



COMMODIFICATION OF CONCEPTS: COMMUNISM, CRIME, AND TERRORISM IN THE POST WWII UNITED STATES

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Abstract

A crisis in world capitalism had created an economic downturn in the United States. The Arab oil embargo associated with the Yom Kippur War of 1973 turned the US economy from post-Second World War expansion to contraction. The economic turnaround was linked to the neoconservative trend in politics. “The assault on the welfare state went hand in hand with an increasingly punitive approach to crime” Neoconservatism. in governance wedded with neoliberal economics. The liberation movements of the 1960s began with decolonization in Africa; in a different sense via the civil rights movement in the United States. The latter twentieth century began recolonization through a combination of global finance under the leadership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Popular revolts in former colonial areas, especially in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia led to bloody violence, usually justified by some connection with communism. Sometimes the recolonization in suppressing those popular revolts took the form of fomenting civil wars, such as those in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and central Africa, but in other cases it was outright invasions as in Panama, and later in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the twenty-first century, the main theater shifted to the Middle East, rife with Arabs, Muslims, and, of course, oil. There, it was terrorism that American consumers bought.

Key Words: Trade, Comodification, Terrorism

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MERCANTILISATION DES CONCEPTS: COMMUNISME, CRIME ET TERRORISME DANS LES ÉTATS-UNIS DE L'APRÈS SECONDE GUERRE MONDIALE

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Résumé

Une crise du capitalisme mondial a causé une récession économique aux États-Unis. L'embargo sur le pétrole arabe connexe à la guerre du Yom Kippour en 1973 a fait passer l'économie américaine de l'expansion, qui a suivi la seconde guerre mondiale, à la contraction. Cette volte-face a été liée à une tendance politique néoconservatrice. "L'agression contre l'État-Providence est allée de pair avec une approche du crime toujours plus punitive". Le néoconservatisme du gouvernement s'est uni à l'économie néolibérale. Les mouvements de libération des années 1960 ont commencé par la décolonisation en Afrique; ils se sont poursuivis par le mouvement des droits civils aux États-Unis. La fin du XXe siècle a amené la recolonisation par une combinaison financière globale sous l'égide du Fonds Monétaire International (FMI) et de la Banque Mondiale. Des révoltes populaires dans des régions anciennement coloniales, notamment en Afrique, au Moyen-Orient et en Asie, ont conduit à des violences sanguinaires dont le prétexte habituel était une connivence avec le communisme. Parfois, la recolonisation en supprimant ces révoltes populaires a entrepris de fomenter des guerres civiles, comme celles du Nicaragua, du Salvador et d'Afrique centrale, mais dans d'autres cas, ce furent de véritables invasions comme à Panama, et plus tard en Afghanistan et en Irak. Au XXIe siècle, le théâtre principal s'est déplacé au Moyen-Orient, riche en Arabes, en Musulmans et bien sûr en pétrole. Là-bas, c'était du terrorisme qu'achetaient les consommateurs américains.

Mots clé: commerce, simplification, terrorisme

Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War public policy in the United States has swirled around three concepts: communism, crime, and terrorism. They set the framework for almost all other national policies. They followed each other sequentially, but with much overlap. What follows argues that policy planners had to commodify the concepts to fit policy purposes. That is because they had to sell them to American consumers, since it was they who had to spend money for them. Buying communism, crime, and terrorism took the form of buying touted antidotes to them, perhaps not unlike buying snake oil from a traveling medicine show. Some of the most expensive antidotes included the construction of a nuclear arsenal for the Cold War, the extraordinary expansion of the penal system coupled with the quasi-military war on drugs, and most recently the military adventures and expansion of national security apparatuses in the war on terrorism. Although arguable and far from precise, one ballpark estimate of military expenditures related to the Cold War is 10 trillion dollars (Higgs 1994). Estimates of the war on crime are harder to find, but estimates of the war on drugs alone run from 40 to close to 80 billion dollars a year since it began in 1970 (Drug Policy Alliance 2002, Miron 2004). Estimates of the costs of the war on terror only since 11 September 2001 range from 700 billion to 4 trillion dollars (Homeland Security Market Research 2008, Belasco 2010). Consumption of these products does not come cheap.

The present essay on commodifying a concept departs from most analyses of commodification, but it fits with what has happened in the United States since the mid

twentieth century. Since concepts are ideas with empirical referents (Mills 1959), their commodification involves reification and in turn fetishization (Lukács 1923, Marx 1867: c. 1 sec. 4). Instead of rereading Marxian paths, fetishization and commodification have a less anachronistic application to the subjects at hand. Stephen Kline used it to analyze toys and play. Kline's analysis connects it with the advent of commercial television in the 1950s.

“Focusing on play reveals the dual status of the toy commodity: an object to be manipulated and a representational medium for the prevailing mores Toy makers, therefore, were among the first to discover that goods are really fetish objects: The mystery of their use lies in the user's ability to transform an experience through imagination” (Kline 1998: 347-8).

Kline continued the critique by noting that this deployment depended on commercial television's penetration into daily life. He offered the example of the 1954 Disney production of *Davey Crockett*: “this program had kids everywhere demanding coonskin caps and plastic Bowie knives within a month of its premiere” (349). Not coincidentally, toy fetishism occurred at the same time as the program that commodified communism and fetishized its own spin off products from thermonuclear bombs to McCarthyism.

A Chronology of Commodifying Communism, Crime, and Terrorism

Panics, ideological programs, and neutralizing or curative public policies preceded the commodification of communism, crime, and terrorism. Communism entered American discourse as an ideological pejorative from the Paris Commune of 1871. By 1877, the country experienced a crime scare in the form of “tramping.” Those without work would tramp the roads. They found themselves demonized as vagabonds and criminals. “They were everywhere, these wandering poor, and theft and violence followed their path.” The terror campaign's target audience was the new middle class who also feared the violence and social upset threatened by the communists (Bellesisles 2010:113). Terrorism gained traction as a national issue with the 1901 assassination of William McKinley by Leon Czolgosz, who was proclaimed an anarchist. Nonetheless, the commodification of the concepts awaited a mature public relations industry that emerged during the Second World War.

The two world wars were milestones of commodification, as they spurred development of the public relations industry. Famously, the Creel Commission under the leadership of George Creel, a former newspaper reporter, sold the First World War to a reluctant, at times recalcitrant, American public. The advertising industry went into high gear, along with most other industries in the Second World War. Granted, Pearl Harbor made selling that war easier than the first, but the public relations tasks became more complicated. The American public no longer had merely to accept US entry into the war; the entire population had to mobilize to fight it, not just those destined for the front.

Between the wars consumerism had grown apace. While still mainly a production driven economy, in the United States Fordism became its dominant mode. What made Fordism different was that it required a relatively affluent productive class. Those who produced the goods had to be able to buy them. Moreover, they had to be sold on the aspiration to buy things they did not need. Lifestyle advertising with an increasing reliance on social fears—for example halitosis, body odor, yellow teeth, and so on—began to create a consumerist economy (Lears 1994, Marchand 1985). The

changeover from production to consumption arguably did not occur until the 1970s, but the trend began after the First World War. Concomitant with the broad and basic economic change, public relations gained maturity. It was that maturation that made possible the commodification of concepts after the Second World War.

Without recounting all the twists and turns of the origins of the Cold War or the lurch toward the political right spearheaded by the successful efforts to blunt organized labor, the elites in the United States took steps to reassert control in the late 1940s through the early 1950s. They directed their efforts domestically and in foreign affairs. Domestically it took forms such as the following: the Taft Hartley Act of 1947 plus various Congressional investigations of Communism. Internationally the campaign coupled anti-Communist re-militarization with covert operations against Communists, but also against nationalists and various left reformers, such as Mussaddegh in Iran, Arbenz in Guatemala, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, and others. These foreign and domestic campaigns culminated in the formation of a US national security state, ostensibly designed to protect against Communist aggression and subversion. Anti-Communism provided the crucial link and *raison d'être*. Of course, the problem was that Communism was not some uniform enemy like Germany's Nazism in the Second World War. Although there were states that proclaimed themselves communist and had communist parties, and there was a Communist Party in the United States, communism was far less coherent. It was, in fact, just a concept.

The elites engineered a return to stability and predictability. The next challenge came in the 1960s. First, the ultimately successful, partially at least, civil rights movement challenged White elites in the South. The success of the movement depended on a wedge in the ruling class that went back to the origins of the United States—namely a North-South split. When civil rights moved north, it prompted a reaction. It was out of that regional shift that the next concept came to commodification, crime.

Crime had to be commodified because the needs of the elite required meanings far different from those traditionally assigned to the word. Moreover, they had to sell crime as a thing that needed policy attention and money spent on it. First, reify it; then commodify it. The campaign began in the 1960s, initiated by the Goldwater presidential campaign in 1964 and given effect by Nixon's presidency beginning with the 1968 election. From one perspective, the crime campaign paved the way for the terrorism campaign (Altheide 2002, 2006, 2009).

Terrorism did not traipse across the stage as a commodity at first. Just like crime appeared first as a national social problem with the Kefauver hearing in 1950-51, long before its commodification around 1970, so terrorism gained notice at about the same time crime coalesced into a commodity, in the late 1960s. Initiated in the 1970s, it gained realization with the presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Afterwards, Congress memorialized and formalized it into law by making foreign terrorism a crime.

The timeline for commodification of the three concepts approximates the following.

- 1871-1919 Communism became a political label.
- 1920-1946 Communism became a social and political issue.
- 1947-1955 Communism was introduced as a commodity.
- 1956-1991? Communism was a dominant commodity.
- 1950-1963 Crime gained national attention.
- 1964-1968 Crime became a political issue.

1969-1979 Crime was introduced as a commodity.
1980-present Crime became a dominant commodity
1961-1979 Terrorism was recognized as a domestic problem—e.g., the KKK,
etc.

1970-1979 International terrorism gained recognition.
1980-1987 Terrorism was introduced as a commodity.
1988-present Terrorism became a dominant commodity.

The foregoing remains arguable, but it functions more as a rough outline than a definitive chronicle. The process, development, and ascendance for each commodified concept are more important. Each concept followed a similar path. It began as an issue or label; then became politicized; then it metamorphosed into a commodity, and finally became a dominant or master commodity. This essay focuses on the process of commodification and subsequent developments after a concept becomes a commodity.

Fetishes, Concepts, and Commodities

Early usages of the term ‘fetish’ referred to what Europeans of the seventeenth century called artifacts found among non-Europeans. The Europeans and later Western anthropologists believed that in certain non-Western cultures, particular objects or kinds of objects functioned as repositories of magical, religious, or otherwise spiritual power. That is, the fetish called forth supernatural forces. Marx used the term to describe how commodities take on powers that people believe inhere in the objects themselves while not recognizing that people themselves and the way they relate to one another are the real sources of power. Freud and various nineteenth and early twentieth century psychologists applied the term to sexuality. A sexual fetish refers to some object or body part that serves to provide sexual arousal and gratification, although not itself part of sexual reproductive organs.

All these usages of the term ‘fetish’ suppose a material object. How, then, can a concept become a fetish? Concepts, which by definition do not have material form, may be referenced by symbols, and concepts regularly become symbolized. Symbols, of course, do have material form. They can be words, mathematical symbols such as numbers, musical notes—those are the most common symbol systems. Symbols convey meaning as parts of cultural systems. But fetishes do not just carry meanings. What makes them fetishes is that people treat them as if the fetish itself had power. To illustrate, take the word ‘dog’. It references a concept, an idea with empirical content. One can point to instances of dogs. To treat the word ‘dog’ as a fetish, however, would mean something like fear of being bitten by the word.

A fetish differs from a symbol. Symbols are signs. They signify with respect to something else. Additionally, a symbolic sign relation has meaning. To stay with linguistics, take two words: ‘that’ and ‘dog.’ ‘That’ performs as an indexical. It does not have meaning itself, but points to another linguistic sign. ‘Dog’ means something, and its meaning depends on more than linguistic context. ‘Dog’ is meaningful in a cultural context. Dogs mean different things to different people, but the weighting of those meanings differs from one culture to the next. In most Western cultures, dogs usually do not mean food animals as do cattle. In the same way, while communism, crime, and terrorism have symbolic functions, once commodified and fetishized, their rhetorical and iconic force transcended, or perhaps more exactly effaced meaning. They could serve as fungible ciphers for public policies. They do not have to *mean* anything so long as produce the requisite public arousal and potential gratification.

Generally, commodification of concepts employs imagery. Concepts are discursive. People express them linguistically. Images, on the other hand, are iconic. They signify what they depict. Any meaning is, as the old saw goes, in the eye of the beholder. The task for the public relations manager is to make that eye desirous. In the first eminently successful public relations campaign, Edward Bernays, the self-proclaimed inventor of that industry, boasted that he made women smoke (Ewen 1996). The success of the campaign largely depended on making women want to appear as the images of smoking women that Bernays deployed. Rather than discourse and argumentation, Bernays portrayed smoking women as attractive, fashionable, smart, sophisticated, and so on. Internalizing the image produced a behavior change, taking up smoking cigarettes. Moreover, all those concatenated desirables—attractiveness, fashionable, smartness, sophistication, and others—came along with the internalization. To sell more cigarettes, Bernays sold an image.

Imagery captures the key step from social problem to commodity. Of course, commodification entails another difference. Although social problems acquire vested interests—the moral entrepreneurs, claims makers, enforcers, and all the other personnel of socially constructed problems (Becker 1973, Blumer 1971)—to be a commodity requires something else: exchange value and eventually profit. Without financial fungibility and without the prospect of profit, social problems languish. Take drunk driving, a classic example elaborated by Joseph Gusfield (1981). Following the usual steps, drunk driving emerged as an institutionalized social problem with many states criminalizing the practice. Although a boon to criminal defense attorneys, most of whom need a reliable revenue generator, drunk driving remains a mere social problem, not a commodity. No one profits from it. Note that the aforementioned defense lawyers do not profit. They merely garner a wage from it. Communism, on the other hand, spawned numerous, profitable spinoffs, akin to coonskin caps and plastic Bowie knives—movies, television programs, novels, plays, and so on (Barranger 2008; Brinkley 1998; Cauter 1978, 2003; Schrecker 1998, 2002). Those were just the consumer products. The big money came from the Cold War—nuclear missiles and submarines, bombers and fighters, and all the smaller goods to equip a three sphere war capability on land, sea, and air. Later, full spectrum dominance added outer space. Communism, or anti-Communism, became a fetish. It aroused and gave gratification. Of course, no sooner gratified, than the need for further gratification appeared. Each nuclear missile led to more and bigger ones, and in the later stages of the Cold War, undersea, submarine launched missiles with MIRVed warheads became the must have accoutrement. How could a simple shoe fetish compete?

Public Relations, Marketing, and Selling Concepts

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), American philosopher and scientist, developed a study of signs that he called semiotic. His semiotic theory identified ten trichotomies, and in fact a main distinction between Peirce's semiotics and the more widely referenced semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure is that the latter uses a dyadic versus a triadic structural model. Very roughly, Peirce's triad requires an object, a sign, and an interpretant whereas Saussure's dyad uses only an object and a sign. Great consequences follow from the distinction. Saussure's semiology remains idealistic; Peirce's semiotics is materialistic. For Saussure the sign referred to an idea—the object. The paradigm for Saussure's sign is a word, for example 'dog.' Here, 'dog' does not refer to a domesticated mammal, but to the idea of dog. For Peirce, the object is a dog or

dogs; the sign is the word, and the interpretant is the linguistic sign determined by a culture-bound language.

Among the trichotomies Peirce used most often was the icon-index-symbol. These three are aspects of signs: signs that represent iconically; those that represent indexically; and those that represent symbolically. Symbolic sign relations connect objects through meaning. Indexical sign relations connect them through pointing to, based on an intrinsic relation such as ‘that dog’ the example used above or smoke indexically representing fire. Iconic sign relations depend on resemblance. They are, in essence, images. Peirce noted that his usage of icon in this context relied on Aristotle’s *Simulacra*, which Peirce believed Aristotle got from Plato (Peirce 1906: 481n). Therefore, an icon is a simulacrum that signifies by resembling some object.

The twentieth century French intellectual, Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) used the term simulacrum to capture a particular trend in communication and thought. According to Baudrillard, simulacra are products of new communication technologies combined with later modern political economies that center consumerism. Baudrillard identified four stages of development of simulacra evolving from images designed to depict some object faithfully, then images that distort real objects, then images that pretend to represent reality but in the absence of a real object, and finally images that merely refer to other images and signs. He also proposed a developmental timeline. The premodern in which the image refers to a real object precedes the modern period associated with industrial capitalism and mechanical reproduction, as in Walter Benjamin’s famous essay “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936). The final stage is the postmodern, in which there are only simulacra; reality is elided; there is no reality other than images.

The era on which this essay focuses moves from the modern to the postmodern. The imagery and commodification of communism came during what some cultural critics and historians call high modernism, the mid-twentieth century. It presented the epitome of industrialism and mechanical reproduction. The commodification of crime occurred in the transition from modernity to postmodernity, and that of terrorism signifies postmodernity.

Guy Debord (1967) anticipated Baudrillard’s conception of simulacra by his explication of the spectacle. The spectacle embodies reified and congealed capital in which reproduction is all, because reproductions are commodities. Their ontological status as commodities makes them more authentic, precisely because they are sources of profit and capital. In the present focus, the commodification of communism, crime, and terrorism, coincided with the fact that they were simulacra. The concepts had as their empirical content only the simulacra. There was no communism, no crime, no terrorism; not because there was no communist ideology and no communists; not because there were no violations of, law and criminals; and not because there were no attempts to intimidate and no terrorists. In fact, all these things existed and exist, but communism, crime, and terrorism gained their authenticity because and only because they had exchange value and profitability.

Commodifying Communism

Commodifying communism combined two ideologies that seem incompatible on the surface—neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Their combination reached its apotheosis in the Ronald Reagan regime of the 1980s. Neoliberal economics rejects

Keynesian economic theory in favor of a kind of laissez fair policy. In the United States neoliberalism served the ideological needs of certain elements of the ruling class against the policies initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the New Deal of the 1930s. Later regimes under presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and even Nixon, Ford, and Carter; adhered to Keynesian principles. Keynesian economics argues that private sector decisions sometimes lead to inefficient macroeconomic outcomes and therefore advocates active policy responses by the public sector, including monetary policy actions by the central bank and fiscal policy actions by the government to stabilize output over the business cycle. The theories forming the basis of Keynesian economics were first presented in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). Keynesian economics advocates a mixed economy—predominantly private sector, but with a large role for government and public sector—and served as the economic model during the later part of the Great Depression, World War II, and the post-war economic expansion. An important part of the New Deal and subsequent public policy in the United States recognized trade and labor unions as an intrinsic part of the private sector economy, which later included public sector workers.

The combination of state management of the economy and recognition of organized labor were the main targets of animus by the right wing of the ruling class, represented by such business associations as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Business Roundtable. In contrast, the US Chamber of Commerce typically took a more centrist political approach. The NAM fought against the New Deal and against organized labor. Its ideology remain reactionary and obstructionist but without an articulated discourse until the publication of Frederick Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* in 1944. The NAM and like minded organizations promoted what later was called neoliberalism as it ostensibly recuperated the ideas of eighteenth and nineteenth century political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Relevant to the present argument, Hayek and this brand of political economic ideology gained credence because of a deliberate and well funded public relations campaign, which Bertrand M. Roehner summarized (2007:115-126). In addition to anti-unionism and objections to state regulations, the same organizations promoted anti-Communism. At this juncture the ideology encountered contradictions.

Neoliberalism ostensibly espouses small government and low government spending. But post Second World War anti-Communism did not just fight against leftist ideas and policies in the domestic sphere. Anti-Communism combined this with a Cold War strategy that entailed a re-expansion of the US military and perforce government spending. Another peculiarity, and maybe an explanation for the term 'neoconservatism,' is that Roosevelt's New Deal did not end the great depression of the 1930s; that was the achievement of the Second World War. As a result, leftists and center leftists in the United States could be associated with both Keynesian and welfare state policies and militaristic anti-Communism. Unions and welfare at home, and militaristic anti-Communism abroad characterized US public policy from 1946 through 1980. Although schizoid, it worked with the US electorate and the two party political arena.

The Reagan era combined the two by creating a new and improved communism product that reflected new and advanced technologies of marketing and public relations. The marketing technique used a refined kind of market segmentation. Previously understood, segmented marketing depended on demographic analyses of consumption.

Market research could discern the age ranges, race, gender, residential location and so on for people who tended to buy certain kinds of products. Advertisers could then target those market segments in which their advertising could most efficiently produce increased purchases for a given product. Previously, Cold War anti-Communism and welfare state domestic policies could operate in parallel universes as foreign policy and domestic policy had been separate. One could be a neoconservative who favored Cold War belligerence with labor union support and government spending on domestic welfare because of these separate spheres. Lyndon Johnson with his Great Society and Vietnam War is the exemplar. The new commodification of communism combined the two and wedded neoliberalism with neoconservatism. It used a marketing strategy that did not just identify and target demographic groups, but targeted different consciousnesses within individuals. The new communism commodity sold well with union members and beneficiaries of welfare state public services—the so-called Reagan Democrats. They were heirs to the New Deal and the Cold War. This combined a neoliberal and neoconservative ideology. It meant cuts in the welfare state, anti-unionism, and militaristic anti-Communism. Its success depended on two features of the post Second World War American culture. One feature was old and the other new. They are best illustrated through the commodification of crime.

Commodifying of Crime

Commodifying crime took advantage of two features of the United States. By cultural tradition and its inescapable history, the United States built on a foundation of racism. The colonial settlements by Europeans, for the future United States, mostly English, used a dual racial strategy of displacing the native inhabitants and slave labor. By the eighteenth century, slavery was defined by race. The other feature of the post war United States was the decline and dismantling of its Fordist economy. Fordism relied on mass production to make commodities cheaply and on relatively high wages to workers so they could afford to buy the commodities. The mid 1960s portended the change away from Fordism, and it saw a backlash and revival of populist racism.

Social upheaval marked the country in the 1960s just as it was approaching a historic high of equality in wealth and income. Behind the façade of prosperity lurked a menace—deindustrialization. Already, US manufacturers began casting their eyes on cheap labor, accessible raw materials, and comprador governments in what was then known as the Third World. The economic crisis of the 1970s accelerated the problems.

Two events began the acceleration. The first was a culmination of the long term trend of increasing pressure on the dollar. Because there were not enough dollars to keep the growing world economy going, Nixon finally took the US currency off the gold standard in 1971, letting it float with respect to other currencies. In effect, Nixon devalued the dollar while still keeping its reserve currency status—the currency of last resort in world financial transactions. The second was a serendipitous event, the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the subsequent Arab oil embargo. By early 1974 a new deal was cut. The OPEC countries' governments gained controlling interest in the oil producing companies on their soil, the transnational oil companies retained monopoly control of refining and distribution, and most importantly for the present story, the petrodollar was born. All oil traded anywhere in the world had to be traded in dollars. In a sense, the oil standard replaced the gold standard. One implication was that the US could print dollars as long as there was a seller's market in oil. It also meant that dollars became not just the reserve currency but the capital currency for the world. The

beginnings of the recent globalization stem from these two economic events of the early 1970s.

When dollars became the main form of capital investment in the world, a new solution came to the ruling class in America. Instead of trying to lower wages by increasing the size of the labor force through civil rights and similar strategies, manufacturing industries could just ship their factories overseas. The era of deindustrialization was born. Politically defanged unions became even more conservative as union bosses held onto a shrinking work force. There was no real effort to unionize low wage service sector workers. Industrial cities became rust belts. Specialized manufacturing using light industry and cybernetic controls moved to the suburbs along with increasing numbers of finance related industries. Deindustrialization and urban sprawl left an abandoned working class in central cities that was largely non-White. The Democratic Party, which had long relied on developers and construction for their money base turned away from central cities to gain political power elsewhere, thus abandoning the interests of those remaining urban dwellers. With the removal of economic controls of those urban populations—once workers do not have jobs they cannot so easily be controlled through credit schemes like home ownership—the main way to control them increasingly turned to force, the criminal justice system. Also, with a new solution to the falling rate of profit (Duménil and Lévy 2002), globalization and overseas capital development, the ruling class could once again close ranks to control the masses, resorting to the already established method of using race to divide and rule. Such movements of material relations show up in political discourses. By the late 1970s ‘liberal’ had become a pejorative term as the ruling class no longer had a use for it. In addition to the transformation of capitalism, and in conjunction with it, the standards of American racism underwent a test.

The Racial Backlash

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) said the racial backlash began in the 1970s, perhaps with roots in the later 1960s. They especially note Nixon’s 1968 Southern strategy to make electoral gains in the formerly Democratic South. They also note the success of George Wallace’s campaign to attract White blue collar working class voters in the North. They attribute much of the success of these appeals to an underlying, simmering White racism and economic dislocations in the country and the world (Omi & Winant 1994:114-15). Several years after their book, Katherine Beckett (1997) made a more detailed study of the backlash, with the express intent to link it to new criminal justice policies. Beckett outlined the historical progression. The early 1960s showed the relative success of the civil rights movement in the form of federal legislation such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the administrative efforts of the Johnson administration to ensure fair employment practices, various lawsuits to further desegregation, etc. Southern segregationists first responded with massive resistance. Public officials and private businesses just refused to recognize court orders and federal laws. By the mid-1960s the strategy clearly had failed, and so they turned to another. They linked Black agitation and resistance to oppression to crime, and eventually to expanding government programs designed to end poverty—Lyndon Baines Johnson’s War on Poverty and the Great Society. This linkage and rhetoric that went with it resonated with White working class people in the North who were beginning to experience the economic squeeze brought on by the Vietnam War, most immediately, but also the declining rate of profit in US manufacturing industries. Moreover, as Beckett pointed out, once the civil rights movement went

North, demanding equality in housing, education, and jobs, politicians like Nixon successfully articulated an underlying racism to fuel a reaction against those making demands—civil rights demonstrators, anti-war demonstrators, and in even more complex ways, challenges to previously stable cultural practices, the sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll revolution of the late 1960s. Racist politics put the fears of the White working class together to blame a concatenation of “Blacks, Communists, Crime, Hippies, and Welfare” on the Democratic control of government. “[F]ormer Democrats indicate that many of these voters switched their allegiance to the Republican party largely as a result of their perception that the Democrats have granted minorities ‘special privileges’” (Beckett 1997:86). The campaign succeeded even as the real economic and political situation continued to worsen for the American working class, beginning in the 1970s and accelerating to the present (Sugrue & Skrentny 2008).

By the mid 1970s, the effects became obvious. Lawrence Friedman observed that “Law and order, it turns out, is a commodity, like oil, sugar, or Maine lobsters; if demand increases too fast and the supply cannot keep pace, the price goes up. . . . Conceptions of crime are rapidly changing” (Friedman 1977:274). Of course crime, the obverse of law and order, makes the demand rise. By playing on a fundamental racialism built into the American culture and coupling it with economic fears and the status anxieties that accompany economic decline, the ruling class commodified crime and profited by it. Moreover, the campaigns to achieve this end laid the groundwork for the commodification of terrorism.

Commodifying Terrorism

Commodifying terrorism needed more than a transition from social problem, to ideology, and finally commodification. The terrorism product needed branding and marketing. Effective marketing in US culture works best with a racial brand: so, terrorists of a non-White variety. The long tradition of White supremacists, new versions of the Ku Klux Klan, would not do. Due to the variable and restrictive notion of race and Whiteness in American culture—it took decades for Irish immigrants to become White (Ignatiev 1995)—Arabs and oddly enough, Muslims in general served as effective branding devices. A frightening non-White group bent on violence and other untold evils helped construct terrorism as a commodity.

Fear sells. Horror movies, slasher movies, alien invasion movies have long used the formula. Fear sells, and it motivates people to seek protection. It is in this latter aspect that profit lies. Entrepreneurs of many stripes, not the least of whom are so-called “defense” contractors, stand eagerly at their shop fronts awaiting anticipated flocks of consumers looking for protection. Once frightened, the American public was ready to buy.

With origins in the late 1960s, the campaign to turn American culture around and away from its apparent path toward greater social freedom and cultural liberation acquired increasing force and effectiveness during the next two decades. From the status anxiety of the White working class’ antipathy toward Blacks, Communists, Crime, Hippies, and Welfare; the 1970s and 1980s saw a host of scares assiduously promoted in the mass media and by opportunistic politicians of all stripes. A steady drum beat of rising crime rates found official and popular resonance, despite a slow but steady decline in measures of crime victimization (Skoll 2009:111-112). Promotion of the image of the *criminalblackman* (Russell 1998:3) synergistically fueled fears of interpersonal predatory crime. Juvenile superpredators, implicitly non-White, ostensibly roamed public spaces of cities (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters 1996). Missing children coupled with rising anxieties about child sexual exploitation, hair raising stories of

stalkers, serial killers, drug induced berserkers, and similar scares continually gained notoriety in the closing decades of the twentieth century (Bohm and Walker 2006; Kappeler and Potter 2005). The overall picture presented an increasingly dangerous world, although by most measures Americans and people in other developed societies had measurably lower risks from untimely deaths, disease, and accidents. Perhaps most dramatic of the lowered threats to life was the end of the Cold War and consequent plummeting of the risk of nuclear war. Each new scare provided another building block in the culture of fear culminating in the fear of terrorism in the twenty-first century.

David Altheide says fear is cumulatively integrated over time and in the process becomes associated with certain topics. The process binds meaning through concerted action, ideology, and policy. Certain topics are associated with terms as if there were an invisible hyphen. Eventually, the fear term becomes implied and unstated. Altheide goes on to link fear of crime with fears about major events, such as the September 11 attacks (Altheide 2002:37).

A forty year campaign of fear mongering over crime, sex, disease, heterodox lifestyles, and so on has turned an American people once renowned for a sort of frontier adventurousness and insouciance toward authority into masses who look forward to subjecting themselves to body scanning with a hope of saving them from non-existent terrorists on airplanes. A populace conditioned by an ideology of fear has increasingly looked to the armed forces of the state, police and military, for protection. That dialectic has set the twenty-first century terrorism scare juxtaposed to the Red scare of the mid-twentieth century. Denouncing Communists in the late 1940s and 1950s assumed and relied on a presumption of solidarity and common ideals. The part they played in the terrorism scare bound together consumers. The line that they hate us (Americans) for our freedoms should add the word 'consumers.' Americans after 9/11 feared attacks from individuals, not a competing world power. Twenty-first century Americans were not bound together by their ideals. They only had shared fears and consumerist desires.

Elites within the world system of capitalism and especially those in the centers of the system, the United States and Britain, have been threatened ever since the liberation movements of the 1960s. These liberation movements coincided with the flowering and then death of Fordism. A new economic strategy followed—neoliberalism. Neoliberalism helped restore capital accumulation and elite control differently than the Fordist approach. Fordism relied on state regulation. Neoliberalism depends on deregulation. Fordism depended on a productive working class in the centers of capital. Neoliberalism depends on shrinking working class compensation, replaced by credit and geometrically increased financial speculation (Krier 2008). A new marketing strategy ensued centered on new adaptations of technologies: cell phones, mega-channel television broadcasting, wireless internet connections, and so on. New marketing techniques used the new technological hardware to transform mass marketing into segmented marketing. The new post-Fordist production strategies combined with the new marketing to create a new working-consuming class, atomized and segmented. Obedience replaced determined and righteous, if misguided, antagonism to Communism. Frederic Jameson articulated the transition from an obsession with communism toward terrorism.

Marxian opposition to terrorism is an old and established tradition . . . it is important to remember that “terrorism,” as a “concept,” is also an ideologeme of the right and must therefore be refused in that form. Along with disaster films of the late 60s and 70s, mass culture itself makes clear that “terrorism”—the image of the “terrorist”—is one

of the privileged forms in which an ahistorical society imagines radical social change; meanwhile, an inspection of the content of the modern thriller or adventure story also makes clear that the “otherness” of so-called terrorism has begun to replace older images of criminal “insanity” as an unexamined and seemingly “natural” motivation in the construction of plots—yet another sign of the ideological nature of this particular pseudo-concept. Understood in this way, ‘terrorism’ is a collective obsession, a symptomatic fantasy of the American political unconscious, which demands decoding and analysis in its own right.

As for the thing itself, for all practical purposes it comes to an end with the Chilean coup in 1973 [the other 9/11] and the fall of virtually all the Latin American countries to various forms of military dictatorship (Jameson 1991:203-4).

Between the liberatory upheavals of the 1960s and the terrorized, repressive 2000s came the total penetration of the world economy by capital. Capital, in its varied guises, dominated everywhere, from Amazon rainforests to Antarctic ice and Middle Eastern deserts. It circled the earth borne by satellites spawned by telecommunications. Capital has pacified the planet, much like Tacitus characterized the Romans version of peace: “They made desolation and called it peace” (*Agricola* 98:30).

A crisis in world capitalism had created an economic downturn in the United States. The Arab oil embargo associated with the Yom Kippur War of 1973 turned the US economy from post-Second World War expansion to contraction. The economic turnaround was linked to the neoconservative trend in politics. “The assault on the welfare state went hand in hand with an increasingly punitive approach to crime” (Killen 2006:209). Neoconservatism in governance wedded with neoliberal economics. The liberation movements of the 1960s began with decolonization in Africa; in a different sense via the civil rights movement in the United States. The latter twentieth century began recolonization through a combination of global finance under the leadership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Popular revolts in former colonial areas, especially in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia led to bloody violence, usually justified by some connection with communism. Sometimes the recolonization in suppressing those popular revolts took the form of fomenting civil wars, such as those in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and central Africa, but in other cases it was outright invasions as in Panama, and later in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the twenty-first century, the main theater shifted to the Middle East, rife with Arabs, Muslims, and, of course, oil. There, it was terrorism that American consumers bought.

Conclusion

After all, it was inevitable that concepts became commodities. It is the logic of capitalism. Capitalism must penetrate everywhere. In its beginnings in Europe it invaded commerce, an ancient human practice, which cemented social relations. Under capital, its purpose diverted to money and profit. Later capital subverted the species specific ability to work, create, and produce; capital penetrated labor. With its monopoly organization it colonized the planet. All people everywhere bent to its demands. Handicrafts produced by desert dwellers and rainforest denizens entered the world market of commodities by acquiring the rubric ‘art.’ In the most advanced arenas of capitalism, spectacle replaced real people doing, talking, making, seeing. All was spectacle, commodities, congealed capital. So, it was inevitable that capital penetrated thought. Concepts became commodities. Those most useful to the managers of capital, the ones most fungible, likely to turn a profit, led the way. In the 1960s fighters against

imperial domination decried the colonization of the mind. Successful anti-colonialist struggles, Vietnam comes to mind, promised decolonization, only to succumb to capital. Capital must colonize the mind as it has colonized everywhere.

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