A N ARTIFACT OF THE TOTALITARIAN MIND, CULTURAL REVOLUTION serves in various guises to carry control beyond formal legal and political structures into the fabric of everyday life. As it feeds upon its successes, the limitless urge to dye everything one color ends either in counter-revolution, as in China, or petrification, as in North Korea.

At present the United States is in the midst of its own idiosyncratic cultural revolution, which, like all others, is differentiated—as hurricanes are—by the nature of the waters from which it draws its energy. Though the feedstock of China’s convulsions was unlike our own, some similarities are worth noting.

In August 1966, Mao Zedong mobilized high school and university students for the purposes of purifying revolutionary ideology, doubling down on and concealing its failures, purging non-conformists, establishing a cult of personality, and eliminating the “capitalist roaders” who threatened his control of the party.

Shortly before his election, Barack Obama (who, to this day enjoys a nauseating savior cult explicable by nothing except perhaps mass hypnosis) declared, “We are five days away from fundamentally transforming the United States of America,” and, later, in his First Inaugural, “We will transform our schools and colleges and universities.” Succeeding only partially in regard to the country, he did cement factional control in his party to the extent that its current leaders are far to the left of where he once transparently pretended to be.

Following the most inflamed years of China’s Cultural Revolution, four Communist Party officials, the so-called “Gang of Four”—with indoctrinated youth their base—persisted in trying to drive the country further left. An imprecise but suggestive comparison is that after Obama has (almost) left the scene—like Jimmy Carter, he seems perpetual—Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Kamala Harris, and Spartacus (Cory Booker), with indoctrinated youth the heart of their base, drive ever leftward.

Both the Chinese and American cultural revolutions involve an ongoing and intensively aggravating program, despite the risk of losing control, so as to let it rip—a temperamental characteristic of the Left, although not always exclusive to it. The one deployed and the other deploys the young as pliable, demographically ascendant, energy rich troops, a tabula rasa upon which to write simplistic instruction sure to lead to delight in frenzy.

Shielded by those at the top, these soldiers tend to engage in increasing suppression of speech and contrary opinion. Unlike China, we have a tradition of free expression and a constitution that protects it. But the precincts of America’s schools, colleges, and universities now resemble those of the Red Guard-lite, in terms of mob violence, officially sanctioned indoctrination, re-education, kangaroo courts, dedicated spaces for dissent (thereby demarcating everywhere else as unsafe), and severe and effective ideological enforcement and exclusion.

The Red Guard seemed to Westerners at the time to have been bizarre in its unremitting war against traditional society. But it did not go as far in radical revision as to adopt same-sex marriage, state-sanctioned recreational drugs, or the delusion that sex is not biological, something that in the U.S. has led to absurdities such as Department of Defense procedures for dealing with male soldiers who are “pregnant.” This you do not find in the People’s Liberation Army.

NONETHLESS, THERE isn’t THAT much LIGHT BETWEEN THE two revolutions in that both can be characterized as movements which rather than check extremes see extremism as proof of ideological purity and qualification for leadership. Unlike in traditional political parties but very much as in organized crime, gangs, and terrorist groups, the more extreme one is the more likely he is to take control. An internal contradiction then arises from this as it mutates into the authoritarianism of the bold, as if to offset the anarchy to which the movement is at first devoted. Antifa, supposedly anarchist, is very well organized and disciplined, just as most supposedly liberating revolutions end with the jail cell and the firing squad.

The Chinese eruption half a century ago directed violence at the aged, the prosperous, and the educated. Our lesser-proof American variety has declared open season on the aged, prosperous, religious, white, “heteronormative,” and male, all the while ostentatiously raging at the abstract qualities of hate and intolerance. And in both cases, ongoing failures that could be largely if not mainly attributed to the cultural revolutions or their puppeteers—in China the Great Leap Forward, in the U.S. economic stagnation, crime, drug abuse, the disintegration of the family—have been blamed on the other camp, for justification and to drive the frenzy.

In China, this was dictated from above. Here it is suggested from above but, as America by nature is less subject to dictation, it takes more than that. Among the intellectual class, thought leaders, elites, or whatever one may call them, we find an unperishable willingness to abide the destruction and failure—inflicted on others, as well as themselves—caused by the principles they themselves advocate, as long as their actions conform to theoretical models that are more real for them than reality itself. In China this was a characteristic of the ideologically besotted. Here it is a characteristic of lower order intellectuals inhabiting institutions of high prestige.

Having led impractical lives largely sheltered from consequence, they are susceptible of believing less in what is undeniably before them than in their idea of what should be, according to the model of reality to which they adhere. Indeed, many of them will tell you that there is no objective reality or truth. Truth becomes whatever you believe or power decrees. This is both a cause and a symptom of cultural revolution. But taking a leaf not from Karl Marx but Chico—‘Who ya gonna believe, me or your own eyes?’—it’s a safe bet that cultural revolutions end in counter-revolution or petrification. And, presumptuous elites or not, if ever there was a country with no tolerance for petrification, it is ours.
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