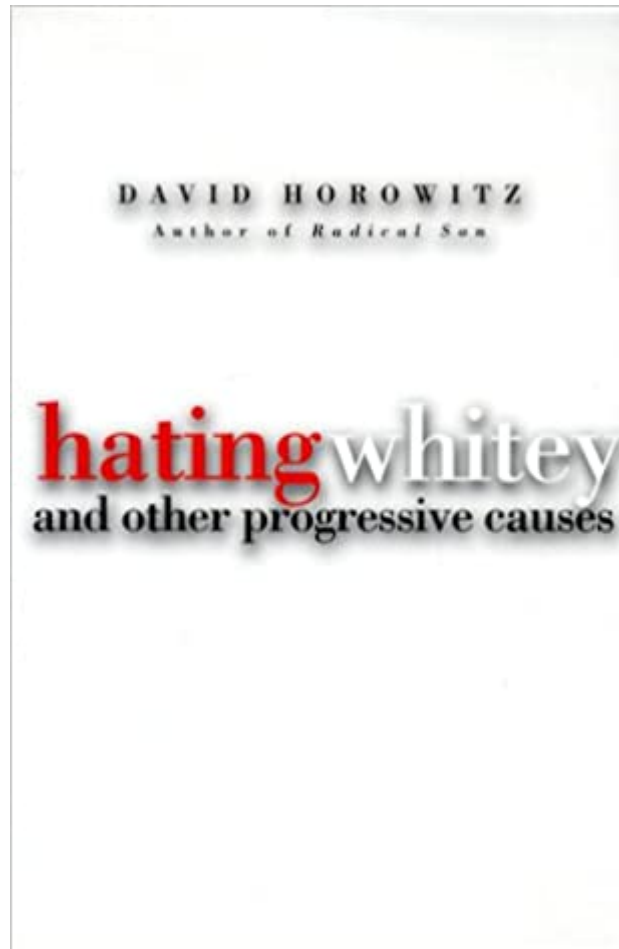


David Horowitz: American Prophet



by Bruce Bawer

For a couple of years toward the end of the last century, David Horowitz contributed a regular column to the online magazine *Salon*. In 1999 he gathered those columns in a book entitled [*Hating Whitey and Other Progressive Causes*](#). To return to this book today is to recognize that it could've been published yesterday, for the issues it addresses are now even more urgent, and the bizarre ideological tendencies now even more extreme than they were then.

To revisit in this book the subjects discussed in his *Salon* columns – from Camille Cosby's claim that her son's murder was motivated by the racism that is endemic in American society,

to the self-professed anti-white rage of feminist scholar bell hooks (sic); from the black leftist celebration of Bill Clinton as “our first black president” to the black leftist contempt for black conservative thinkers like Larry Elder; from the entrenched leftism of the American academy to the leftist elite’s shunning of one of its own, Christopher Hitchens, for “betraying” his friend, Clinton bagman Sidney Blumenthal – is like looking at an old photograph of the tree in one’s front yard and exclaiming, “Wow! We thought it was big then, but look how much it’s grown since!”

Given that Horowitz, in these columns, looks back time  again to the days of the New Left in which the Clinton-era events he’s discussing had their beginnings, what we have here is a text that, revisited today, operates on several temporal levels. Horowitz takes us to the Sixties, as it were, by way of the Nineties, thereby shedding light on the process by which many of the intellectuals, rabble-rousers, and outright gangsters of six decades ago, became themselves. All of them were determined to tear down the American establishment in the name of Black Power or Women’s Liberation or explicit Leninist or Maoist revolution. By the 1990s, they were firmly entrenched members of the cultural, political, and academic elite, and are at present, to an alarming extent, our *éminences grises*, in all but absolute control of the legacy media, Ivy League, Democratic Party, movie business, Silicon Valley, an increasing number of major corporations, and even the military, FBI, CIA, and mainline Protestantism.

As for Horowitz, in the 1960s he was one of the left’s leading figures. But while other, lesser lights of the left rode the wave of anti-establishment rebellion to entrenched establishment power, Horowitz, recognizing the toxicity of the movement he’d helped lead and the value of the American institutions he and his cronies had sought to dismantle, switched sides. By the 1990s, in one of recent history’s supreme ironies, he had ridden his pro-American stance to a

position as an outsider in an America rapidly being taken over by its (former?) enemies. And while writers whom he'd once edited at *Ramparts* contributed to the reshaping of American culture from their corner offices at the *New York Times*, *L.A. Times*, and elsewhere, Horowitz, by far a finer writer (and thinker) than any of them, was grateful for a perch at *Salon*.

Today – when *Salon* is perhaps most famous for celebrating pedophilia, and the very idea of conservatives getting a toe in the door even there is a quaint memory – Horowitz continues to shout through newer (and thankfully proliferating) cracks in the wall, such as the Ben Shapiro and Dave Rubin podcasts, about his ex-comrades' enduring perfidy, while they wield microphones so large that they can afford to ignore him entirely – or, if they do choose to pay him attention, to dismiss him as a crank.

But, dammit, he was there, back when the New Left was new. And he remembers. He remembered in 1999, and he remembers now. And he's more aware than anybody in America of the guileful ways in which his old comrades have rewritten their histories, and that of the New Left generally, to make themselves and their former movement look sympathetic and heroic. Take a 1998 PBS documentary entitled *1968: The Year that Shaped a Generation*, in which the old lefties Steve Talbot, Todd Gitlin, and Tom Hayden presented themselves as having been liberal followers of the peace-loving Martin Luther King at a time when they had, in fact, been aligned with the violent and murderous Black Power movement. Also dropped down the memory hole in the PBS film was their Vietnam-era support not just for U.S. withdrawal from southeast Asia, as they'd have you believe, but for Vietnam's "liberation" – a "liberation" that, precisely as many onlookers had warned, resulted in Communist genocide. As Horowitz declares with a thoroughly warranted bluntness, "The mass slaughter in Cambodia and South Vietnam from 1975 and 1978 was the real achievement of the New Left."

Repeatedly in *Hating Whitey*, Horowitz dismantles his ex-

comrades' Clinton-era résumé rewrites and corrects the record with surgical precision. He notes that even the Marxist journalist (and Soviet spy) I.F. Stone's own "adoring biographer" acknowledged Stone's ineradicable belief that "in spite of the brutal collectivization campaign, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the latest quashing of the Czech democracy and the Stalinist takeover of Eastern Europe...communism was a progressive force, lined up on the correct side of historical events." Horowitz also quite properly derides the audacious claim by many old leftists that they'd celebrated and even contributed to the end of the Cold War – when in reality they'd "aided and abetted" the Soviet system "throughout its career" and mourned its passing. "Even in its best moments," Horowitz recalls, "the western left disparaged the threat from the communist enemy as a paranoid fantasy of the Cold War right." To be sure, even as he calls the dissemblers to account, Horowitz is capable of giving credit even to a murderous thug like Eldridge Cleaver for having finally admitted on *60 Minutes*, not long before his death in 1998, that "[i]f people had listened to Huey Newton and me in the 1960s, there would have been a holocaust in this country."

To read *Hating Whitey* is to be reminded that in the 1990s there still seemed reason to hope that the cultural war might yet be won by the partisans of truth so long as they presented their arguments cogently and respectfully. The only thing that's astonishing about Horowitz's account of a presentation he gave at Bates College is that he was treated with a degree of tolerance by almost everyone (except for the student who called him a fascist and raised a Nazi salute); these days, such a relatively civilized reception would be unimaginable. Similarly, the only surprise about Horowitz being the sole conservative at a book festival is that he was invited at all (however curtly) and that the host was actually "embarrassed" when Horowitz was heckled.

How to describe David Horowitz? By turns, in these pages, he's

Daniel in the lion's den, Diogenes looking for an honest man, Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Throughout, he's an American (and non-socialist) Orwell, bringing moral clarity to topics that have been twisted beyond recognition by odious ideology and duplicitous rhetoric. One reason why this 23-year-old book remains required reading is that it reminds one again and again that the left, over the decades, has kept proffering the same cynical lies and perpetrating the same destructive slanders – and thereby seducing ever-new generations of naive, idealistic young people. Not only is Horowitz one of the few sometime New Left members who, as of 1999, was telling the truth about that movement and his role in it; he's also one of the few commentators anywhere who, also as of 1999, was already calling out phenomena – such as Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Theory – that were then marginal but that currently occupy center stage. Likewise, if you'd read *Hating Whitey* when it first came out, you wouldn't have been blindsided by the recent transformation of the Democrat party into a veritable Communist Party – the culmination of a process that, as outlined by Horowitz in this book, began way back in 1968.

On top of everything else, Horowitz is a wellspring of abiding truths about the left. For many progressives, he writes, it would be more offensive to support their own country's democratic government in a struggle against a palpable communist threat than to “serv[e] a totalitarian state and ai[d] an enemy power.” The “acceptance of conservative truths while avoiding conservative conclusions,” he observes, apropos of the philosopher Richard Rorty, “marks the intellectual cul de sac in which the left finds itself in the post-communist era.

Pondering the left's shunning of Hitchens over the Blumenthal matter, Horowitz declares: “This tainting and ostracism of sinners is, in fact, the secret power of the leftist faith.” Faith, you ask? Yes, faith – for “the community of the left

is...bound by ties that are fundamentally religious," with "messianism [as] its political essence." Moreover, the left isn't just a "faith" but a "romance" – and, as such, will never perish, because every day new romantics are born while old romantics die still clinging to the dream, unwilling to abandon the role of bold crusader and own up to the "unheroic, ordinary, and unredeemed" nature of their own existence.

Yes, some, like Horowitz himself, do snap out of the leftist illusion. "But," he laments, in the closing words of this still-powerful book, he realized long ago that "there would always be others, and in far greater number," who would keep the faith. "A century of broken dreams and the slaughters they spawned would, in the end, teach nothing to those who had no reason to hear. Least of all would it cure them of their hunger for a romance that is really a desire not to know who and what we are."

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