

explaining the centrality of free-market ideas in contemporary political discourse.

Despite these criticisms *The Great Persuasion* makes an important contribution. It is carefully researched and well written, and it makes for a compelling narrative of ideological transformation. The general reader as well as students in the fields of intellectual history and political science will find reading this book a rewarding experience.

Blacks in and out of the Left. By Michael C. Dawson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. 242p. \$24.95.
doi:10.1017/S153759271400187X

— Joshua Miller, *Lafayette College*

In this short, provocative, and elegantly written book, Michael C. Dawson sketches twentieth-century left-radical African American movements and their leaders, criticizes white left activists and historians for not knowing or suppressing this history, advocates for black nationalism as a significant component of a revived Left, defends this ideal from possible criticisms by left political theorists, and, in the conclusion, calls for political action.

The first half of the book “blames” the Left for “failure,” “inability,” “refusal,” and “erasure.” Dawson sharply rebukes sociologist Todd Gitlin and philosopher Richard Rorty, saying of Gitlin’s *Twilight of Common Dreams* (1995): “The startling lack of information he has about those movements is matched only by the vacuousness of his interpretation of that history” (viii). Ignorance of black history, according to Dawson, makes many historians and activists myopic about American history in general. For example, when Beverly Gage in *The Day Wall Street Exploded* (2010) claimed that the first great act of terror in the United States in the twentieth century was a 1920 bombing in Wall Street she misses the waves of terror that were directed at black people, especially in the era of lynching.

The book is not primarily a work of history, although in the first 125 pages Dawson refers to positions of activists and organizations who may be unfamiliar to many, such as Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Otto Hall, Harry Haywood, Cyril Briggs, Hubert Harrison, Chandler Owen, Monroe Trotter, Claudia Jones, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Liberty League, and the African Blood Brotherhood. Those who do not know this history might feel that they are walking into a conversation that has already begun. For example, we learn that Harrison’s misogyny and poor organizing ability undermined the potential of the Liberty League, but we are not sure who Harrison is or what other scholars have said about him.

According to Dawson, black radicals have been ignored or disparaged not only by historians and cultural critics but also by left activists, including socialists, communists,

and the New Left: “[I]deological positions and political practices of the left led, often inadvertently, to the reproduction of structures of racial subordination within the myriad of progressive social movements that came into being during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century” (11). Racism turned blacks off to the Left, and the Left underestimated how much it needed African Americans. “I also demonstrate how the left’s consistent mistakes on race directly led to failures in grassroots organizing and in building leftist organizations,” the author states (44).

The Left has been strongest, Dawson asserts, when it incorporates black nationalism, or at least focuses on the particular concerns of African Americans. He sees a political model in the Communist Party USA between 1920 and 1940 where black and white radicals worked together. Unfortunately, in the late 1940s the party lost contact with the black masses as it began to follow “Soviet-mandated false unity that emphasized working with racist and liberal whites” (52). Thus, the Communist Party created “the great sundering” which jettisoned African Americans in favor of putative class solidarity, papering over the divisions in the working class created by white racism. In addition, it split black organizations like the NAACP into radical and anti-communist factions: “[T]he sundering led to a degenerate form of politics in the United States and the closing off of many democratic possibilities for people both inside and outside the United States” (60). By excluding or disparaging the concerns and actions of black radicals the left lost its “richer base of mobilization” (11). Black and white liberals joined in a tepid political movement, cut off from the black masses, while a few black radicals remained within the inhospitable and largely ineffective Communist Party, and still others joined anticommunist organizations or, later, identified with China. Dawson explains that, ultimately, this is why the Tea Party has a much greater effect on politics today than does the Left: Natural opposition to the Tea Party had fallen apart.

Dawson’s ideal is “the path that sought to fight for human emancipation from within black radical organizations deeply embedded within black communities and movements,” and he wants those organizations to be accepted as part of a resurrected left coalition (37). The Left has mistakenly rejected black nationalism, falsely believing that it jettisons class solidarity, universalism, and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision of a beloved community. Yet according to the author, the embrace of black identity is not necessarily divisive. Malcolm X wanted “freedom, political power, and egalitarian redistribution of resources, and other demands that a politicized working class has historically advanced” (136). Similarly, although the Black Panthers sought black liberation, their 10-point program was part of a social democratic agenda that applied to all workers and poor people.

Having endorsed nationalism as a necessary component of a revived Left, Dawson pleads not guilty to hypothetical charges of opposing universalism or adhering to a type of identity politics that has been blamed for dividing and weakening the Left. He finds in Linda Zerilli's work "a universalism that not only respects but is built on recognition of the particular" (154). In criticizing an argument by Wendy Brown, he asserts that identity politics, or at least a commitment to black nationalism and reparations, need not be based on "the politics of rancor" (197). Are left historians and activists maligned as they are portrayed here? Dawson is sharply critical of people who would probably want to be his allies. Many early-twentieth-century leaders of the Socialist Party were explicitly racist. The valid critique of the Communist Party USA for subsuming race to class solidarity is familiar from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). There is, however, a plausible counterargument that the party in general, as individuals, in certain unions, particular states, and as an organization, believed that they were fighting for the liberty and equality of African Americans. Communist Party Chairman Gus Hall's *Fighting Racism* (1985) is but one primary source. A description of race in one union is Roger Horowitz's *Negro and White: Unite and Fight—A Social History of Unionism in Meatpacking* (1997). African American political and cultural leaders W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Coleman Young, Charles Hayes, Langston Hughes, William Patterson, and Angela Davis worked with the party after 1945. Dawson might respond that these leaders were not representative of the black masses, and several of them did African Americans no favors by hewing to the Soviet line.

Have left historians uniformly and deliberately ignored or derided black history? In his preface, the author cites many historians and political scientists who have not. Todd Gitlin and Richard Rorty earn his criticisms, but they are not appropriate representatives of the Left. Dawson is surely right to say that any revived left scholarship and activism must incorporate the unique needs and demands of African Americans without subsuming them. Recent books on such topics as incarceration, the death penalty, the drug wars, poverty, hip-hop, gender, Frederick Douglass, Du Bois, James Baldwin, and Dr. King have contributed to that scholarship. There is insufficient space here to provide a bibliography. *Black in and out of the Left*, which is based on Dawson's 2009 lectures at the Du Bois Institute at Harvard University, would be the best place to start.

In brief, while I was put off by Dawson's polemical tone, I learned a great deal about a compelling subject, that is, African American radicals before the Civil Rights movement. His book has a political aim, which is to clarify the relationship of African American radicals and the Left in order to create a strong movement for reparations, black political organizations that will take militant action, meaningful work, a democratic relationship between the state and civil society, and opposition to imperialism. The book is an

effort to better explain history and theory in order to achieve those goals. I for one accept Dawson's analysis and his goals, but I would like to hear in greater detail the theories and political history of the twentieth-century African American radicals to whom he has drawn our attention.

The Myth of Liberal Ascendancy: Corporate Dominance from the Great Depression to the Great Recession. By G. William Domhoff. Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013.

320p. \$124 cloth, \$28.95 paper.
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— Stan Luger, *University of Northern Colorado*

The late Robert Dahl famously posed what should be the central question for the discipline of political science: Who governs in a society where nearly everyone can vote, yet wealth, knowledge, and social position are unequally distributed? While in previous decades this question sparked debates among political scientists and sociologists, in recent years it has receded to the margins of the our discipline—notwithstanding a recent acknowledgment that the American political system is characterized by inequalities of all sorts.

For almost 50 years, G. William Domhoff has tirelessly engaged the question of who rules. Domhoff, who has never shied away from challenging the accepted wisdom or dominant paradigm of the day, has offered detailed accounts of policymaking framed by a keen attention to changing theoretical battles among scholars.

First, he challenged the empirical foundations of the early Dahl's pluralist conclusions by uncovering the hidden role of business in shaping local decision making (*Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community Power Reexamined*, 1978). Later, when pluralism lost its luster, some sought a safe haven with a "new" emphasis on state-centered theory. Led by Theda Skocpol, state-centered scholars emphasized the role of state actors and neutral policy experts, instead of class forces, as the key to understanding policy change. Domhoff subsequently turned his attention to these empirical claims and, once again, was able to show that these so-called neutral policy experts were members of corporate-sponsored think tanks, policy-planning organizations, and discussion groups (*The Power Elite and the State: How Policy Is Made in America*, 1990, and *State Autonomy or Class Dominance? Case Studies on Policy Making in America*, 1996).

Many readers will be familiar, at least by title, with Domhoff's introductory text *Who Rules America?*—first written in 1967 and now in its seventh edition. In this, and in 15 other books on the question of power, he has argued for a class dominance model of power in the United States, in which corporate-based owners and managers dominate. He has maintained the centrality of the role of class, but has rejected the Marxist claim that the ruling class is always the economic elite. He contends, to the contrary, that