"DEMOCRACY IS IN THE STREETS"

"BRINGS THE SIXTIES ALIVE: IN ITS PASSION, IN ITS IDEALISM, IN ITS FOLLIES."
—RONALD STEEL

JAMES MILLER

FROM PORT HURON TO THE SIEGE OF CHICAGO

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by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROPHET OF THE POWERLESS

"WHERE DOES ONE begin thinking about manifestos?" wondered Tom Hayden in the spring of 1962. The existing political groups scarcely offered food for thought. "The socialistic parties are in a shambles," he wrote, "the working class etc. is just not the missionary force we can count on," the "civil rights leadership," though "more militant than most," was still oriented around a single issue. "I have the impression," wrote Hayden, "that we have been our own leadership to a far greater degree than most 'student radicals' of the past. . . . We are, like it or not, young intellectuals in an anti-intellectual society."[1]

As a "young intellectual," Hayden naturally turned for inspiration to books. By then, he had read all the titles on the recommended reading list that SDS had distributed the previous fall. These thirty-eight texts ran the gamut: from the Declaration of Independence to the Democratic Party Platform of 1960, from Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to Daniel Bell's *End of Ideology*, from John Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* to Seymour Martin Lipset's *Political Man*, from Dostoyevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor" to Fidel Castro's "History Will Absolve Me," from the Sharon Statement of the right-wing Young Americans for Freedom to *Conviction* and *Out of Apathy*, two anthologies produced by the British New Left.[2]

Hayden found scant solace in most of what he read. "We are the inheritors and victims of a barren period in the development of human values," he wrote in March of 1962: "The old promise that knowledge and increased rationality would liberate society seems a

lie." Given "the default of the politicians and the professors," to begin thinking about a modern manifesto was proving peculiarly difficult. "The real question," wrote Hayden, "is whether or not society contains *any* prophets who can speak in language and concept that is authentic for us, that can make luminous the inner self that burns for understanding."[3]

As so often, Hayden was exaggerating. He had, in fact, already found the prophet he longed for: C. Wright Mills. In an article on the new student politics for *Mademoiselle* magazine the previous summer, Hayden had singled out Mills as the one scholar with something to say to the student left. When SDS published its agenda for the December meeting in Ann Arbor, it opened with an epigraph from Mills. And when Steve Max joined SDS, he quickly learned that "you had to know C. Wright Mills"—to know not just the major texts and key concepts, but the personal anecdotes, the rhetorical style, the sweep of the man's political vision.[4]

The reason was simple: Mills was the master thinker behind a great deal of what Haber and Hayden were saying and doing. When Hayden in the spring of 1961 had written that "the University must work relentlessly at being a face-to-face, rather than a mass society," he was borrowing two phrases that Mills had made his own. When Al Haber declared in a memo that America lacked "a 'political' public," he was echoing a complaint that Mills commonly voiced. When Hayden spoke about "creating and informing a 'public,' " in order to enrich the meaning of democracy, he was using the master's own language to evoke Mills's vision of the intellectual and his proper task.[5]

"I was completely absorbed in his writing," says Hayden. "He was the inspiration for what I was trying to do."[6]

Outside the Whale

C. Wright Mills wrote in the age of the atom bomb and Eisenhower, the Cold War and McCarthy, at the twilight of Stalinism and the zenith of "The American Century." But even in the early Fifties, when many once-critical intellectuals were ready to sing the praises of America, Mills refused to celebrate. Instead, he excoriated the evils of modern American society. Like one of his favorite stylists, Thorstein Veblen, he grabbed his readers with hard-boiled prose and blazing slogans. America's "main drift," he declared, was toward a militarized, centralized, impersonally administered structure of "or-

ganized irresponsibility." A republic of alert citizens was being transformed into a mass of "cheerful robots." The ideal of Jeffersonian democracy had become a "fairy tale." "If we accept the Greek's definition of the idiot as an altogether private man," wrote Mills, "then we must conclude that many American citizens are now idiots."[7]

The immorality of power was Mills's great theme. But the powerlessness of intellectuals was his obsession. "Only when mind has an autonomous basis, independent of power, but powerfully related to it, can it exert its force in the shaping of human affairs," Mills wrote in a statement of purpose that became the epigraph for the SDS meeting of December, 1961. "Such a position is democratically possible only when there exists a free and knowledgeable public, to which men of knowledge may address themselves, and to which men of power are truly responsible. Such a public and such men—either of power or of knowledge—do not now prevail, and accordingly, knowledge does not now have democratic relevance in America."[8]

Mills was born in 1916. He grew up in Texas, first in Waco, later in Dallas. His father was an insurance broker, his mother a homemaker and devout Roman Catholic. Charles Wright, as she called her son, was a choirboy in the Catholic church of Waco. After graduation from Dallas Technical High School, he became a cadet at Texas A&M, a school that still embodies the provincial spirit of military spit-and-polish. He rebelled by becoming a student of philosophy. In 1936, Mills transferred to the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied philosophy and economics. In 1939, he went on to the University of Wisconsin, where he received a doctorate in sociology. From George Herbert Mead and Karl Mannheim, he learned to think of human nature as social and plastic. From C. S. Pierce and John Dewey, he took heart in "the power of man's intelligence to control his destiny." Wanting philosophy to be "impatient" and critical, he admired "Dewey's brave words: 'Every thinker puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril.' "[9]

From an early age, Mills cultivated the image of a lone wolf and rebel. "I am an outlander, not only regionally, but down bone deep and for good," he once wrote. "In Orwell's phrase: I am just outside the whale and always have been." The summer after his graduation from Texas, Mills worked as an insurance clerk—only to shout out one day in disgust, as he later recalled his one-man revolt, "I am of the opposition!" Though he lived in New York and taught at Columbia University from 1944 until his death in 1962, Mills became leg-

endary for his rough, unrefined manner—he usually wore boots and a motorcycle helmet and carried his papers in an Army-surplus duffel bag. When Mills liked someone, he would say, 'That guy's a real Wobbly.' "[10]

"He was like Rousseau coming from the country to Paris," his Columbia colleague and friend Charles Frankel recalled after Mills's death. "He was a Texan turned inside out." Frankel, who lived near Mills in Rockland County, New York, had commuted into Manhattan with him until Mills bought his motorcycle. "Getting his motorcycle," said Frankel, "was one way of cutting himself off. It was a way of showing contempt for the fraud and hypocrisy of polite society." It was also a way of expressing his love for superior craftsmanship; the proud owner of a BMW, he made a point of flying to the factory in Germany in order to learn how to repair the engine himself. The novelist Dan Wakefield, who was his student at Columbia, recalls watching a member of a small socialist sect solicit his signature on a petition requesting that the group be removed from the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations: "Mills obligingly signed, but then in discussing politics, as was his habit, he challenged all his visitor's beliefs and arguments until the poor fellow, pushed to the wall, said in frustration, 'Just what do you believe in, Mills?' At the moment Mills was tinkering with his motorcycle, and he looked up and said without a moment's hesitation: 'German motors.' "[11]

This kind of flamboyant style, combined with Mills's outspoken contempt for the routine canons of sociology—"the higher ignorance," he once called it—made many colleagues frankly hostile. It also made some students tremendously excited: here was a rebel and iconoclast in a world of button-down pedants! His legend gave added weight to his words. For in truth, Mills was more than an academic sociologist. In his key works, he hammered away at a handful of motifs and themes, almost all of them linked to a vision of America's lost democratic promise. An intellectual first and scholar second, he hoped to provoke, to alarm and, finally, to inspire—hopes borne out by admiring young readers like Tom Hayden.

Mills first revealed his ambitions and overarching political vision in a remarkable essay that he wrote in 1944 for the third issue of Dwight Macdonald's magazine *Politics*. The magazine's name was Mills's idea, and this was the first published work to bear the stamp of his distinctive voice; he was twenty-eight. In this essay, which he called "The Powerless People," Mills argued that intellectuals must respond to a "world of big organizations" where "grass-root demo-

cratic controls become blurred" and "irresponsible actions by individuals at the top are encouraged." The crucial fact about modern society was the "centralization of decision and the related growth of dependence. . . . More and more people are becoming dependent salaried workers who spend the most alert hours of their lives being told what to do. In climactic times like the present, dominated by the need for swift action, the individual feels dangerously lost. As the London *Economist* recently remarked, 'The British citizen *should be* an ardent participant in his public affairs; he *is* little more than a consenting spectator who draws a distinction between "we" who sit and watch and "they" who run the state.' "

The body of the 1944 essay represents nothing less than a preview of Mills's life project. He maintained that the intellectual as an "independent craftsman" was one casualty of the "world of big organizations": "The material basis of his initiative and intellectual freedom is no longer in his hands." As a hired hand in the "information industry," perhaps churning out pieces for a mass-circulation magazine, the intellectual found his prose "regulated by an adroit formula." As a salaried scholar in a university where research often depended on funds from private foundations and the government, the intellectual had to withstand a "vague general fear—sometimes politely known as 'discretion,' 'good taste,' or 'balanced judgment.' " Whether quarantined in the academy or trivialized in the mass media, the intellectual was cut off "from his potential public"—a public that Mills suggested had once flourished, thanks to the pamphleteering of republican writers like Tom Paine. In this situation, it was in the interest of the intellectual himself to resist the drift toward conformity and "to unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us."

Knowledge was not enough. As pragmatism had taught Mills, "only through the social confirmation of others whom we believe adequately equipped do we earn the right of feeling secure in our knowledge. The basis of our integrity can be gained or renewed only by activity, including communication, in which we may give ourselves with a minimum of repression." The intellectual's private feelings of frustration and powerlessness should be linked to the big picture of society. The quests for personal happiness, truth and democracy, properly understood, went hand in hand; and the intellectual willing to speak truthfully about his own powerlessness was the natural ally of unhappy people seeking their fair share in decision-making.[12]

The Public in Eclipse

For the remainder of his life, Mills worked to clarify these ideas. In his great trilogy on the American scene—*The New Men of Power* (1948), on labor; *White Collar* (1952), on the middle classes; and *The Power Elite* (1956)—Mills animated with broad strokes and humorous vignettes a lively panorama of social types, from The American Salesman with his "theology of pep" to "the perfect candidate for the Presidency of the United States"—a farm boy from Ohio, ventured Mills, "of a sizable family, which arrived from England shortly after the *Mayflower*." In an effort to make his own knowledge relevant to the widest possible public, Mills used the wit of the satirist, the passions of the partisan, the imaginative attention to detail of the novelist—Balzac was one of his models. His ambition, he once suggested, was to create "a sociological poem which contains the full human meaning in statements of apparent fact." Later, in what Mills called his "pamphlets"—*The Causes of World War Three* (1958) and *Listen, Yankee* (1960)—he sharpened and simplified his rhetoric to arouse a mass audience.[13]

Mills wavered in his hopes for social change, as the gloomy picture of creeping totalitarianism in *The Power Elite* might suggest. In 1943, he proposed an alliance between intellectuals and labor as the only basis for "genuine democracy." The left he regarded as "a series of desperate attempts to uphold the simple values of classic democracy under conditions of giant technology, monopoly capitalism, and the behemoth state." Calling for workers' control of industry, Mills in 1948 avowed that "the left would establish a society in which everyone vitally affected by a social decision, regardless of its sphere, would have a voice in that decision and a hand in its administration." In the years that followed, however, Mills viewed the labor movement with increasing skepticism. By 1960 he had become convinced that Marx's "labor metaphysic"—his faith in the proletariat as the embodiment of freedom in world history—was a Victorian relic, especially in societies like America, where the working class had happily joined the political rearguard. He fixed on the intellectuals themselves "as a possible immediate, radical agency of change." Still, he never swerved from his basic idea—of the intellectual as an advocate for the powerless—which he had announced in 1944.[14]

In pursuing this political ambition, Mills remained committed to the methods of sociology. His books used the tools of empirical

survey research and the "ideal type," as Max Weber called the pure models he abstracted from historical examples in order to classify different social phenomena. Both aspects of the sociological tradition come into play in another pivotal essay by Mills, "The Sociology of Mass Media and Public Opinion," an unpublished manuscript completed in 1950. This essay contains one of the earliest formulations of Mills's key distinction between "mass" and "public"—perhaps his most striking contribution to social theory and certainly the one that had the most profound influence on Hayden, Haber and the other young intellectuals in SDS.[15]

Though Mills again fondly evokes the lost world of Tom Paine, this particular paper, based on a study of opinion-formation in Decatur, Illinois, documents the enduring "independence and unpredictability" of U.S. public opinion in a midsize city. On the basis of interviews conducted with a representative sample of 800 of the city's 60,000 citizens, Mills concluded that "primary publics"—face-to-face groups of friends—actively responded to opinions expressed in the mass media, rejecting some, modifying others, arriving at their own, independent views through the give-and-take of "person-to-person discussion."

However, it was the theoretical frame for these empirical observations—and not the sanguine conclusions, which he subsequently modified—that Mills would return to repeatedly in his later works. In order to clarify the difference between opinions shaped by the mass media and those formed through face-to-face interactions, Mills defined two ideal types: the "mass ideal-type of 'public' in a mass society" and, by way of contrast, "the primary publics" typical of "the simpler democratic society."

In the democratic society, "Parliament, as an institution, crowns all the primary publics; it is the archetype for each of the scattered little circles of face-to-face citizens discussing their public business. . . . So conceived, the public is the loom of classic, eighteenth century democracy; discussion is at once the threads and the shuttle binding discussion circles together."

In a mass society, by contrast, "institutions become centralized and authoritarian; and media markets gain ascendancy over primary publics. There is . . . an historical parallel between the commodity market in the economic sphere and the public of public opinion in the sphere of opinion. . . . There is a movement from widely scattered little powers and laissez-faire to concentrated powers. . . . The mass media, as it were, expropriate from individuals in discussion the formulation of opinion." No longer a community of sovereign

individuals, the mass public becomes the passive object of intensive efforts to control, manage, manipulate.[16]

Mills believed that these two ideal types highlighted conflicting tendencies in modern American society. His findings in Decatur confirmed that "the members of publics in smaller communities know each other more or less fully," thereby keeping alive some vestige of the simpler democratic spirit.

But Mills also worried that in larger cities, in suburbs and even in towns like Decatur itself, the democratic spirit was at risk. The decline of a truly independent middle class that he described in *White Collar* was destroying the basis for classical democracy. Jefferson's self-reliant yeoman farmer had given way to the buck-passing company man. Mills most memorably dramatized the baleful implications of this social and psychological transformation in his climactic chapter on "The Mass Society" in *The Power Elite*—a book that was closely studied by virtually every early leader of SDS.

"Man in the mass," declared Mills in *The Power Elite*, "is without any sense of political belonging." Despite "the folklore of democratic decision-making" in America, "the idea of the community of publics" had become the "assertion of an ideal"—"not a description of fact." In the "bedroom belts" and "one-class suburbs" surrounding America's great cities, residents were increasingly segregated into "narrowed routines and environments," losing "any firm sense of integrity as a public." Politics became a spectator sport. The support of voters was marshaled through advertising campaigns, not direct participation in reasoned debate. A citizen's chief sources of political information, the mass media, typically assaulted him with a barrage of distracting commercial come-ons, feeble entertainments and hand-me-down glosses on complicated issues. The self-reliant citizen who formed the bulwark of the simpler democratic society was being replaced by a depressing new breed of American: "He drifts, he fulfills habits, his behavior a result of a planless mixture of the confused standards and the uncriticized expectations that he has taken over from others whom he no longer really knows or trusts, if indeed he ever really did. . . . He loses his independence, and more importantly, he loses the desire to be independent. . . . He thinks he wants merely to get his share of what is around with as little trouble as he can and with as much fun as possible." One is reminded of Nietzsche's "last man," as "ineradicable as a flea-beetle."[17]

A New Moral Optic

"Often you get the best insights by considering extremes," Mills once wrote. His "ideal-type" of classical democracy was certainly an extreme: the perfect antithesis to his image of witless suburban conformism. But Mills's notion of democracy was more than a theoretical construct designed to throw into stark relief his empirical findings about the mass society he felt was emerging in modern America. His image of classical democracy also functioned implicitly in his work as what he called a "counter-symbol" or "moral optic"—a focus for moral outrage. In his first book, Mills had argued that simple deprivation could not, by itself, create a movement for social change: "With deprivation must come the rejection of the symbols and the myths that justify the authorities and the acceptance of counter-symbols that will focus the deprivation politically." In *The Power Elite*, by describing in detail the trends in modern America toward "manipulated consent" and then reminding his readers of the lost ideal of face-to-face freedom, Mills made outrage easy. Here is a town meeting animated by outspoken individualists. There is a clique of powerful politicians, tycoons and warlords, ruling over a herd of blank drones drifting vacantly through the shopping malls of America. Faced with that choice, most readers would not hesitate. His "ideal-type" of classical democracy was not simply a critical element in a clever piece of social theory. As a "counter-symbol," it was Mills's great ideological gift to the left in America.[18]

Throughout most of his life, Mills struggled to convey this democratic vision to a literate public. Not content with evoking the memory of a bygone world of zealous democratic thinkers, he set out to bend the mass media to his own ends, urging intellectuals "to make the mass media the means of liberal—which is to say, liberating—education." He struck up a partnership with Ian Ballantine, one of the pioneers of the paperback revolution in American publishing and a man keen to market John Hersey's *Hiroshima* as well as *Mad* magazine anthologies in cheap editions. Mills gambled his academic reputation to reach a larger audience, and in one sense, he won: *Listen, Yankee*, his polemical defense of Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution, sold more than 400,000 copies as a Ballantine paperback.[19]

There is more to the story, though, than simple sales figures. To the small circle of young radicals who had gathered around Al Haber and Tom Hayden, Mills was a hero, an oracle, a model of the radical intellectual—particularly after he published his "Letter to the New

Left" in the fall of 1960 in the British journal *New Left Review*. Almost immediately, copies of this piece were circulated within SDS—it was one of the 38 titles on the recommended reading list that SDS distributed in the fall of 1961. "The Age of Complacency is ending," declared Mills. "We are beginning to move again." Answering the charge that the New Left was utopian, Mills stressed the need to analyze "the *foundation* of policies": "our work is necessarily structural—and so, *for us*, just now—utopian." Unlike some Marxists, Mills welcomed the new prominence of students: "Who is it that is getting fed up? Who is it that is getting disgusted 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 is the same: it is the young intelligentsia."[20]

"Mills was the first to see what was happening," says Hayden. "He saw that students, who hadn't played that much of a role in American history, were *doing* things. And that this opened a whole new period of history in which the left had to go from a belief in labor as the agency of change to students as an agency of change. Well, this just filled us with enormous confidence. It helped us make sense of what we were doing, and actually it made us feel as if we'd been *anointed*."[21]

"Mills was a model," says Paul Booth: "*The Power Elite* was Bible." Bob Ross recalls first reading *The Power Elite* in the winter of 1961. "I remember finishing it late one night and walking out into this cold, snowy dawn, crying. I was already in SDS, already was committed to this notion of participatory democracy, and this Leviathan had been portrayed to me. I walked the streets weeping. What can we do? Is this our fate?"[22]

In Mills, the young radicals found a theory of power, an image of democracy, a kindred spirit. Though none of the SDS leaders ever met him, Hayden, for one, knew all about his motorcycle. Mills's storied personal style—macho, blunt, impatient—had an impact. So did his distaste for Marxist cant and Cold War dogmatics. The students in SDS identified with his project of fostering a "free and knowledgeable public" and his eloquently expressed desire to conduct research with "democratic relevance." His belief that feelings of personal frustration and powerlessness ought to be connected to public issues was reiterated and developed by Hayden, becoming one basis for the characteristic assertion by the New Left [and later, by feminists] that "the personal" is "political."[23]

Taking It Big

Mills's influence on the young intellectuals of the New Left attests to the appeal of his political vision and the effectiveness of his rhetoric. By giving a fresh luster to the textbook image of democracy, he implicitly dared Americans to take it seriously. "Because democracy has never been fully realized," Robert Dahl has written, "it has always been and is now potentially a revolutionary doctrine."[24]

At the same time, Mills's approach to democracy suffered from weaknesses that would be aggravated and made palpable by the student movement he helped to inspire. His use of "ideal-types," for example, facilitated a highly imaginative reconstruction of the historical evidence. As Mills knew perfectly well, even revolutionary America had been a stratified and hierarchical society; at the very time he was completing *The Power Elite*, his friend Richard Hofstadter, the great historian, was dissecting the interlocking myths of the yeoman farmer and America's lost agrarian democracy. Mills's suppression of this kind of historical knowledge created a false aura of practical solidity around the image of classical democracy. To the extent that he created a countersymbol by using the sociological device of the ideal-type, Mills also avoided offering any independent argument on behalf of his ideal: though he saw clearly the need for an "indigenous political theory" on the American left, he produced no such theory and no original moral arguments. The only hint he gave as to what such a theory might look like was an admiring reference in 1948 to the Guild Socialism of G. D. H. Cole, who in turn relied on the philosophical premises of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Unlike Rousseau, however, Mills never offered a systematic defense of his political principles; unlike G. D. H. Cole, he never made a sustained effort to demonstrate the feasibility of his political vision in the context of a modern industrial society. Instead, Mills allowed the ideal-type of democracy to function as a subversive exhortation disguised as a nostalgic typology.[25]

As a result, the implications of Mills's vision remained highly ambiguous. Despite his anxious description of the contemporary trends toward centralization and bureaucracy, he never really explained whether these trends might be reversed or somehow mitigated. Instead, he defended the virtues of a "genuine bureaucracy" staffed by knowledgeable civil servants. He also argued that "the centralization of the means of history-making itself" had created "new opportunities for the willful making of history." As his com-

ments about parliament as the prototype of the primary publics may suggest, he seems to have held no reservations about the virtues of representative government. Although his romantic identification with Wobblies and his description of "the scattered little circles of face-to-face citizens" might evoke a decentralized democracy, other comments suggest that Mills was more realistic—and more interested in fostering within the modern nation-state an alert, knowing public able to appreciate the ideas of maverick thinkers such as himself. (As he once admitted in passing, "the theory of the public is, in many ways, a projection upon the community at large of the intellectual's ideal of the supremacy of intellect.") In an essay published in 1958, Mills's specific proposals for democratic reform are both vague and remarkably mild: he calls for the spread of "free associations" to act as a buffer between small communities and the state; "a civil service that is firmly linked with the world of knowledge and sensibility"; "nationally responsible parties"; and "an intelligentsia, inside as well as outside the universities, who carry on the big discourse of the western world."[26]

"Taking it big" was one of Mills's favorite phrases. He "loved 'tough-minded' writers and writing," recalled his friend Hans Gerth, "men of tall talk and 'no bones about it.' " But by the end of his life, his tough-minded approach to power and "tall talk" of democracy had taken on a desperate stridency. He was a more meticulous thinker than Tom Paine, his favorite pamphleteer, yet his edgy, staccato prose sometimes recalls the hard-sell slogans of an ad campaign. The support he gave to Castro was remarkably uncritical—maybe he considered him an example of "the willful making of history." It is no wonder that some readers felt bullied. To rouse his audience, he was prepared to sacrifice subtlety, nuance, the patient evaluation of contradictory evidence—in short, the virtues of dispassionate scholarship. His carefully cultivated image—the powerless intellectual as populist outlaw—masked an unresolved tension between an emotional sense of outrage and the conviction, inherited from the pragmatists, that reason ought properly to control man's destiny. He epitomized a politics of theatrical fury and mythomanic fervor, of high moral seriousness, savage social criticism and peculiarly blinkered self-righteousness.[27]

It is symptomatic that Mills, when he alluded to "Inside the Whale," Orwell's famous essay, turned Orwell's methaphor inside out. "Admit that you are inside the whale (for you *are*, of course)," wrote Orwell in 1940, justifying the "passive, non-cooperative attitude" of his friend the novelist Henry Miller: "Give yourself over to

a public," answering fears of futility with a defiant decision "to throw in with 'the little groups that cannot win.' " It was no wonder that Mills twelve years later became the first prominent American intellectual to embrace the fledgling New Left—after all, thanks in part to the success of his own "sociological poems," they shared the same "collective dream."[31]

the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you can control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it." This Mills could never do. To resist, protest, dream of alternatives—such was his daemon. If, as Orwell had warned in the same essay, "the autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence," Mills could not stand calmly by. A spiritual exile from the heartlands of America, he imagined himself to be "outside the whale." He wanted to harpoon the beast before it swallowed his public.[28]

The very shape of his career and nature of his influence on the New Left raise some hard questions: Is the middle-class intellectual a fit tribune for the powerless? Is the desire to win converts compatible with intellectual honesty? Is the self-dramatizing visionary a figure to be trusted?

Although he raised different questions, Tom Hayden was no blind disciple. "C. Wright Mills is appealing and dynamic in his expression of theory in the grand manner," Hayden wrote late in 1961 in "A Letter to the New (Young) Left"—the title itself, of course, was a kind of homage: "but his pessimism yields us no formulas, no path out of the dark." In the graduate thesis on Mills that Hayden started while he was still in Atlanta, he portrayed the sociologist as a loner whose spirit was finally crushed by his isolation. For Hayden, "community" was a synonym for "democracy." Mills, by contrast, once confided that of the three great goals of the French Revolution, he could appreciate liberty and equality—but not fraternity.[29]

Despite such reservations and differences, Hayden believed that the work of C. Wright Mills was the perfect place to begin thinking about a manifesto—particularly one that was designed for "a radical democratic organization." Writing under Mills's influence, Hayden incorporated the promise of face-to-face democracy into the document that he was drafting. As he explained in one of his notes, "I am primarily concerned about *the complete absence of an active and creative set of publics, people working in union to conform the structures and direction of events to their interests.*" In his notes, he did not shy away from one of the implications. "This is a central fatal fact about the United States," declared Hayden: "it is a republic, not a democracy, and nearly everyone wants to keep it that way."[30]

In 1948, at the close of *The New Men of Power,* Mills himself had spoken wistfully of the left in America. It was "powerless, distracted and confused." The ideas its intellectuals held were "less a program than a collective dream." Still, Mills cast his fate with that dream, pressing for a "more direct democracy of daily life," trying to "build