

New Book: The Prospect of a Kamala Harris Presidency

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Global Research, October 20, 2020

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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With the 2020 U.S. presidential election less than a month away, there is widespread speculation concerning Democratic nominee Joe Biden's mental and physical fitness at 77 years of age if he were to defeat incumbent Donald Trump on November 3rd. The former Vice President and Senator from Delaware would surpass his opponent as the oldest to ever hold the office of the presidency if victorious, while his generally acknowledged cognitive decline has led many to question whether he is even capable of serving a single term. Given the concerns about his health, the likelihood that Biden's running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, would become his successor has put the controversial former prosecutor and California Attorney General's own politics under scrutiny, though not to a degree sufficient with the odds she could very well become commander-in-chief in the near future.

*Trump himself suggested it was the hidden motivation behind House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's recent introduction of a 25th Amendment commission on removing a "mentally unfit" president to enable the replacement of an incapacitated Biden with Harris after the election. Even Saturday Night Live recently joked about Biden's poor first debate performance as a Harris term in-the-making — but as journalist Caleb Maupin explains in his new book *Kamala Harris and the Future of America: An Essay in Three Parts*, the prospect of her becoming president is no laughing matter.*

Maupin's ambitious essay surpasses the redundant analysis of the vice-presidential nominee by placing her political success in a broader historical context while forewarning the unique danger of a budding Harris administration waiting in the wings. The majority of the critical examinations of Harris during the campaign have critiqued her rebranding as an outwardly "progressive" figure in stark contrast with the reality of her career as a prosecutor turned establishment politician. While that is true, Maupin's analysis takes an important step further by formulating the rise of Harris, who is the first Jamaican and South Asian-American nominee on a major party ticket, as the culmination of the U.S. left's failures in the last several decades resulting in its present deteriorated state preoccupied with liberal identity politics. More specifically, a result of the defeats suffered by the so-called New Left of the 1960s and 70s which had long-term consequences for progressive politics in America today.



Although not a biography, Maupin does link Harris's psychological profile, personality traits and upbringing with her political career which he parallels with the life stories of previous presidents and other political figures. Born in 1964, Harris was raised in a hub of the organized left in the Bay Area by immigrant parents who were politically active during her early childhood in Northern California. While not a communist, her estranged Jamaican-American father, Donald Harris, is a Stanford University professor and Marxian economist whose work influenced the progressive domestic reforms in his native island country during the administration of Prime Minister Michael Manley, a democratic socialist who introduced land redistribution, socialized medicine and free education until Jamaica's neocolonization by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decimated the Caribbean nation with enormous debt, as explored in the documentary *Life and Debt* (2001). Young Kamala grew up attending civil rights protests in Berkeley with her parents until their bitter divorce which resulted in her Indian-American mother gaining sole custody. Maupin dares to ask — is her chosen career path as a criminal prosecutor and top legal officer disproportionately locking up black men unconsciously motivated by a vendetta against her father? Could it even explain her thinly-veiled [contempt for the progressive politics](#) she now pretends to uphold as a politician?

Maupin also argues that Harris was likely groomed for her present role as Biden's running mate by the Clintonite wing of the Democratic Party once it became apparent Hillary was not in a position to run again in 2020, citing [a 2017 closed door meeting](#) in the Hamptons with elite party donors and apparatchiks. Despite her own early exit from the primaries after a knockout blow in the debates delivered by Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii who sharply criticized her record as a prosecutor, Harris was already vetted by the party leadership to be Biden's heir apparent. For the Democratic establishment, she is the perfect choice to derail the emerging progressive faction of the party led by Bernie Sanders which champions a similar brand of the social democratic politics championed by her father. This could also hold disastrous geopolitical implications, as the world is still reeling from the four years spent ravaged by the foreign policy of Hillary Clinton's State Department which oversaw the wholesale destruction of several nations in the global south. We can only expect the same regime change policies from Harris if she is cut from the same cloth.

Maupin then uses Harris and her Berkeley upbringing to explore the history of leftism in the United States, tracing the New Left's ceding of leadership roles to students and marginal groups while discarding labor rights and the class struggle back to the influence of the Frankfurt School of Social Theory. The philosophical movement of intellectuals and academics associated with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, otherwise known as 'critical theory', put forward that both capitalist societies and Marxist-Leninist states like the Soviet Union were equally rigid "totalitarian" systems. The interdisciplinary sociological school viewed Marx's prediction of revolutionary emancipation in the 20th century as an evident failure and rejected the historical materialism of orthodox Marxism, arguing that forces of economic change were undermined by the dominant ideology of the ruling class represented in mass media which produced false consciousness in the working class. Theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse attempted to reformulate Marxism with Freudian psychoanalysis and other disciplines while critiquing mass consumer culture and modern technology.

As the impact of the Frankfurt School gave rise to the New Left in the U.S. and Western Europe, mass social movements became housed in the universities instead of the factories. This was favorable to the ruling class, as student-led counterculture revolts were much easier to control in comparison with a revolution organized by the workers. If any authentic revolutionary leaders did emerge, they were quickly neutralized. After the student protests of 1968, the New Left withdrew further to its comfort zone in the realm of ideas and out of the streets, which was perfectly alright with the powers that be since they were intellectuals who denounced Marxism-Leninism. Soon the academy would be dominated by an even more pessimistic and "anti-authoritarian" ideology, postmodernism, which rejected the value of all universal truths and grand narratives. How did this all happen?

Maupin emphasizes that the intelligentsia of the New Left were actively supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) through its clandestine Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) program during the Cold War, which sought to subvert the sympathies of liberals and the non-communist left with the Soviet Union through the covert funding of [prominent literary magazines](#), journals, international conferences, [modern art exhibitions](#), and other cultural activities. The objective was to promote an intellectual consensus on the Western left that the Soviet Union was to be opposed as much as capitalism and it was indisputably successful. Meanwhile, the Church Committee and Rockefeller Commissions of the 1970s exposed how in the previous decade the CIA had played an enormous role in introducing drugs to the counterculture as part of its domestic espionage against the anti-war movement in Operation Midnight Climax, a sub-program of Project MK-Ultra, where the Bay Area became a petri dish for its human experimentation. With the drug culture came the popularization of eastern mysticism and eventually, the New Age movement.

As it happens, the relationship between the CIA and the New Left's intellectuals goes back to its origins. One of the most prominent ideologues of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse — often referred to as the "father of the New Left" — spent almost a full decade during the 1940s working for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA, and as an anti-Soviet intelligence analyst in the U.S. State Department. This was not just during wartime but continued well after WWII was over in West Germany until 1951 when Marcuse immigrated to the United States to work as a professor at universities on the east coast, the same year that the CCF was founded. However, one interesting fact that Maupin overlooks is that while Kamala Harris was growing up in Oakland in the 1960s, Marcuse relocated his teaching career out to the west coast at the University of California, San Diego

(UCSD), where his work continued to be cited as an influence by the middle-class student activists and radicals of the counterculture as the left drifted further away from the socialist countries and the working class. The documentary [Herbert's Hippopotamus: Marcuse and Revolution in Paradise](#) examines Marcuse's time in Southern California in the late 60s.

Prior to his work in the OSS, in Weimar Germany the young Marcuse had been a pupil of philosopher Martin Heidegger even as his mentor infamously joined the ascendant Nazi Party, though the relationship came to an end once Marcuse's own academic career was obstructed by the Third Reich in the early 1930s. One of the major thinkers associated with the New Left promoted by the CCF was a former lover of Heidegger's, Hannah Arendt, who penned one of the most seminal and harmful works in equating the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany as twin pillars of authoritarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In particular, Maupin takes aim at Arendt's essay *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* where she famously observed Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann's thoughtless conformism and ministerial disposition in his lack of remorse for his atrocities while covering his trial. Maupin interprets her notion as implicitly concluding that lurking underneath the surface of every ordinary hardworking person is a potential fascist, therefore anyone who would try to organize them for a collective cause is a threat to society. This cynical, psychoanalytic definition of fascism as rooted in what Adorno called the "authoritarian personality" replaced the Marxist economic understanding. Yet in spite of her work, Arendt controversially participated in the shameful post-war apologia and rehabilitation of Heidegger's reputation.

Critics might say that Maupin's diagnosis of the Western left as the manipulated brainchild of Western intelligence agencies is oversimplistic, conspiratorial or risks espousing a form of vulgar Marxism. Indeed, it is a touchy subject for those too personally connected to the artistic and intellectual milieu of the time to accept the undeniably significant role played by the CIA in subverting leftist politics, arts and culture in the second half of the twentieth century. Some on the left will inevitably try to dismiss his analysis by likening it to the right-wing canard of "cultural Marxism" spoken of by paleoconservatives simply because of the overlap in mutual subjects of criticism. Nonetheless, there is a small kernel of truth at the heart the right's mostly fictitious narrative of Western Marxism's control of academia but unfortunately, what they misinterpret as a plot to "subvert Western culture" was hatched at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia — not the former Soviet Union. Today's pseudo-left which recoils working people is truly an imposter generated by the CIA's cultural cold war program to replace actual Marxism, the real casualty of the pervasiveness of Western Marxism in universities.

Others may find Maupin's assessment of the Frankfurt School and thinkers of the New Left to be too dismissive of their contributions. Ironically, Adorno's worthwhile conception of "actionism" applies to the left-wing anti-intellectualism and leaderless, spontaneous voluntarism of the very movement to which the Frankfurt School gave birth and is even more relevant per Maupin's thorough description of what he calls the "synthetic left" today. Look no further than the 'propaganda of the deed' which dominates Antifa and the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests this year. In [Thesis on Feuerbach](#), Karl Marx articulated the predicament of revolutionary politics in his day being restrained by the gap between thought and action, or "*philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.*" One could say the mantra of the Western left now seems to be taking action without any thought whatsoever. Or as Lenin wrote in [What is to be Done?](#), "*without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.*"

If the idea that Kamala Harris represents an apotheosis of the New Left's failures feels like a bit of a stretch, it is only because the examination warrants further inquiry which Maupin should continue in his work, regardless of the outcome of the 2020 election. Nevertheless, in just a little over 125 pages he manages to comprehensively piece together the trajectory of the Western left from the end of WWII to what can only be described as its "stinking corpse" today, a term once used by Rosa Luxembourg to describe the treacherous Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) after it voted to support the imperialist bloodbath of WWI in 1914. Maupin's use of Harris and the environment she grew up in as a springboard to investigate the shortcomings of the Western left generally is a formidable exploration that is desperately needed at a time where the American people are faced with the probability of enduring yet another destructive administration and no authentic left to represent it.

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