to map the reemergence of international left-wing dissent at the end of the 1950s and the start of the 1960s. His example points to the significance of an international dimension of the American New Left that historians have generally ignored.⁹ Indeed, the very origin of the term *New Left* reveals the movement’s international interconnections. British Marxists associated with *New Left Review* borrowed the term

from non-Communist French intellectuals of the *nouvelle gauche*, a group identified with the search for socialist alternatives beyond Soviet-style Communism and American capitalism.¹⁰ Mills's use of the phrase in his "Letter" played a crucial role in its adoption in the United States. Examining what he meant by the term and how he came to use it not only helps us to understand this fascinating last period of his career, but also suggests new historical understandings of the New Left.

BECOMING INTERNATIONAL AGAIN

From 1956 to 1962, Mills's writings and activities took place in an international context. Though he had been influenced by European thinkers throughout his career, Mills's work had focused almost exclusively on American society until the mid-1950s. In 1952, Mills wrote Max Horkheimer of his desire to travel: "I have all my life lived in a country that is only some six or seven generations old, and the longer I work here and the older I get, the more provincial and limited I feel. I want to live in Europe for a while, to put it positively, in order to establish points of comparisons."¹¹ Mills first visited Europe in January 1956, when he took a short course on motorcycle mechanics at a BMW factory in Munich. He returned in the fall on a Fulbright fellowship to lecture on social psychology at the University of Copenhagen, which he used as a base to explore the rest of Europe.

As a result of his frequent travels, Mills spent less time at Columbia University in his later years. He was promoted to full professor in 1956, achieving the position at a young age, shortly before he turned forty years old. Unfortunately, his relationships with his colleagues continued to deteriorate, especially after the publication of *The Sociological Imagination*. When Mills suffered a severe heart attack in 1960, only one member of the sociology department (Robert Lynd) wrote a letter of condolence.¹² In addition, Mills grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of institutional support Columbia provided for his research. In a sarcastic letter to Dean Jacques Barzun in 1959, Mills complained, "Does it not seem curious that a full professor at a leading university who has produced 8 books in the last dozen years hasn't got a girl to type his mail?"¹³ Even so, Mills remained a member of the Columbia faculty until the end of his life, although he continued to express ambivalence about his position. "Why, then, do men stay in such [academic] jobs?" Mills reflected at one point. "Here I need answer only for myself. . . . Because despite everything—which you must agree is quite

a lot—it is still the only job in which you are considerably free to teach and study and write social science.”¹⁴

The first several months of Mills’s Fulbright year were uneventful. He found Copenhagen itself a bit dull. He began to make progress on a draft of *The Sociological Imagination*, but, as argued in chapter 5, that book was more a settling of old accounts than a new direction. At first, Mills felt even more intellectually isolated than he had in the United States. At one low point, Mills wrote to Gerth, “As you see, I’ve no will just now for writing at all. . . . I’ve lost any notion of a public for whom I might once have thought I was writing.”¹⁵ Yet the timing of Mills’s visit fortuitously coincided with the first stirrings of the European New Left. As Alan Hooper has argued, if one has to select a single year that the development of those European social movements associated with the 1960s began, 1956 is the best choice.¹⁶ Out of the events of 1956 emerged groups that advocated democratic socialism as an alternative to both Eastern bloc Communism and Western capitalist democracy. Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev’s revelations of Stalinist atrocities at the Twentieth Party Congress in February and his violent suppression of the Hungarian revolution in November discredited the Soviet model. Meanwhile the Suez crisis, beginning in October, sparked renewed anti-imperialist protest in Western Europe.

Mills traveled to England in March 1957 to lecture at the London School of Economics (LSE). There he discovered the community of left-wing intellectuals that had eluded him in the United States, connecting with radical social scientists Norman Birnbaum, T. B. Bottomore, and Ralph Miliband. Writing to the director of the school following the event, Mills gushed, “I haven’t yet seen all of the western world, but, from what I have seen, I cannot believe that there is in it any intellectual center more stimulating than the London School of Economics. To be there was especially gratifying to me because in recent years, quite frankly, I have often felt the lack of an audience with which I could believe I was truly in communication. Last weekend I came to realize what such an audience looks like.”¹⁷ As Mills reported to Lewis Coser, “My God, it is nice to know it makes a difference somewhere. Well, it damned well does there. Naturally, I’m nuts about the place and everyone I met there.” “It’s becoming quite a year,” he continued, “a pivotal year, I think, for me. . . . Suddenly there’s the need to make a big sum-up. Suddenly there’s a lot of ideas to do it with. They write themselves.”¹⁸

Mills’s trip to London put him in touch with the emerging British

New Left, which would prove the most significant intellectual connection of his later life. Mills traveled frequently to Britain after 1957. Indeed, he felt so at home in the British intellectual milieu that in 1961 he seriously considered permanently relocating to take a chair in sociology at the newly created University of Sussex.¹⁹ In the British New Left Mills found not only intellectual interlocutors, but also an exciting attempt to reconstruct left-wing politics. Consisting of two separate strands, the British New Left emerged in reaction to the events of 1956. The first group centered around a set of longtime Communist intellectuals who, in the wake of Khrushchev's speech and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution, broke with the party under the banner of socialist humanism. This group, based in Yorkshire, coalesced around the journal *New Reasoner*, edited by E. P. Thompson and John Saville. In contrast, the second group was younger, without a prior connection to Communism, and based in Oxford and London. Consisting largely of current students or recent graduates, it published the journal *Universities and Left Review* and founded a series of New Left clubs to promote political discussion. Though of different origins, the two groups worked closely together, and in 1960, *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review* merged to form *New Left Review*.

Mills found that he shared a common perspective with British New Leftists. Together they sought a socialist alternative to Communism—a new left. An eclectic intellectual and cultural movement, the British New Left rejected the bureaucratic political organization of the Communist-based Old Left. Its strategy was to counter public apathy by reinvigorating a left-wing public sphere of journals and clubs. Mills and British New Leftists shared the hope that, by constructing alternative ideas that were “utopian” in the sense that they could not be politically implemented in the short term, intellectuals could clear the ground for the reemergence of a popular left-wing movement.²⁰ As Stuart Hall wrote Mills regarding his “Letter to the New Left,” “The point about our thinking being explicitly ‘utopian’ is what we all feel; and it has a pretty decisive effect, too, with presenting these ideas to younger people.”²¹

Mills was not the only American to interact with the British New Left. Michael Walzer, for instance, who became closely associated with *Dissent*, was decisively influenced by a year he spent at Oxford in 1956–1957, when he fell in with the *Universities and Left Review* crowd.²² The influential left-wing sociologist Norman Birnbaum, an American teaching at the LSE whom Mills befriended, was on the editorial board

of *Universities and Left Review* and later a founding editor of *New Left Review*.²³ Another American, Norm Fruchter, was Stuart Hall's assistant editor at *New Left Review* from 1960 to 1962, before he returned to the United States to help edit *Studies on the Left*; he later helped found the internationalist U.S. film collective Newsreel.²⁴ Yet it was Mills who became the iconic American radical for British leftists. He influenced them with his ideas about the cultural apparatus and the nature of the New Left. But perhaps more important, British leftists took hope from Mills's example that they might find compatriots in a nation that, since World War II, had increasingly come to be seen by Europeans as a bastion of conservatism. A writer for the *London Tribune* hailed Mills as "the true voice of American radicalism."²⁵ Leading left-wing Labour Party MP Michael Foot praised Mills's work as "the strongest blast of fresh air which has come across the Atlantic for years."²⁶

Nevertheless, there was a key difference between Mills and his new British friends, who were more rooted in the Marxist tradition than he was. In his "Letter to the New Left," Mills expressed puzzlement that his British counterparts "cling so mightily to 'the working class' of the advanced capitalist societies as *the* historic agency, or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really impressive historical evidence that now stands against this expectation."²⁷ Even though it was primarily a middle-class movement committed to finding new agents for social change, the British New Left remained committed to a tradition of working-class radicalism that was stronger in Britain than in the United States, and which had some political expression in the left wing of a major political group, the Labour Party. As a result, they disagreed with Mills's sharp rejection of the "labor metaphysic." Stuart Hall protested to Mills, "I don't think that it is just a Marxist hangover which made me question some of the assumptions you made in your LSE lectures last year." Because of the stronger labor tradition in Britain, Hall argued, "we cannot write off the working class in the same way."²⁸ E.P. Thompson similarly complained, "You say that 'labor alone' can't do the job of transforming our society, and then suggest that intellectuals ought to try and realize their goals by themselves. Aren't you tipping the balance too far the other way?"²⁹

Mills's closest relationship with British New Leftists was with Ralph Miliband, a Marxist scholar at the LSE whom Mills met during his trip in 1957. In fact, the first draft of Mills's "Letter to the New Left," was written as a letter addressed to Miliband.³⁰ A Belgian Jew, Miliband

emigrated to Britain in 1940 at the age of seventeen and went on to study at the LSE under the prominent British leftist Harold Laski.³¹ A lifelong independent socialist, Miliband was the only member of the editorial board of *New Reasoner* who had never joined the Communist Party. Of all the intellectuals of the early British New Left, Miliband's interests ran toward political and social science rather than cultural studies or history, which perhaps explains why he became closest to Mills. Eight years younger than Mills, Miliband looked up to him as if he were an older brother. As he later recalled, "I got to feel closer to Mills than I have ever felt to any man, or should feel again, I should think."³² *The Power Elite* was a major influence on Miliband's major work, *The State in Capitalist Society*, which he published in 1969 and dedicated to Mills's memory.³³

In the summer of 1957, Mills persuaded Miliband to meet him in Austria and to travel with him through Eastern Europe. Though Mills at first had hoped to journey by motorcycle, they drove an automobile instead. Although they stopped in Yugoslavia, it was Poland that made the greatest impression upon Mills. As in Hungary, political dissent in Poland emerged in 1956, following Khrushchev's speech denouncing the crimes of the Stalin era at the Twentieth Party Congress. Unlike Hungary, however, where the Soviet invasion quashed all political opposition, Poland saw a degree of cultural liberalization in the late 1950s. During his sixteen-day visit to Warsaw Mills interviewed a variety of Polish intellectuals for his planned book *The Cultural Apparatus*. Mills was particularly impressed with the dissident Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, one of the more radical critics of the Stalinist legacy and one of the strongest advocates for democratization. In the late 1960s, Kołakowski fled Poland after being sanctioned for his outspokenness, and he eventually rejected Marxism altogether. Yet when Mills visited in 1957, Kołakowski was a leading international exponent of Marxist humanist philosophy. In 1958, Mills declared, "I can no longer write with moral surety unless I know that Leszek Kolakowski will understand where I stand."³⁴ Kołakowski offered Mills a model of how intellectual dissent could be politically explosive. Kołakowski believed that only the "socialist consciousness of the intelligentsia" could rescue socialism from a repressive Communist bureaucracy.³⁵ The emphasis Kołakowski and other Eastern bloc socialist dissidents placed on the potential political power of the "intelligentsia" was a crucial influence on Mills's conception of the "young intelligentsia" as the key New Left agency.

Mills's "pivotal year" forced him to think internationally as he began to conceptualize what a new left might look like. After 1957, Mills traveled frequently. In early 1959, he not only traveled to Britain to deliver a series of lectures titled "Culture and Politics," but he also returned to Europe in September to attend an international sociology conference in Italy, and he visited Austria, Germany, and London in October before traveling to Brazil. In early 1960, Mills went to Mexico City to teach a seminar on Marxism at the University of Mexico. In April 1960, Mills toured the Soviet Union for a month, conducting thirty intensive interviews with Soviet intellectuals and officials.³⁶ In August 1960, he traveled to Cuba, and he spent the better part of 1961 in Europe, visiting the Soviet Union once again. It was in 1961 that Mills considered permanently moving to England, but ultimately he still felt rooted in the American environment. Explaining to his parents why he refused the offer from the University of Sussex, he wrote, "The decision has less to do with the many attractions of England than with the fact that my argument lies in America and has to be worked out there."³⁷

Mills's international turn was evident in three projects he embarked upon during the late 1950s. Mills believed that to be truly international, American intellectuals needed to contact their counterparts in the Soviet bloc. This was the idea behind "Contacting the Enemy: Letters to Tovarich," a series of letters that Mills wrote to an imaginary Soviet intellectual from 1956 to 1960. Hoping that connections across the divide could help transcend the alignments and conflicts of cold war nation-states, Mills proposed that intellectuals make their own separate peace. Disappointed with the Soviet intellectuals he met during his visit, because most of them parroted the party line, Mills addressed his letters to an imaginary Soviet counterpart, Tovarich. Often autobiographical in nature, these letters were the most personal form of writing that Mills had ever written for publication, though "Contacting the Enemy" was never in fact published.³⁸

During his travels Mills continued to think in grand sociological terms. In 1958 he embarked upon an elaborate project on comparative world sociology that was truly Weberian in scope. Mills planned "to undertake a fully comparative study of the world range of present-day structures and of the variety of their economic and intellectual elites." As Mills explained in a request for funding, "This project is going to be my major work for my next period of work. Having written several books about the United States, and having worked in the social sciences

for nearly twenty years, I feel the need to settle down now to a long-term endeavor. . . . I feel that I am at a pivotal juncture in my work as a whole.”³⁹ Mills was frustrated in his attempts to secure research funding for the project, although he did receive a small grant from the California-based Fund for the Republic. He used this money to hire research assistants, but by the time of his death Mills had made progress only on the first step of the project, the construction of a master file listing basic information about all existing nations. Mills had planned to then narrow his study to approximately ten “representative” nations. In 1960, he began to reconceptualize the project: “This year I’ve learned so god damned much about ‘freedom,’ about ‘democracy’—in Brazil, Mexico, Russia—and now reading on Cuba, that I’ll have to rethink the whole question.”⁴⁰ Mills’s project was absurdly ambitious given his previous focus on the United States and the several other writing projects and activities that he frantically pursued during the late 1950s and early 1960s. His attempt, however, reveals that, in spite of his increasingly prominent role as a public voice for left-wing causes, there remained virtually no limit to Mills’s sociological imagination.

Mills’s posthumously published *The Marxists* also grew out of his international turn, and in particular out of his desire to reach a new international audience that was steeped in the Marxist intellectual tradition. In 1959, Mills explained that he needed to have “a real confrontation with ‘Marxism.’” “You see,” he continued, “I have always written with reference to liberalism, because that is a kind of common denominator of the public for which I write.”⁴¹ *The Marxists* was an oddly structured work, a hybrid between introductory reader and critical commentary that combined a series of selections from Marxist writers with Mills’s own reflections. Mills’s declaration that he was a “plain Marxist” proclaimed his solidarity with non-Communist leftists around the globe. For Mills, being a “plain Marxist” meant accepting Marx as one of the great classical sociologists and political theorists while refusing to dogmatically follow his ideas. Mills aligned himself with other “plain Marxists” such as G.D.H. Cole, Antonio Gramsci, Kołakowski, Rosa Luxemburg, John-Paul Sartre, Paul Sweezy, and William Appleman Williams.

Nevertheless, *The Marxists* showed very little engagement with the intellectual traditions Perry Anderson termed “Western Marxism,” a movement of primarily Western European left-wing thinkers who rejected Soviet Communism and sought to reinvigorate twentieth-century Marxism by combining it with other fields of intellectual

discourse.⁴² In spite of his substantial prior engagement with the unorthodox Marxism of the Frankfurt School, Mills interpreted Marx in an orthodox fashion. His selection of Marxist texts emphasized the writings of Communist political leaders, and his commentary stressed a critique of conventional Marxist notions, such as the ultimate primacy of economics in social analysis, which Western Marxists had challenged for decades. As a result, Mills failed to seriously grapple with the writings of Marx himself, which were far more complex than Mills allowed for. Thus, *The Marxists*, while clarifying Mills's opposition to the official Marxism of the Soviet bloc, was less rewarding as a serious engagement with more sophisticated varieties of Marxism. As such, it reveals the limitation of Mills's international turn in his final years. Even as Mills's "pivotal year" opened up new possibilities for social analysis and political engagement, it tempted him to pursue too many projects at once; he often sacrificed depth of thought to his newfound breadth. As Mills wrote Gerth in June 1960, "I know it is ridiculous but I am actually at work on six books, all of them at least halfway written. . . . One pays a price for this sort of moral and psychic energy; I am sure I am not aware of the full price, intellectually I mean."⁴³

'THE CULTURAL APPARATUS'

In his "Letter to the New Left," Mills wrote, "It is with this problem of agency in mind, that I have been studying, for several years, the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals—as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change."⁴⁴ Of all of Mills's late unfinished projects, the most important one was *The Cultural Apparatus*. Begun in 1955, the project started out as an attempt to delineate the degeneration of public debate into mass apathy, expanding on themes from Mills's earlier work.⁴⁵ Yet during his "pivotal year" abroad, Mills transformed what was originally to be a book about American intellectuals into a large-scale comparative study that would examine the contemporary politics of culture in all regions of the world, including Western Europe, the Soviet Bloc, and the underdeveloped world. In particular, as he encountered an emerging New Left, Mills became more optimistic that the "cultural apparatus" possessed an autonomy that might allow it to reenergize oppositional publics. Mills thus widened his past emphasis on the "intellectual" to encompass a larger stratum of "cultural workmen." He now suggested that intellectuals were not "powerless people." Acting as a group, they

could serve as a significant agency for left-wing change. Even though the manuscript was never completed, the idea of the cultural apparatus animated much of Mills's later thought, particularly his conception of the New Left. In 1960, Mills even considered changing the title of the manuscript to *The New Left*.

In a 1960 draft preface explaining the origins of *The Cultural Apparatus*, Mills stressed that the project emerged from his lifelong concern with "the role of ideas in politics and society, the power of intellect." Although he did not know it at the time, Mills indicated, the project had begun with his writing of "The Powerless People" for Dwight Macdonald's *politics* in 1944. "Coming upon an earlier draft of it early one morning last year," he wrote, "I was both depressed and pleased to see how many themes it contained which, during the last sixteen years, in later books, I have been working out. It may be that I have had no really new themes since then, although I have of course had many topics."⁴⁶ *The Cultural Apparatus*, Mills continued, would build on the "Brains, Inc." chapter of *White Collar* and on two chapters about the "cultural elite" excised from *The Power Elite*. In his original proposals, Mills indicated that the roots of the project went back even further, to the articles he had published on the sociology of knowledge, beginning with "Language, Logic, and Culture" in 1939. Here lay much of the promise of *The Cultural Apparatus*. Ever since "The Powerless People," Mills had clearly articulated the special duties of intellectuals, and his attack on the deficiencies of liberal intellectuals remained a constant refrain in his later work. But by returning to his roots in the sociology of knowledge, *The Cultural Apparatus* suggested a real development in Mills's social analysis, matching his earlier analysis of class, stratification, and power with a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of ideas and culture. Mills's new approach was reflected in his shift in vocabulary from *intellectuals* to *cultural apparatus*, defined as "all those organizations and *milieus* in which artistic, intellectual and scientific work goes on" and "all the means by which such work is made available to small circles, wider publics, and to great masses."⁴⁷ Hence, he encompassed a much larger social group than he had in his earlier work on *intellectuals*, which had referred primarily to fellow social scientists and writers centered around little magazines such as *politics* and *Partisan Review*. When Mills first publicly used the term *cultural apparatus*, he did so in a 1958 speech to industrial designers.

The Cultural Apparatus contained an unresolved tension between

Mills's newfound optimism that the "cultural apparatus" could serve as a possible new agency for left-wing change and the bleak pessimism of his disillusioned radicalism, which he never fully set aside. Mills's use of the term "cultural *apparatus*" suggested a formidable mechanism that smoothly functioned to uphold the established political and social order. In this sense, Mills's new project simply expanded upon his earlier analysis that responsible "publics" were being replaced by apathetic "masses." Mills argued that, in the West, cultural institutions and workmen were becoming increasingly absorbed into the larger economy and polity.⁴⁸ For instance, Mills claimed that in the United States, "Cultural activities, on the one hand, tend to become a commercial part of an overdeveloped capitalist economy, or, on the other, an official part of the Science Machine of the Garrison State."⁴⁹

In capitalist societies, Mills contended, the cultural apparatus was dominated by a marketing mentality that manipulated consumer demand and restrained cultural workmen from producing quality work for a discriminating public. Cultural workmen could be "hacks" or "stars," but not genuine craftsmen. Here Mills tied his analysis of the cultural apparatus to a wider critique of what he now called the "overdeveloped society." Sharing the assumption of many postwar liberals that material deprivation was no longer a serious problem in the industrialized West, Mills defined the overdeveloped society as one in which "the standard of living dominates the styles of life; its inhabitants are possessed, as it were, by its industrial and commercial apparatus; individually, by the frenzied pursuit and maintenance of commodities . . . [and] the struggle for status supplements the struggle for survival; a panic for status replaces the proddings of poverty."⁵⁰ The cultural apparatus played an integral role in corporate capitalism, generating consumer desire for new goods. Here Mills continued his left-wing critique of mass culture, which, he claimed, produced "the kind of human being who really is, psychologically and socially, in his sensibilities and in his reasoning, like mass culture itself . . . distracted, shallow, banalized."⁵¹

In the overdeveloped societies, Mills contended, the cultural apparatus was subordinated not only to the economy, but also to the nation-state: "the cultural apparatus is officially established and the cultural workman altogether established as a politically qualified man."⁵² The cultural apparatus performed a necessary function for power elites: "The prestige of culture transforms mere power into spell-binding

authority. That is why the cultural apparatus, no matter how internally free, tends in every nation to become a close adjunct of national authority and a leading agency of nationalist propaganda.”⁵³ The purest example of established culture was in the Soviet Union, where “the source of money is the one-party state; masses of people are the managed public for culture; cultural activities are official activities. Opposition is traitorous and exists mainly as a more or less hidden literary mood.”⁵⁴ Yet also in the West there was the “tendency and the strain for quite unofficial cultural workmen voluntarily to coordinate themselves and their work in conformity with officially defined needs as well as in anticipation of needs not yet officially proclaimed.”⁵⁵ This pattern was most apparent, Mills claimed, in the support most American intellectuals gave to the cold war.

What Mills was trying to pinpoint in *The Cultural Apparatus* was nothing less than what Jürgen Habermas referred to in the title of his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Had Mills remained in good health, he might have published *The Cultural Apparatus* in 1962, the same year that the German thinker published his important work, in which he cited at length Mills’s distinction between “public” and “mass” from *The Power Elite*.⁵⁶ With the term *cultural apparatus*, Mills identified a social phenomenon similar to Habermas’s “public sphere.” Mills’s project focused primarily on cultural producers rather than the public sphere as such, but, like Habermas, he defined a sphere of society that mediated between citizens and state authority. If functioning properly, it would provide the mechanism by which private individuals could bring critical reason to bear on state policy. Through it, informed citizens could build a society based on democratic deliberation, where the best argument would win out through reasoned discussion.

Both Habermas and Mills regarded the eighteenth century as a period in which the public sphere, whatever its faults, fulfilled its ideal function. Mills’s unfinished analysis of what he called the “bourgeois public” is less sophisticated and less historically rich than Habermas’s now classic account. Unlike Mills, Habermas had a clear sense of the contradictions of the Enlightenment-era public sphere that arose from the dual identity of its bourgeois participants both as citizens committed to the use of reason and the ideal of common humanity, as well as property owners with a specific class interest. Nevertheless, it is worth quoting an unpublished passage by Mills that parallels Habermas’s account:

Then emerges the bourgeois public, and the cultural workman is liberated from dependence upon patrons, royal or otherwise. As entrepreneur, the cultural workman is supported by money received for his products bought by anonymous publics. In this stage, for a brief liberal period in Western history, many intellectuals were in a somewhat unique historical situation, even as the situation of the small entrepreneur of classic liberalism was unique: one historic phase sandwiched between two more organized phases. The eighteenth-century intellectual stood on common ground with the bourgeois entrepreneur: both were fighting, each in his own way, against the remnants of feudal control . . . a new kind of freedom, the writer for an anonymous public, the businessman for an anonymous and unbounded market.⁵⁷

Mills's account of the absorption of the cultural apparatus into the polity and economy during the modern period also resembled Habermas's analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere in the twentieth century from a "culture-debating" to a "culture-consuming" public.⁵⁸ In Habermas's account, as the public sphere lost its autonomy to corporate capitalism and the expanded power of the nation-state, it could no longer mediate between state and society. Both Mills and Habermas argued that mass culture created manipulated and falsely privatized individuals incapable of contributing to reasoned debate about public policies. Neither open nor democratic, public opinion was manipulated from above by public relations rather than shaped by citizens employing substantive reason. Conceived by a second-generation member of the Frankfurt School, Habermas's account of the structural transformation of the public sphere emerged from the same type of disillusioned radicalism as did Mills's.

As he continued to write *The Cultural Apparatus*, however, Mills combined his account of the structural transformation of the cultural apparatus with a more optimistic and intriguing analysis of the cultural apparatus as a potential agent of New Left social change. If, on the one hand, the concept of a cultural *apparatus* suggested that cultural institutions were becoming seamlessly integrated with the political status quo, on the other hand, it also implied that cultural activity possessed a significant power of its own. In his 1959 London lecture "The Cultural Apparatus," Mills drew on a pragmatist tradition emphasizing the constitutive power of language in order to stress the autonomy of the cultural apparatus. "Men live in second-hand worlds," he noted. "They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced, and their own experience is always indirect."⁵⁹ As that social realm mediating between consciousness and existence, the cultural apparatus

defined “our standards of credibility, our definitions of reality, our modes of sensibility.”⁶⁰ “The consciousness of men does not determine their material existence; nor does their material existence determine their consciousness,” Mills continued. “Between consciousness and existence stand meanings and communications which other men have passed on—first, in human speech itself, and later, by the management of symbols.”⁶¹ In one sense, Mills explained, everybody was part of the cultural apparatus, “for everyone to some extent uses symbols, exercises skills, and manipulates things.” But Mills focused his attention on cultural workmen, who were particularly powerful in shaping images of reality in “an elaborate set of institutions: of schools and theaters, newspapers and census bureau, studios, laboratories, museums, little magazines, radio networks.”⁶² If autonomous, cultural workmen could question established institutions and spark a wider challenge to them.

In asserting the potential power of cultural institutions, Mills was strongly influenced by his British interlocutors. As Stuart Hall has observed, a central belief of British New Leftists was that the “cultural and ideological domain” was “not a secondary, but a constitutive dimension of society.”⁶³ By conceiving of culture as a key ground of political conflict, *The Cultural Apparatus* bore a strong resemblance to the ideas of British New Left critic Raymond Williams, who saw cultural struggle as an essential part of what he called the “long revolution.”⁶⁴ Similarly, British New Left historians such as E. P. Thompson conceived of class in terms of cultural identity rather than mere economic position.⁶⁵ Appropriately, the major public expression of Mills’s “cultural apparatus” ideas was a series of three lectures he delivered at the LSE in early 1959, “Culture and Politics.” Enthusiastically received by British New Leftists, the lectures were broadcast on BBC radio and created a stir in the British press. The *London Observer*, for example, described “a huge, alarming Texan [who] has just been lecturing to the London School of Economics, to an excited audience of sweaters, black stockings and duffel coats.”⁶⁶

In Mills’s final LSE lecture, “The Decline of the Left,” he attributed the waning of radical power to the nationalization of Communism and the disastrous effects of identifying socialism with the Soviet Union. A second and less obvious reason for the left’s decline, however, was “the expropriation from cultural workmen of their means of cultural distribution, and, increasingly, of cultural production as well.”⁶⁷ Mills suggested a program of workers’ control for cultural producers: “What we ought now to do,” he proposed, “is repossess our cultural apparatus,

and use it for our own purposes.”⁶⁸ Intellectuals need no longer rely on other agents, such as the moribund labor movement, to effect social transformation. “Intellectuals have created standards and pointed out goals,” Mills said. “And then, always, they have looked around for other groups, other circles, other strata who might realize them. Is it not now time for us to try to realize them ourselves?”⁶⁹ Calling for a repossession of the cultural apparatus by cultural workmen, Mills also articulated a more nuanced view of cultural consumers, seeing in them potentially active agents of a public, rather than simply passive dupes of mass culture. Mills claimed that only if cultural workmen attempted to repossess the cultural apparatus could we know “whether the general political apathy that now prevails so generally is endemic in modern society or whether it is in considerable part due to the default of cultural workmen and their withdrawal from politics.”⁷⁰

In the unpublished manuscript *The Cultural Apparatus*, Mills pursued “utopian” thinking, calling for the “release [of] the human imagination, in order to explore all the alternatives now open to the human community.”⁷¹ Mills envisioned a society distinguished from both the “overdeveloped” industrialized world and the “underdeveloped” third world. In this “properly developing society,” an “ethos of craftsmanship was pervasive”: workers would produce neither for material incentives nor to achieve social status, but for the pleasure of creating.⁷² In his exploration of the “properly developing society,” Mills set forth ideals that were nearly identical to those he had articulated in earlier works, such as in the section on craftsmanship in *White Collar*. The difference here, however, was that instead of locating these ideals in a romanticized past or articulating them to lay bare the standpoint of his social critique, Mills now presented them as guidelines for a possible future. Mills posited his utopia on the material abundance that modern technology had made possible. In imagining the possibilities presented by a post-scarcity economy, Mills aligned himself not only with contemporary radicals such as Paul Goodman and Herbert Marcuse, but also with liberal social thinkers such as John Kenneth Galbraith, Eric Larrabee, and David Riesman.⁷³ Mills looked to cultural workmen, who most valued craftsmanship and were most aware of how current social structures frustrated that value, as the key agent for moving society closer to this utopian ideal.

By asserting a power within culture that was potentially autonomous from the prevailing political establishment, and by expanding “intellectual” to include journalists, clergy, scientists, industrial designers,

screenwriters, and others, Mills suggested that the cultural apparatus could be an agent of the New Left. His conception of the global New Left in terms of the oppositional potential of a cultural apparatus, evident in the British New Left and among dissident intellectuals in Eastern Europe, bore important insights. It also undermined Mills's own tendency, still very much present in his later career, to present that now-familiar image of himself as a lone rebel against 1950s-era complacency. Instead, the notion of a cultural apparatus allowed him to focus on what intellectuals, broadly defined, could do as a group. Mills's view of the intelligentsia as a new source of political agency offered needed inspiration to New Leftists across the globe, reassuring them that intellectual and cultural activity could be politically significant, that ideas can and do matter. Finally, by urging intellectuals to conceive of their movement in international terms, Mills challenged attempts to nationalize thought and culture by enlisting them in the cold war struggle. Mills's notion of the power of oppositional ideas left its mark on 1960s-era radicalism. Operating largely outside new or established political parties and institutions in both the United States and Western Europe, the New Left revealed that a mass movement based on "speaking truth to power" (to borrow a popular phrase from the period) could have an explosive effect by exposing state actions to public scrutiny.

Nevertheless, Mills's conception of the cultural apparatus as an agent for social change left many questions unanswered. As E.P. Thompson pointed out in a letter to Mills, "You argue intellectual workers must repossess their own cultural apparatus and use it for their own purposes. In what sense have they ever possessed it?"⁷⁴ Moreover, Mills never specified exactly what cultural workmen should do once they repossessed the apparatus. In addition, although Mills expanded his notion of "cultural workmen" to include a much larger group than traditional intellectuals, he was nevertheless open to charges of elitism. Even ordinary cultural workmen were relatively privileged members of society, and Mills failed to consider the political agency of others who lacked cultural capital and whose participation would presumably be essential for any significant left-wing social transformation. Finally, Mills never explained how reenergizing public debate would lead to radical social and political change. How could the activity of the cultural apparatus spark a larger mass political movement with the capacity to directly alter state policy? In other words, how could cultural opposition translate into institutional political change? In the United

States and Europe, the New Left ultimately had to confront the limits of a political opposition using predominantly intellectual and cultural means. Nevertheless, Mills's conception of the potential agency of the cultural apparatus proved fruitful in a period when left-wing movements were just reemerging. Mills's ability to reach a mass audience with *The Causes of World War Three* and *Listen, Yankee* suggested that there was indeed a new receptiveness to radical ideas within the cultural apparatus. Mills's interaction with the peace movement in the United States and abroad demonstrated the merit of his notion of intellectual and cultural activity as a key spark for political activism.

A PROGRAM FOR PEACE

Even as he encountered an emerging New Left in Europe, Mills sensed a shift in the public mood back in the United States. As he wrote Harvey Swados in 1957, "I've not read American publications for over a year now . . . but isn't it true that there's something of a swing away from conservative silliness and incapacity for moral discernment that's paralyzed the postwar imagination? Aren't there signs I wouldn't have seen? I've the vague feeling that 'we' may be coming into our own in the next five or ten years."⁷⁵ Back in the United States, Mills sought to spread his new internationalism by drawing attention to developments abroad. Tellingly, Mills associated himself with the segment of the U.S. left most focused on international events and most closely linked to compatriots overseas: the peace movement. It was to this movement that he contributed his 1958 book, *The Causes of World War Three*, which found a receptive audience that Mills had failed to reach with his earlier books.

The reemergence of the U.S. peace movement in the late 1950s was part of a worldwide increase in antinuclear protests across the industrialized world, in North America, Europe, Japan, and Australia. Because peace could only be achieved through international cooperation, peace activists formed global networks and thought of their movement in international terms. The international "ban the bomb" movement used immediate demands, such as an end to nuclear testing, to launch a more basic challenge to the buildup of nuclear weapons and cold war policies. The antinuclear movement was strongest in Japan, where public opinion was overwhelmingly against nuclear testing: a massive series of rallies led by university students attracted an estimated 350,000 participants in May 1957. In Britain, the New Left was closely

linked with the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1958. Popular antinuclear sentiment was evident in Britain in the well-attended and widely publicized annual marches, beginning in April 1958, from London to the Aldermaston nuclear facility fifty miles away.⁷⁶

In the United States, key activists kept radical pacifism alive after World War II and provided an experienced leadership that could mobilize the growing dissent of the late 1950s. Energized by civil rights protests in the South that utilized nonviolent direct action and sensing changing public attitudes toward the cold war, A.J. Muste, David Dellinger, and Bayard Rustin founded *Liberation* magazine in 1956. Over the next several years, *Liberation* provided a valuable forum for the revival of pacifist and radical thought. Readers of *Liberation* were keenly aware of developments throughout the world and took heart from the growth of the peace movement in other nations. In 1957, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) formed around opposition to nuclear testing, quickly and unexpectedly tapping into a mass base of opposition to American nuclear policies. SANE resembled the CND in terms of its middle-class composition and modeled itself in part on the British organization. By the summer of 1958, SANE had grown to 130 chapters, with an estimated membership of 25,000. And in 1958, a small group of American pacifists connected to the more radical Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA) garnered international attention by sailing into a nuclear test zone site in the Pacific Ocean to disrupt the implosion of a hydrogen bomb.⁷⁷

Beginning in the late 1950s, Mills developed close ties with radical pacifist organizations. Though most closely linked to the peace movement in the United States, Mills had connections to the British peace movement as well, and he cited antinuclear protests throughout the world as a key element of the global New Left in his "Letter to the New Left." Mills's principal contribution to this revitalized international peace movement was his 1958 book *The Causes of World War Three*, which developed from two popular articles that he published in *The Nation* and from the Sidney Hillman lectures he had delivered in April 1958 to a standing-room-only crowd at Howard University.⁷⁸ A slightly revised 1960 edition of the book, priced at only fifty cents, was printed as a mass paperback and released in time for the presidential election. Unlike his earlier works, which were based on painstaking sociological research and sophisticated theoretical analysis, *Causes* was a short book, written quickly to address a pressing contemporary

topic and reach a mass audience. Indeed, Mills referred to *Causes* and *Listen, Yankee* as “pamphlets” to distinguish them from his earlier books. While of little enduring intellectual significance, these books did have an important cultural and political impact. Addressed “neither to power elites nor to people in general, but to those who are generally aware of what is going on, who have thought about the preparation of World War III and who are becoming uneasy about it,” *Causes* connected Mills with the educated readers he hoped would form a public for a left-wing revival.⁷⁹

In *Causes*, Mills used his notoriety as a social critic to focus public attention on the dangers of nuclear war. At the heart of the book was his passionate attack on the “insanity” and “idiocy” of escalating nuclear diplomacy between the superpowers. By the late 1950s, an expanding arms race held out the nightmare of a massive nuclear confrontation. In identifying a “drift and thrust” toward World War III, Mills relied on his earlier arguments about the irresponsibility of power elites. Indeed, *Causes* can be viewed as a kind of sequel to *The Power Elite*. Much of the first section of the book summarized Mills’s “power elite” argument that the American government was run by a small group of interconnected political, corporate, and military leaders. When Mills described the “causes” of World War III, he blamed the acceptance of a “military metaphysic” among both Soviet and American policy makers seeking to solve political problems through military means, and he noted the expanded political power of both militaries. Focusing on the United States in particular, Mills detailed the wasteful military expenditures of the permanent war economy, which reinforced a nuclear arms buildup. He also pointed to a “capitalist brinkmanship” in American foreign policy, which involved taking risks to protect American economic interests abroad. Though his analysis concentrated primarily on the American government, Mills observed the vicious circle created by the arms race, and in particular how military buildup in one superpower strengthened the hands of hard-liners in the other. Thus, Mills argued, “The immediate cause of World War III is the preparation for it.”⁸⁰

Though Mills provided a convincing enough critique of the nuclear arms race, he failed to explain why an arms buildup would necessarily result in World War III, only imagining a scenario in which nuclear war would arise accidentally from a failure of mechanical equipment. This nuclear nightmare was the stuff of popular novels and films of the era, and readers might have expected more analysis from Mills. Indeed, considering the title of the book, Mills was strangely weak on the issue

of causation. In particular, Mills did not analyze at any length the history and geopolitical causes of cold war confrontation. When Mills did analyze specific situations, he was often insightful, as when he noted the growing prominence of oil politics in the Middle East. Presciently suggesting the possibility of war in Iraq, Mills remarked, “Western civilization began in the Middle East; the beginnings of its end could also occur there.”⁸¹ For the most part, though, Mills failed to suggest what scenario would actually result in World War III. In what instance would either power elite actually initiate nuclear war?

In many ways, *Causes* was even bleaker than *The Power Elite*. Not only would the domination of the power elite erode American democracy, but it might also spell the end of human society. Yet in addressing the growing peace movement, *Causes* had a decidedly more optimistic tone than anything Mills had written in a decade. Intellectually isolated for so long, Mills felt heartened that he had finally reached a public for his work. The very fact that Mills would propose a “program”—something he had refused to do since his days as a labor intellectual—suggested that he sensed an audience for his ideas about the cold war. Mills’s analysis of modern society remained dark, and suggested seemingly insurmountable structural obstacles to left-wing political action, yet Mills insisted that he and his readers could take steps to alter the course of history. Nevertheless, an undercurrent of desperation remained even behind Mills’s most impassioned calls to action.

Initially published in *The Nation*, Mills’s “Program for Peace” was revised for *Causes*, but it remained basically unchanged. Mills’s theme was that the coexistence of superpowers was a necessity in the nuclear age: “We must demand that the coexistence of these two world-established models of industrialization be fully recognized and that the competition between them be conducted in economic and cultural and political ways.”⁸² Mills’s proposals were of mixed utility. At points, his program was vague, as when he urged the abolition of “the military metaphysic and the doctrinaire idea of capitalism.”⁸³ Some of his demands were more imaginative, as when he proposed that the U.N. should take charge of oil resources in the Middle East and that 20 percent of the U.S. military budget be devoted to aid for underdeveloped nations. Characteristically, Mills emphasized intellectual and cultural proposals, as in his suggestion that, using U.S. funds, the U.N. should establish first-class educational programs in the third world emphasizing the humanities and social studies. He also included a number of suggestions central to the mainstream peace movement (and

that were, in fact, implemented in the next two decades, largely due to public agitation). These included an end to nuclear testing, negotiations with the Soviet Union to reduce nuclear stockpiles, and recognition of Communist China. Mills's boldest and most controversial proposals called for unilateral nuclear disarmament by the United States, the abolition of NATO, and the closing of all overseas U.S. bases. Such proposals were of use in the frankly utopian sense of imagining a long-term alternative to the cold war, and they pushed the peace movement to go beyond reforms such as an end to nuclear testing toward a more fundamental critique of American foreign policy.

The peace movement that Mills addressed in his proposals differed in important respects from the labor movement he had enthusiastically supported in the 1940s. Based in churches and universities, it consisted primarily of members of the educated middle classes. With a strong moralistic edge, the peace movement represented the emergence of a community of conscience that would help shape the politics of liberalism and radicalism over the coming decades. Mills indicated that he grasped the peace movement's base in liberal Protestantism in "A Pagan Sermon to the Christian Clergy." Originally delivered as a lecture to the United Church of Canada in Toronto in February 1958, the piece was also published in *The Nation* and incorporated into *Causes*. "A Pagan Sermon" sharply condemned American Christians for failing to live up to their ostensible pacifist ideals by speaking out against the cold war: "Total war ought indeed to be difficult for the Christian conscience to confront, but the current Christian way out makes it easy; war is defended morally and Christians easily fall into line."⁸⁴

Like "A Program for Peace," "Pagan Sermon" received an enthusiastic response from readers, particularly liberal clergy, who protested Mills's neglect of a pacifist Christian minority yet nevertheless found in Mills's article an affirmation of their own views. Mills's essay was mentioned in sermons throughout the nation and caused a stir in the liberal Christian press. For example, the editors of *Christian Century* applauded Mills's "Pagan Sermon," though they objected to Mills's one-sided view of organized Christianity. "Take time to look at the churches in action, visit the front where the ministers you address are busy," they told Mills, and "you will see a great deal of action on the correct side from your viewpoint."⁸⁵ Mills took the advice, addressing the First Midwest Conference of the Unitarian Church in April 1958 and a number of church meetings following that. In December 1958, Mills wrote to Ralph Miliband, "Tomorrow I go lecture in Atlantic

City to another group of big shot clergymen. Amazing, but they are, in truth, apart from university groups, the only real audience I have, and some of them are very good indeed. I am learning how to get to them and shake them up.”⁸⁶

The positive reception Mills received from liberal Protestants was a response to a heightened moralistic emphasis in his work on the necessity of acting on the basis of individual conscience. Mills had always stressed the special responsibility of intellectuals to tell the truth and confront unjust power, but he now widened his plea to appeal to a larger stratum of society. Thus, in his “Pagan Sermon,” he confronted ministers with the question, “Why do you not make of yourself the pivot, and of your congregation the forum, of a public that is morally directed and that is morally standing up?”⁸⁷ Mills remained decidedly secular, yet his moralistic rhetoric appealed to Christian radicals. Indeed, the venerable Christian radical pacifist A. J. Muste valued *Causes* primarily for its argument that national policy needed to be held to higher moral standards. In a review published in *Dissent*, Muste claimed that the book implied a stance of “revolutionary pacifism” based on the protest of conscientious individuals. In fact, as his endorsement of the Cuban revolution would soon underline, Mills never became a pacifist, but he must have been heartened by Muste’s praise of *Causes* as “an event in the world struggle against war” and possibly “a major turning point.”⁸⁸

Though *Causes* received mixed reviews in the press, the enthusiastic response of some readers confirmed Mills’s tentative hopes about the growth of a New Left. Mills received dozens of letters from readers, many of whom claimed to be galvanized to action after reading it. A Presbyterian minister in Detroit told Mills that “much of what you write appears to be a searing shaft of light illuminating the darkness of an otherwise insane public apathy.”⁸⁹ “We have been pacifists for generations, but now, we feel, we can no longer be passive,” wrote a dentist and his wife from Sheboygan, Wisconsin.⁹⁰ “Your book made me angry, and I am looking for an outlet for my anger,” concluded a New York art critic, who also confessed that the book left her confused about what sort of action to take. Some readers took it upon themselves to promote the book as a form of political action. Jesse Gordon, a New York public relations executive, forwarded a copy of Mills’s 1960 *Nation* article, which then became part of the revised book, to Senator Mike Mansfield. After Mansfield wrote a paragraph of qualified endorsement (noting that “We need very much the kind of bold

analysis he advances, whether we agree with it in whole or part or not at all”), Gordon forwarded the comments to President Eisenhower.⁹¹ And a doctor from Tampa, Florida, wrote the publisher to purchase hundreds of copies of the book, which he distributed in packets of twenty-five to university presidents across the country.⁹²

That the reaction to *Causes* was not limited to Americans testified both to Mills’s new status as an international intellectual and to the emergence of middle-class opposition to the cold war throughout the world. Some British readers treasured the book not only for its anti-nuclear critique, but also as evidence that American society was not monolithically supportive of the cold war policies of its government. As one reader wrote, “You cheer my heart to hear that something different is coming out of the USA. I have read your most interesting book, and now I hear your broadcasts, and feel that you have to muster some courage to put this over.”⁹³ *Causes* was also reviewed in important newspapers outside the United States and Britain, including in the *Johannesburg Star*, the *Montreal Star*, and *Die Welt*. A German student praised the book to Mills, as did a doctor in western Australia who told him, “The sanity of it appeals—the more so as to thoughtful people the World over the foreign policy of the United States since Hiroshima appears increasingly psychopathic.”⁹⁴ An Italian informed Mills that “many intellectuals in Europe think in the frank and non conformist spirit you affirm in your work.”⁹⁵

If *Causes* won Mills many new political allies, it also cost him an old one. Along with Muste’s positive review, *Dissent* published a harsh response by Irving Howe, who offered trenchant criticism of the book. As a work of social analysis, *Causes* did not live up to Mills’s earlier books, nor did it provide a theory of the causes of World War III. But Howe’s primary objection was to Mills’s treatment of Communism in the Soviet bloc. The nature of Soviet Communism was not central to *Causes*. Indeed, Howe was probably reacting less to the book itself than to a meeting he had shortly after Mills’s return from Europe in which they discussed developments in the Communist world.⁹⁶ From his 1957 trip to Eastern Europe until his death, Mills hoped that Eastern-bloc Communism might transform itself into a more humane and democratic type of socialism. Mills was influenced by the analysis of Marxist scholar Isaac Deutscher, who argued that, in the wake of Stalin’s death, one could expect a series of democratizing reforms that would go far beyond the current measures of the Khrushchev government.⁹⁷ Mills stopped short of making such bold predictions, but he left it as an open

question whether such reforms might occur. For instance, in an interview in early 1960 Mills referred to “trends toward democratization” in the Soviet bloc and claimed that “maybe the secular and humanist values of Marxism may still be available—despite everything—in the future of the Soviet Union.”⁹⁸

Reviewing *Causes*, Howe charged Mills with endorsing not only “political coexistence” with the Soviet Union, but “also a kind of ‘moral coexistence,’ by which I mean an accommodation not merely with Russia as a power but with Communist dictatorship as a form of society.”⁹⁹ Such a stance, Howe concluded, was “unacceptable for the democratic left.”¹⁰⁰ Howe must have known that the sharp tone of his review would cost him a friend and *Dissent* an ally. The next issue of *Dissent* contained a nasty exchange between Howe and Mills, “Intellectuals and Russia,” which revealed much about the changing politics of anti-Communism on the American left.

Howe’s critique was correct in a number of particulars but mistaken in its general implication that Mills was an apologist for Soviet dictatorship. In his reply to Howe, Mills adequately summed up their differences, writing, “You do not take as seriously as I do the new beginnings in the Soviet Bloc since the death of Stalin. You no longer take as seriously as I do the lack of new beginnings and the disuse of formal freedom in the USA since World War Two.”¹⁰¹ Howe correctly argued that Mills’s hope for “new beginnings” in the Soviet bloc was overly optimistic, particularly when juxtaposed with Mills’s often static and monolithic view of the potential for change within American society. Mills’s optimistic perspective on the Soviet bloc also alarmed some members of the British New Left, such as Dorothy Thompson, who remained suspicious of Communism because of prior experiences in the party.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, to the extent that Mills implied any moral equivalence between the United States and the USSR in *Causes*, it was a wholly negative one. Throughout the book, Mills described both Soviet and American societies as controlled by power elites whose views of the world were colored by a “military metaphysic” and who benefited from the apathy of their peoples. The problem with Mills’s equivalence argument was not that he was soft on Communist dictatorships, but that he underrated democratic elements of American society. Even so, with some justification, Mills defended his argument as a rhetorical strategy: “I do not ‘assimilate’ the U.S. and the USSR ‘into one category.’ One writes in a context in which the two are regularly presented as

polar opposites, one good, the other evil. Therefore, I state differences, but I stress parallels.”¹⁰³ Overall, Howe misunderstood the purpose of Mills’s discussion of the Soviet Union in *Causes*. Mills aimed to prove that Soviet elites would be willing to negotiate nuclear disarmament and the de-escalation of the cold war, a judgment that proved correct. However, Mills neither excused nor defended Communist governments. Indeed he explicitly criticized them.¹⁰⁴ In his unpublished “The Cultural Apparatus,” Mills stated quite clearly, “Yes, I am an anti-communist and have been ever since the late ’thirties when I came to some sort of political awareness.”¹⁰⁵

Ultimately, the exchange revealed as much or more about Howe’s obsessive anti-Communism than it did about the limits of Mills’s analysis of the Communist bloc. Mills wondered why Howe had not taken “due note of differences and then gone on to build a new left.”¹⁰⁶ Why did the exchange not remain a friendly debate instead of a bitter exchange that led to a parting of ways? For Howe, democratic leftists could not differ on the issue of Communism. Mills suspected that Howe was more interested in fighting old battles than in engaging with the emerging New Left. In 1957, Howe and Lewis Coser published a history of the U.S. Communist Party, a vitriolic book that seemed to belong to an earlier era, when the Communist Party was actually a significant influence on the American left and not the institution that had been decimated by the postwar red scare and was now practically irrelevant.¹⁰⁷ As with other Old Leftists such as Michael Harrington, the sectarian baggage that Howe carried with him from his days as a Trotskyist would lead him to rashly attack the early New Left student movement for being insufficiently anti-Communist, costing himself the opportunity to exert a valuable influence upon student activists. Indeed, Mills predicted this fate when he cruelly labeled Howe and his circle “Old Futilitarians of the dead American left.”¹⁰⁸ In this instance, the fact that Mills had become a radical in the early 1940s and had never belonged to any political party placed him in a better position to influence the New Left. However, in an important respect, Mills’s position was more consistent with 1940s anti-Stalinism than was Howe’s. Unlike Howe, who clearly preferred the American side in the cold war, Mills clung to the position he had advanced in the unpublished manifesto he coauthored with Lewis Coser and Irving Sanes in 1948. Mills was still searching for a “third camp” in a two-power world, and he now believed he might have found it in the activities of the cultural apparatus and Cuban revolutionaries.

In contrast to Howe and other intellectual holdovers from the Old Left, Mills was willing to look for radical sources of change from wherever they might come. For that reason, it is particularly curious that even as Mills developed strong connections to the reemerging peace movement, he generally ignored the African-American civil rights movement, which was irrefutably the central force reenergizing American radicalism and liberalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s and was based on the kind of public appeal to morality and reason that Mills advocated. To be sure, Mills supported racial equality. In a rare comment on the movement, in a 1959 speech, Mills hailed the civil rights movement for reopening the question of “whether or not a democratic making of history is possible.” Approving the demand for legal rights as a legitimate goal for the movement, Mills praised civil rights activists for their “moral urge to act” that inherently challenged “the psychology of political apathy and political spectatorship.”¹⁰⁹ It is possible to imagine that if Mills had lived longer, he would have recognized the serious limitation that his blind spot to racial issues was for his social analysis and political radicalism. Indeed, in 1960, in a passage he intended for future publication, Mills declared the United States a “racial tyranny” and admitted, “I have never been interested in what is called ‘the Negro problem.’ Perhaps I should have been and should be now.”¹¹⁰ Even so, Mills’s references to race remained few and far between. Instead of joining the growing civil rights movement in the United States, he looked to developing events in a small island off the coast of Florida.

CUBA AND THE HUNGRY-NATION BLOC

Before 1960, Mills’s international engagements had oriented him primarily toward Europe. His trip to Mexico and subsequent involvement with the Cuban Revolution introduced him to a different kind of internationalism focused on what he called the “hungry-nation bloc.”¹¹¹ New Leftists, he now argued, would have to confront the global imbalance of power between the industrialized and underdeveloped worlds. In his best-selling 1960 book *Listen, Yankee*, Mills championed the Cuban Revolution as a model for left-wing anti-imperialist movements in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Support for the Cuban Revolution also confirmed Mills’s belief in the potential emergence of protest within an international cultural apparatus. Playing a significant role in a wider Cuban solidarity movement, *Listen, Yankee* demonstrated the

significance of international events and networks for the development of national New Left movements in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

A year before he published *Listen, Yankee*, Mills knew little about Cuba, but discussions with Latin American intellectuals in Brazil in the fall of 1959 and in Mexico in early 1960 compelled him to confront the issue. In particular, during his three-month stay in Mexico City, Mills became close to leading left-wing Mexican writers, including the prominent novelist Carlos Fuentes. This set of intellectuals proved to be crucial contacts for Mills, allowing him first to discover and then to reach a wider Latin American left. Fuentes, in particular, became for Mills a model of the engaged Latin American intellectual and a key representative of what Mills, in a 1961 letter to Fuentes, referred to as “our New Left.”¹¹² Mills was strongly influenced by Fuentes’s belief that “after the assassination in Spain of the ideal internationalism of the first few decades of the twentieth century, we are now witnessing the emergence of a concrete internationalism: that of the underdeveloped nations.”¹¹³ After speaking with Fuentes and other Latin American leftists in Brazil and Mexico, Mills came to share their hope that the Cuban Revolution would provide the impetus for this new internationalism. Fuentes—like many Latin American leftists, drawn to socialism but disenchanted with the Soviet example—looked to developments in Cuba as a new model for radical social change.¹¹⁴ In an early 1960 interview in Mexico with Fuentes and other Mexican intellectuals, Mills tentatively voiced the appeal of the Cuban Revolution as a New Left force: “It is not within advanced capitalism or within the Soviet bloc, but within the underdeveloped countries perilously outside both blocs that I see the best possibilities for an independent Left. As for the *probabilities* of it, quite frankly I don’t estimate them very high. . . . I don’t know of any country which has yet displayed for us a really new beginning—a third model of industrialization which, of course, would be the basis for any international New Left. Maybe Cuba will turn out that way; I haven’t been there.”¹¹⁵ When Mills returned to the United States from Mexico, he arranged to visit Cuba in August 1960. No doubt Mills was flattered and intrigued to hear a report that Castro had read *The Power Elite* while leading the guerrilla campaign in the Sierra Maestra, but the primary purpose of his trip was to see for himself whether Cuba really did represent a possible New Left “third model.”¹¹⁶

Mills’s visit came at a time of rapidly deteriorating relations between Cuba and the United States. In June, at the request of the U.S. gov-

ernment, American oil refineries in Cuba refused to process Soviet crude oil, leading to their nationalization by the Cuban government. In retaliation, the United States cancelled Cuba's guaranteed quota of sugar sales. Although Castro had previously received positive U.S. press coverage, by 1960 he was generally portrayed as a dangerous Communist dictator, even though he was not yet a Communist. Mills's trip also occurred against the backdrop of the development of a Cuban solidarity movement in the United States led by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), founded in 1960. By opposing the conduct of American foreign policy and expressing solidarity with revolutionary movements in third world nations, the FPCC was a crucial early organization in 1960s-era radicalism. Seeking a "fair hearing" for the Cuban Revolution, the FPCC was led by former CBS journalist Robert Taber. It countered negative and inaccurate portrayals of the Cuban Revolution in the mass media and urged the American government not to support counterrevolutionary activities. Beginning as a tiny ad hoc group that published an advertisement in the *New York Times*, by the end of 1960 it had seven thousand members in twenty-seven adult chapters and forty student councils. Presenting itself as "a group of distinguished writers, artists, journalists, and professionals," the FPCC seemed to fulfill Mills's calls for the repossession of the cultural apparatus.¹¹⁷ Taber helped Mills arrange his trip to Cuba. When he arrived in Cuba, Mills met another prominent FPCC activist, Saul Landau, a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin and an editor and cofounder of *Studies on the Left*, who would subsequently become Mills's research assistant, traveling with him to Europe in 1961.¹¹⁸

Mills spent barely more than two weeks in Cuba, but he made the most of his time. With the assistance of a translator, he conducted interviews with members of the revolutionary movement at all levels. He spent "three and a half eighteen-hour days" with Castro himself.¹¹⁹ Because he did not speak Spanish, because his time was short, and because his activities were largely arranged by Cuban government officials, there were very clear limits to what Mills was able to learn during his trip. Though he sometimes worried he might not be properly prepared to comment on Cuba, Mills was swept up in the excitement of the revolutionary situation. He also calculated that no other figure was willing and capable of offering a sympathetic perspective on the revolution for a mass American audience. As one of the only prominent American leftists with no history of association with the Communist Party or Popular Front organizations, Mills believed he was ideally

suited to argue the case of the Cuban revolutionaries in the United States. One Cuban with whom Mills talked during his trip asked Mills whether he'd be "considered a Communist" if he criticized U.S. policy toward Cuba. "On the contrary," Mills replied, "it is known that I'm not. This is the most worrisome thing about me."¹²⁰

When Mills returned from Cuba, he wrote *Listen, Yankee* within a matter of weeks. It was published in November 1960 as a mass-market paperback. Though it contained an introduction and conclusion in Mills's own voice, the body of *Listen, Yankee* was written as a series of letters addressed to the American public by a fictional Cuban revolutionary. This stylistic device expressed one of Mills's central concerns, emphasized by the FPCC, that the Cuban Revolution deserved a fair hearing, which was not provided by the biased mainstream media. Readers today are likely to be struck by the audacity of Mills's claim to portray a Cuban revolutionary, but many Latin American intellectuals at the time were unconcerned by his use of this technique. Mills himself worried about feigning a Cuban voice, but he was reassured by his Cuban translator.¹²¹ For Mills, speaking in the voice of a Cuban revolutionary was a way of expressing solidarity. Even when writing in his own voice, Mills privileged the need to identify with the revolutionaries. "I do not worry about the Cuban Revolution," he wrote, "I worry with it."¹²² Even so, one should certainly be skeptical of Mills's claim that "the facts and interpretations presented in these letters from Cuba accurately reflect, I believe, the views of the Cuban revolutionary. . . . I have merely organized them—in the most direct and immediate fashion of which I am capable."¹²³

The most convincing aspect of *Listen, Yankee* was its sharp challenge to American foreign policy. Mills detailed the long history of American intervention in Cuba, highlighting U.S. government support of the corrupt and brutal dictator Fulgencio Batista, who was overthrown by the 26th of July Movement led by Castro. Mills also explored the larger context of U.S. imperialism in Latin America, pointing to U.S. policies driven by the search for profit and power rather than the nation's professed commitment to democratic ideals. As Mills correctly predicted, American economic sanctions against Cuba escalated into military support for a counterrevolution. "Isn't your Government really left with only one way to act against our Government and against us, military violence against Cuba?" asked Mills's fictional Cuban.¹²⁴ Already by 1960 the U.S. government was gearing up for the Bay of Pigs debacle of April 1961, when CIA-backed exiles launched a surprise invasion of

the island and were easily repelled. American hostility to Cuba, Mills perceived, was a major force pushing Castro's government into the Soviet orbit. One of the most effective rhetorical strategies of *Listen, Yankee* was the direct appeal of the fictional Cuban revolutionary to the American public to scrutinize and change their government's policies: "Because Cuba—listen, Yankee—Cuba is your big chance. It's your chance to establish once again what the United States perhaps once did mean to the world. It's your chance to make it clear how you're going to respond to all the chaos and tumult and glory, all the revolution and bloody mess and enormous hopes that are coming about among all the impoverished, disease-ridden, illiterate, hungry peoples of the world in which you, Yankee, are getting so fat and so drowsy."¹²⁵

Like the influential historian and critic of American imperialism William Appleman Williams, Mills used the Cuban example to argue that the United States needed to reevaluate its foreign policy toward third world revolutions.¹²⁶ From the very first page, Mills made it clear that his concern was not just with Cuba itself, but with the exploited peoples of the underdeveloped world and their struggles against their imperial or neo-imperial masters. "Cuba's voice today is a voice of the hungry-nation bloc," he proclaimed, "and the Cuban revolutionary is now speaking—most effectively—in the name of that bloc." "In Africa, in Asia, as well as in Latin America," he continued, "the people behind this voice are becoming strong in a kind of fury they've never known before."¹²⁷ Not surprisingly, Mills failed to grasp the crucial racial dimension of the Cuban Revolution, or of the anticolonial struggle more generally. This omission proved an important distinction between *Listen, Yankee* and the enthusiastic accounts of the Cuban Revolution offered by African-American radicals such as LeRoi Jones and Robert Williams.¹²⁸

Listen, Yankee left little doubt that Mills believed the Cuban Revolution was the "third model" he had hoped for in world politics. "The Cuban revolutionary is a new and distinct type of left-wing thinker and actor," Mills declared. "He is neither capitalist nor Communist. He is socialist in manner, I believe, both practical and humane."¹²⁹ The Cuban Revolution, Mills believed, had freed itself from the Communist baggage of the Old Left. Though he noted that the Cuban government received aid from the Soviet Union, Mills insisted on the non-Communist nature of the revolution. Through the voice of his fictional Cuban, Mills hailed the Cuban Revolution as a new beginning for the international left: "We are revolutionaries of the post-Stalin

era. . . . We've never had any 'God That Failed.' . . . We are new radicals. We really are, we think, a new left in the world. A left that has never suffered from all that Stalinism has meant to the old left all over the world."¹³⁰

In describing the Cuban Revolution as a nondogmatic yet radical social transformation that portended a left-wing revival centered in the third world, Mills found himself in agreement with many U.S. and European leftists. The editors of *Monthly Review*, Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, traveled to Cuba a few months before Mills; their book, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution*, appeared shortly before *Listen, Yankee*. Huberman and Sweezy enthused that "this is the first time—ever, anywhere—that a genuine socialist revolution has been made by *non-Communists!*"¹³¹ *Studies on the Left* similarly viewed the Cuban Revolution as a "refreshing combination of humanism and rationalism."¹³² *Studies on the Left* published an article by the French intellectual John-Paul Sartre, who traveled to Cuba shortly after the revolution and hailed it as a new beginning for the international left.¹³³ Mills's portrayal of Cuban revolutionaries as a radical "third force" beyond Soviet communism and American capitalism also rested in large part on Cuban leaders' self-portrayal at the time. For instance, Mills quoted Fidel Castro's statement "Capitalism sacrifices man; the Communist state, by its totalitarian concept, sacrifices the rights of man."¹³⁴

Mills's interpretation of the Cuban Revolution was oversimplified and in many ways naïve. In his zeal to identify with the revolution, Mills overlooked the faults of the Cuban government. This was particularly evident in the book's letter on the political system, titled "Revolutionary Euphoria." Though Mills was right to emphasize the popularity of the government (the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion to attract any local support would prove that), he overlooked the dangers of revolutionary dictatorship and failed to acknowledge the vested interest of the government in staying in power. Mills's fictional letter writer emphasized the necessity of dictatorship for the current phase of the revolution. "If we had an organized political system," he wrote, "we could not have done the things we have done in such a short time. Any system would lower the velocity of the revolution."¹³⁵ He praised Fidel Castro for his "anti-bureaucratic personality" and called him "the most directly radical and democratic force in Cuba."¹³⁶ "Above all," he claimed, "we believe neither Fidel Castro nor any other of our revolutionary leaders will use force to maintain himself in power."¹³⁷

In his concluding note to the reader, Mills adopted a more sober

tone, admitting, “My worries for Cuba—like those of knowledgeable Cuban revolutionaries—have to do, first, with problems of politics.”¹³⁸ He added, “I do not like such dependence upon one man as exists in Cuba today, nor the virtually absolute power that one man possesses.”¹³⁹ Despite the revolutionary euphoria in the letters, there was an undercurrent of characteristic Millsian pessimism in *Listen, Yankee*. For Cuba to remain neutral in the cold war conflict and thus have a good chance to continue to represent a “third force,” Mills argued that the U.S. government would have to commit to a policy of nonintervention. Given its material interests in Latin America, this meant that the U.S. government would have to “transform its own imperialist economy.” This would require a truly “deep transformation,” to say the least.¹⁴⁰ Having made this assessment, Mills might have predicted that American hostility to the revolution would have helped force Castro into the Soviet bloc, thus undermining the status of Cuba as a possible third force in world affairs. By instead emphasizing “revolutionary euphoria” and closely identifying with the revolutionaries, Mills perhaps set himself up for future disappointment. Mills’s uncritical embrace of the Cuban Revolution may have been the inevitable result of his desperate search for New Left agents after suffering through long years of left-wing defeat.

Mills’s embrace of the Cuban Revolution complicated his analysis of the global New Left in terms of the agency of the “cultural apparatus.” Mills saw the Cuban revolution as the work of a “young intelligentsia in contact with the poorer people.”¹⁴¹ Indeed, the leaders of the Cuban revolution were educated and relatively young. But Mills failed to recognize that, as revolutionaries who had seized state power, Cuban leaders were a very different type of political agent than the cultural apparatus of the United States and Britain, or even Poland or Mexico. Mills helped to bring about an alliance between the revolutionary intelligentsia of Cuba and the cultural apparatus in other nations, but his lumping them together as a single international New Left obscured crucial differences among them.

At times, Mills worried that he had rushed to judgment about Cuba. As he wrote to E. P. Thompson in late 1960, “I’ve been running since last February, when I went first to Mexico, then Russia, then Cuba. Too much fast writing, too many decisions of moral and intellectual types, made too fast, on too little evidence.”¹⁴² In one sense, Mills’s willingness to uncritically embrace the Cuban Revolution foreshadowed the unfortunate identification of later New Leftists with undemocratic

Communist movements in the third world. But Castro was hardly Mao Zedong or Ho Chi Minh. In 1960, Mills's analysis of the Cuban Revolution as popular, non-Communist, and radical, if oversimplified and overly optimistic, was at least plausible.¹⁴³ Rather than seeing Mills's championing of the Cuban Revolution as evidence of an attraction to "totalitarian" socialism, as his friend Harvey Swados once suggested, it is more accurately viewed as a rare departure for a critical intellectual who had once pledged "not to sink my life and my mind within *any* organization, much less one nation or another."¹⁴⁴

As Cuba edged closer to the Soviet bloc in 1961 and 1962, Mills began to have second thoughts about Castro. At first, Mills defended the revolution. In his last piece of writing on the revolution, the afterword to the Spanish translation of *Listen, Yankee*, Mills stated that nothing had happened to alter his earlier views.¹⁴⁵ And, at a June 1961 meeting with John-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in a Paris restaurant, Mills defended Castro to his French counterparts, who were becoming disenchanted with the revolution's direction.¹⁴⁶ However, there is strong evidence that indicates that Mills became sharply critical after Castro signaled his conversion to Communism in a December 1961 speech in which he declared himself a Marxist-Leninist. The evidence suggests that Mills felt personally betrayed by Castro.¹⁴⁷ It is impossible to know what Mills would have written about these developments had he lived longer, but it is difficult to imagine that he would have supported Cuba as a model for New Left change after it became Communist. After all, Mills's hope for the Cuban Revolution was always that it represented a non-Communist "third model" for left-wing political change.

Positive responses to *Listen, Yankee* demonstrated the importance of the Cuban revolution—and Mills's advocacy of it—for the growth of an international New Left. Mills never proposed that the Cuban Revolution could serve as a model for political change within the industrialized West. However, he did hope that its example could help foster an internationalist New Left consciousness in the United States and in the world as a whole. "Whether they know it or not," Mills wrote in a blurb for Sartre's *On Cuba*, "for the generation just coming to maturity, the revolution in Cuba is their 'Spanish Civil War.'"¹⁴⁸

Mills's book, of course, was primarily addressed to its "yankee" audience. Mills aimed to "get the United States . . . out of its present status as the provincial zone of the Americas."¹⁴⁹ Cuba was a test case for how Americans would respond to third world liberation movements, and Mills hoped the American people could be galvanized to

alter the policies of their government. Indeed, *Listen, Yankee* injected new debate about American foreign policy toward Cuba into the public sphere, and in the process helped to focus American public opinion on the justness of American policies toward the underdeveloped world as a whole. Released in October 1960, the book had sold a remarkable 370,000 copies by January 1961. Many other readers were exposed to it through an excerpt published in *Harper's Magazine*.¹⁵⁰ The book was reviewed in countless magazines and newspapers throughout the nation. Like Mills's earlier books, it was reviewed in major urban newspapers, but it was also reviewed in countless smaller publications, such as the *Crawfordsville (Indiana) Journal and Review*, *The Virginian-Pilot and the Plymouth Star*, the *Lafayette (Louisiana) Observer*, and the *Bristol (Connecticut) Press*. Though the book was denounced more often than praised, the response suggested that there was indeed an opening in the cultural apparatus to the views of a radical. No less a figure than Eleanor Roosevelt praised Mills's "most controversial but interesting book."¹⁵¹

The impact of *Listen, Yankee* was hardly limited to the United States. British New Leftists also followed events in Cuba closely. Emphasizing the need for critical support of the revolution, the editors of the *New Left Review* declared, "Cuba's example will be of the very greatest importance to countries—in Latin America, Africa, Asia—where a similar combination of circumstances could lead on to a similar understanding." Noting that none of its British contributors had yet been to Cuba, the editors argued that they "must rely on second-hand accounts" from "some of our most-trusted fellow socialists" abroad, including Huberman and Sweezy, Sartre, and, of course, Mills.¹⁵² Subsequently, the *New Left Review* published an interview with Saul Landau, conducted when Landau was traveling in Europe with Mills.¹⁵³ Mills sought to create ties between the British New Left and the Cuban Revolution. For instance, he tried (unsuccessfully) to convince the Cuban government to hire E.P. Thompson as a visiting professor at the University of Oriente.¹⁵⁴ Before his death, Mills had also agreed to collaborate with British New Leftist Robin Blackburn on a project about Cuba.¹⁵⁵

Listen, Yankee also had a significant impact in Latin America. Shortly after the book was published in the United States, a Spanish translation appeared. The publisher was the influential left Mexican publishing house Fondo de Cultura Económica, headed by the Argentinean radical Arnaldo Orfila Reynal.¹⁵⁶ Fuentes played a key role in helping Mills

find this publisher, one that Mills hoped would distribute the book not only in bookstores, but also in railroad stations.¹⁵⁷ When Mills's book was criticized by the U.S. press, left-wing Latin American intellectuals were quick to defend it. To such Latin American intellectuals, just as to British New Leftists before, Mills became a symbol of a reawakened American radicalism. His example suggested that there were elements within American society that supported greater democracy and social justice in the hemisphere rather than U.S. dominance. Fuentes, for instance, looked for allies among "those nuclei of democratic opinion in the US that are in a position to support our liberation movements."¹⁵⁸ He later dedicated his novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz* to Mills as a "true representative of the American people."¹⁵⁹ Within Cuba itself, Mills's book was hailed for its accurate depiction of the revolution.

Because of the book's impact, in December 1960 Mills was invited to appear on the NBC television show *The Nation's Future* to debate Kennedy administration spokesperson A. A. Berle. Unfortunately, Mills suffered a heart attack on the eve of the program and had to cancel the engagement.¹⁶⁰ After that, he never fully recovered his former energy, though he was able to travel in 1961 and complete *The Marxists* while also making progress on several other projects. He died of a subsequent heart attack in the spring of 1962. As a result, Mills never lived to see the development of the international New Left, to which he had so prominently contributed. Nevertheless, Mills's writings and his example influenced New Leftists, especially in the United States but also in Europe and Latin America, who did much to spread his legacy.

The Legacy of C. Wright Mills

On March 20, 1962, at the age of forty-five, Mills died of a heart attack in his home in West Nyack, New York. Observances of his death marked the distance that he had traveled in the two-and-a-half decades of his intellectual career. Hans Gerth traveled from Wisconsin to speak at the memorial service held at Columbia University, along with Daniel Bell, once a key influence on Mills's radicalism, but by then one of Mills's leading liberal targets. Other prominent Columbia sociologists, Merton and Lazarsfeld included, were conspicuously absent.¹ A Quaker service for friends and family, held at the interfaith pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation in Nyack, reflected Mills's newfound connections with the international peace movement. Fidel Castro sent a wreath of flowers to the service.²

Mills's early death was a great loss both for American social thought and for the left. Ironically, the timing may have enhanced his influence during the 1960s, and not only because his early death added to his romantic image. Since Mills died in 1962, his neglect of issues of gender and race was more excusable. Mills had just begun to voice his support for African-American equality near the end of his life. Would he have addressed racial inequality more seriously had he lived longer? Likewise, how would he have responded to the growth of the second-wave feminist movement, which would likely have challenged Mills's neglect of gender hierarchies and his masculine persona as a tough, independent intellectual?³ And how would he have reacted to later

New Left trends, particularly its adoption of countercultural styles and militant tactics? How would Mills, who conceived of power in wholly institutional terms, have responded to the notion that “the personal is political”? Or how would he have judged the student occupation of Columbia University in 1968: a laudable assault on university bureaucracy or a tactic that undermined reasoned democratic deliberation? Any answers to such questions would be purely speculative. Yet it is precisely because Mills was no longer around to take sides on such divisive issues that he remained an appealing icon for advocates of different visions of radical politics in the 1960s.

Despite his untimely death, it is virtually impossible to imagine the development of American sociology or the left without Mills. In the original draft of *The Sociological Imagination*, he wrote, “I should like to see the tasks and methods that I understand to be proper and urgent taken up by others, especially of course by younger men who are just now beginning independent work. It is, in fact, mainly for them that I write.”²⁴ As Mills hoped, *The Sociological Imagination* and his other works had an important effect on academic social science, even though he had created no school nor had any disciples. Many scholars trained in the 1960s were inspired by Mills’s vision of the sociological imagination to rebel against Parsonian social theory and bureau-driven social research and to expand their sense of what social science could be. The result was a sociological discipline more divided and confused about its identity, but one far more open to the questions and concerns that Mills had pursued throughout his career. In the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists posthumously reintegrated Mills into the academic milieu out of which he had originally emerged. Beginning in 1964, and continuing to the present day, the Society for the Study of Social Problems has offered the C. Wright Mills Award to books that exemplify Mills’s sociological vision.

Mills’s enduring impact on academic social science was evident in a 1964 collection edited by Irving Louis Horowitz, *The New Sociology: Essays in Social Science and Social Theory in Honor of C. Wright Mills*. Horowitz had proposed the book to Mills in 1960. As Mills explained to his literary agent, though he thought he was “much too young for this sort of thing,” he was interested because “I’m in a fight of course with the profession of sociology: *The Sociological Imagination* . . . made a lot of them mad, but the young ones it made glad; and maybe it’s a good idea to firm them up.”²⁵ Dedicated to “American graduate students of Social Science,” *The New Sociology* contained twenty-eight essays by

social scientists in the United States, Britain, and Latin America, including contributions from T. B. Bottomore, Erich Fromm, Alvin Gouldner, Andrew Hacker, and Ralph Miliband.⁶ Collectively, the essays critically appraised Mills's legacy and represented a new effort to create a public sociology that directly confronted the significant moral and political issues of the day. In his introductory essay, Horowitz reclaimed Mills for the social sciences and hinted that a transformation toward a new sociology was already underway. "The ceaseless barrage of criticism caused Mills to think himself a 'lone wolf,'" Horowitz wrote. "He was mistaken in his romantic notion of being one and isolated. Any authentic movement or authentic sociological method invites many people; and since the new turn in sociology is intrinsically broad in scope, many scholars (from all over the human sciences and humanities) have been attracted to it."⁷ Horowitz concluded, "When social science is tied to social responsibility, the legacy of Mills will be realized."⁸

Another 1964 publication, "Radical Nomad: Essays on C. Wright Mills and His Times," revealed a different aspect of Mills's legacy. A master's thesis written by a principal leader of the young New Left, Tom Hayden, "Radical Nomad" demonstrated the resonance of Mills's radical politics of truth for a new generation. Mills became best known for his influence on radicals of the 1960s. "If any one person was the intellectual father of The Movement," wrote Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau in 1966, "it was C. Wright Mills," noting that "several Movement babies have been named C. Wright."⁹ A leader of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Hayden drafted its influential 1962 manifesto, the "Port Huron Statement." For Hayden, Mills's willingness to tell truths that others ignored made him a worthy progenitor. He saw Mills as one of the few postwar thinkers able to see "through the hypocrisy, fraud, obfuscation, privilege, irrationality, and totalitarianism."¹⁰ Hayden found Mills's work compelling for its commitment to a "participatory democracy where men together make the decisions which order and direct their lives."¹¹ His depiction of Mills as a "radical nomad" contributed to the pervasive mythology of Mills as the lone rebel who spoke out against the political complacency and conformity of the postwar era.

As this book has shown, Mills's ideas were far more embedded in his time than Hayden recognized. Yet just as new sociologists criticized Mills's eagerness to play the maverick, certain aspects of Mills's thinking struck the new generation of leftists as inadequate. Particularly problematic were Mills's failures to address issues of race, poverty, and

gender, as well as the bleak pessimism of his disillusioned radicalism, which to Hayden seemed to allow “no chance for protest or revolt.”¹² Mills’s influence on 1960s-era radicalism extended beyond the white student New Left represented by Hayden. For example, one of the greatest admirers of Mills’s work was the African-American intellectual and leading theorist of Black Power, Harold Cruse. In *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Cruse argued that even though Mills was “an Anglo-Saxon and a Southerner at that,” he was a significant New Left theorist who introduced “a new method for a new radical criticism of American society.”¹³ Cruse praised Mills’s analysis of the “structural question of the American cultural apparatus,” and applied it by arguing that African-American intellectuals needed to develop their own autonomous ideas and institutions.¹⁴

Today, Mills’s legacy endures, even though his radical ambitions for left-wing social change and the widespread public relevance of sociology remain unfulfilled. His best works are still worth reading today. *The New Men of Power* identifies key causes of organized labor’s decline, while *White Collar* still speaks to anyone who has ever worked in an office. *The Sociological Imagination* remains an inspiring account of the possibilities of social science, and *The Power Elite* has acquired new relevance during the period of the so-called “war on terror,” in which it is difficult to ignore the close connections between political, corporate, and military leaders or the ways in which government officials use their power to distort the truth. Clearly, Mills is a figure whose legacy deserves serious acknowledgment. Yet we should not make Mills larger than life by portraying him as a maverick intellectual hero. Mills’s sociological and political imagination had significant flaws as well as considerable merits. His neglect of the issues of race and gender alone make him a problematic model for contemporary radicals. Moreover, while his work remains relevant, Mills sought to understand a society that has changed in important respects since his death over half a century ago. “We must accuse Karl Marx of having lived in the nineteenth century,” Mills once wrote. So must we also accuse Mills of having lived in the twentieth century. One lesson of any intellectual history is that, as Quentin Skinner once put it, “we must learn to do our thinking for ourselves.”¹⁵ The best way to continue Mills’s legacy is to critically apply his insights to think for ourselves about the contemporary prospects for American sociology and the left in our own time.