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**PEASM Winter '04 - Bohmer, Hahn & Vavrus**

**Book Response**  
**Hunt & Zinn**

*Wealth and the Elite*

One figure of accumulated wealth in the early republic was that 1% held 25% of the wealth, which increased to 1% holding 44% by 1770. [Zinn 49] Increasing numbers show 1.6% holding “over 80 percent of all corporate stock and virtually all state and local government bonds” after WWII. [Hunt 207] Is this 1% a group of capitalists or is it a group of people that hold wealth no matter the socioeconomic system. Is it really the capitalists, or are the capitalists the buffer between the real economic elite and the working classes, which later divided into the managerial class [Hunt 214] to further buffer the absentee owners? Or the idea that “medieval society was an agrarian society [Hunt 14] was from the point of production, but the wealthy didn't care how the wealth was produced, only that they were entitled to a cut of it. This links the way that the “slightly prosperous” provide political and social strength to the elite. [Zinn 99] The slightly prosperous produce, in whatever mode they can, the elite take a cut or speculate on the value of production. The historic paternalistic ethic of denying lust for wealth [Hunt 11] was a method of control to stop people from seeking to move from class to class, but this could be abandoned because the control of lust was no longer necessary to avoid class mobility because that lust confined the capitalist class.

*Speculation*

Speculation continually comes up as an issue, but doesn't seem to be examined fully as a cause or component of the economy. [Zinn 172, “slavery” / Zinn 182, “speculation on my body and rights” / Hunt, boom-bust business cycle] It's perhaps not the capitalism itself, but the speculation that creates the boom-bust cycles. The uncertainty of the boom-bust cycles, is like the uncertainty mentioned that keeps work gangs well in hand. [Zinn 173] The idea that there “would be a long-run tendency for the rate of profit to fall” [Hunt 116] might be ameliorated for the

elite by the function of speculation in accumulation of wealth. In many of the boom-bust cycles, it is rampant speculation that creates the untenable economic situation, like the S&L crisis or the tech stock crash. Reasonable market controls fail because there are people willing to be unreasonable seeking profit at the expense of the system itself. Keynes doesn't seem to explicitly include the function of speculation in his model. [Hunt 192] The government's ability to tax, borrow and spend [Hunt 197] is filtered through the Federal Reserve, a captive and quasi-governmental regulatory body. The conflict between these entities can be seen in the economic crisis during the 80s. [Greider] The effect of rampant speculation is existing but uncontrolled X-factor in the economy.

#### *Divide and Conquer and Rhetorical Frame*

The strategy to appease the close enemy in order to ameliorate the dangerous power of rebellion by close allies, like the way the aristocratic powers of government abused the frontiers people in the buffer by dealing with the Native population [Zinn 40] is a strategy to divide and conquer. Similar divide and conquer techniques can be seen in the way that the African Americans were framed in opposition to the Native Americans. [Zinn 54] Another attack was on the power of the South, during the Early Republic and the Civil War, to appeal to the rebels (lower classes) to avoid potential solidarity with industrial workers in the North. [Zinn 171] An earlier technique used in Europe was to use ruralization as a way to create isolation between workers to diffuse class conflict. [Hunt 20] The marginalization of women and non-whites is the usefulness of a sub-proletariat to control the proletariat. [Hunt 246] All of these examples are in stark contrast to the myth of a united people. [Zinn 70]

The way conflict is framed is a method of control, a rhetorical device for the rule of the few over the many. [Zinn 57] The language of liberty and equality [Zinn 58] masks the inequality of power and the potential for solidarity. In the Early Republic, the Articles of Confederation were insufficient to the interests of business and commerce. This is tied to a culmination in 1787 in the constitution in response to rebellion. [Zinn 91] The structure of the new system, a more

centralized national government, was an important economic agenda. There's an idea that the nature of government is to be conservative and avoid change [Zinn 96] but the development of the nationalism of the Federalists was in response to very real rebellions, not an essential quality of government in general. It was also in response to the Anti-Federalists in the Early Republic, and they were actively functioning in resistance to the ideals of the strong central government until after the Civil War, when the political alliances polarized so completely, creating a way for the economic struggle to be made manifest in physical conflict.

To some extent, the Civil War was seen as an essential response to social and economic pressures. If not the war then a full scale slave rebellion may have led to an assault on capitalism and the economic system of the South both. [Hunt 171] The war itself was an economic attack on the system of wealth in the South, which partially explains the red scare in the country as the realization that if the civil war was the triumph of one economic over another by military means, then it could happen again, and a Reconstruction by the proletariat probably wouldn't have resulted in the same people being in power when the dust settled like it did in the South after the Civil War.

There's an economic strategy in this rhetorical framing. The mobilization of the lower class for elite class purposes [Zinn 61] is a way to keep people poor [Zinn 61] by not allowing the conflicts to be framed by the authentic needs and issues of the lower class. There's a reliance on leadership to mediate toward restraint [Zinn 67-68] and avoid large changes, changes that effect the distribution of power. To keep people poor and powerless is economic warfare and allowing the rhetorical frame to be determined by the elite is an abdication of an inherent power that the lower class have in creating their own opinions in the public sphere.

### *Massive Lies and the Liars Who Listen*

There are massive lies about wars [Zinn 360, etc ..] For example, the Lusitania's manifest was falsified to hide the cargo and "even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged" [Zinn 362] all the chief avenues to mass opinion were now controlled by large-scale publishing industries

[Zinn 383] The point above about rhetorical framing which worked to dismantle the opposition to the Federalists [Cornell] is just as much present in as labeling the critics of capitalism as communists [Hunt 217] The bombing of the Japanese happened even though the US clearly knew the Japanese were ready to surrender before that point [Zinn 423] just like the US was tripping over itself to fall headlong into war with an Iraq which had already be devastated by decades of hot and economic warfare. These techniques are used again and again against opposition because they work. Surfacing these tools is the first step to dismantling the effectiveness of them. Either to stop them from being used, or to recognize when they are being used. Unfortunately, we're sometimes complicit in how the lies are used. "[T]he lies did serve to keep something from somebody, and the somebody was us." [Zinn 483]

### *The Point Not Examined*

"[W]e are more interested, however, in the values and the motives of the period than in the bending or breaking of the rules." [Hunt 12] This is a mistake because it is the result of bending and breaking the rules that is the boundary of power. The powerful and privileged know that they can use the rules against the less powerful, and the privilege of ignoring the rules is that power. Like the laws against usury [Hunt 12] that were laws not so much against the usury itself, but against the wrong people engaging in that practice. The powerful and privileged could ignore the law and those that weren't powerful couldn't ignore the law. This creates a barrier to the mobility of the classes. Further examples can be seen in the way that the US handles treaties with the Native Americans, as tools of control that can be ignored by the powerful but are immutable for the powerless .

### *Marx's Market*

The first element of Marx's conception of the market is that humans could not exist alone, [Hunt 89] but people can survive alone. It's the division of labor required in industrial society that moves interdependence to co-dependence, by de-skilling people of the ability to survive. Also,

this web of interdependence is includes more than just the humans, but in fact, doesn't require humans at all.

The second notion is that nature does not transform itself, [Hunt 89] but nature does produce, for example honey. to think that this is not so is a kind of atomism that denies that humans exist in a web of interdependence with the processes of the world. This links to the ideas of natural capitalism and bio-mimicry. I don't think this is fetishism as Marx claims, [Hunt 101] but the recognition that atomism creates artificial and inaccurate distinctions. Thirdly, there is the idea that production is a social activity, [Hunt 89] but it's commerce and the exchange of commodity that is social activity. Production itself can be carried on by a single human alone, or even by the nature alone, a web interdependence that doesn't require humans.

#### **Works Cited**

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