1975

The Book of Daniel and the radical American tradition.

Dan. Zins

University of Windsor

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The Book of Daniel
and the Radical American Tradition

By
Dan Zins

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario
1975
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explain why I believe that E.L. Doctorow's novel *The Book of Daniel* belongs to the "radical American tradition." From its beginnings American literature has seen many of its writers, often those who would later be credited with having written classics, oppose the dominant values of their society. These writers have dramatized the hiatus between the professed American ideals and the actual practices of their country. Doctorow, who issues a vitriolic indictment of American leadership for its greed, stupidity, myopia and hypocrisy, and the American public for its complacency, has earned himself a place with the best writers in the radical American tradition.

In the introduction I have presented a sampling of the praise *Daniel* received from the reviewers when it was published in 1971. There is also a brief discussion of some of the difficulties that Doctorow's protagonist, Daniel, has tried to surmount as he writes his "book."

In the first chapter I present evidence that there is indeed a radical American tradition. This chapter also cites some of the most frequent targets of attack by American writers over the years.

Chapter two explores in detail Doctorow's role as social critic. I have tried to point out that many of Doctorow's criticisms of American society have been made by his literary precursors.

The trial of Daniel's parents, Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, is the subject of the third chapter. I have attempted to draw
attention to a number of parallels with the Rosenberg-Sobell case.

Chapter four is devoted to an examination of the development of the political beliefs of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, who were executed for having "provided Russia with stolen atomic secrets." Also discussed is their membership in the Communist Party, and Paul's decision to gamble their lives for what he believed to be a larger historical purpose.

Chapter five discusses the tribulations of the young Isaacson children as they search for meaning and stability in their lives after having their parents taken away from them. After surviving the hysteria of the McCarthy era they must come to terms with the turbulence of the sixties. I have suggested some possible causes of Susan's self-destruction, and possible reasons why her brother might be able to avoid her tragic fate.

A great deal of protest writing, including much that has survived over the years, has not been known for its aesthetic merits. In the final chapter I cite a number of the most common aesthetic weaknesses of protest fiction, and hope to show that Daniel, in overcoming these limitations, is not another piece of propaganda, but a fine work of art.
What follows is a listing of some of the major characters in The Book of Daniel and their "real life" counterparts in the actual Rosenberg case. Doctorow's characters are often quite closely modeled on the figures of the Rosenberg trial, but the characters in Daniel also reveal a number of interesting differences.

Paul Isaacson... Julius Rosenberg
Rochelle Isaacson... Ethel Rosenberg
Daniel Isaacson (Lewin)... Michael Rosenberg (Meeropol)
Susan Isaacson (Lewin)... Robert Rosenberg (Meeropol)
Selig Mindish... David Greenglass (brother of Ethel Rosenberg)
Jake Ascher... Emanuel Bloch (defense lawyers)
Howard Feuerman... Irving Saypol (prosecution lawyers)
Barnet Hirsh... Irving Kaufman (judges)
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A work of art, taken as a purely formal act... an embodiment of timeless values without relevance to anything historical or social, loses its vital relationship to the artist and its human significance for the person contemplating it. ARNOLD HAUSER

The rhetorician would deceive his neighbors,
The sentimentalist himself; while art
Is but a vision of reality. W.B. YEATS
Introduction

In 1969 Marcus Klein wrote that "it might be wondered why there has not been more serious fiction about, say, crime, or poverty in an affluent society, or the disasters of foreign affairs, or race or that insistency that still underlies everything, the Bomb."¹ Two years later E.L. Doctorow published his third novel,² The Book of Daniel, which is a serious treatment of the themes Klein cited. I will explore these themes in some detail in chapter two. Daniel is a fictional account of the Rosenberg-Sobell trial, called by the Columbia Law Review "the outstanding 'political' trial of this generation."³ Venerable J. Edgar Hoover himself has termed the case the "crime of the century."⁴ When Ethel Rosenberg was executed along with her husband Julius, she became the first woman condemned by a federal court in nearly a century. In chapter three I will discuss the trial of Daniel's parents, and note some of the parallels with the actual case. Daniel is, however, about much more than a famous political trial. It is really the book of Doctorow's protagonist, Daniel Isaacson, which he will submit in place of his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University.

² When Daniel was published, Doctorow's first two novels, Welcome to Hard Times and Big as Life, were out of print.
⁴ Schneirs, p. 429.
In his book Daniel searches for the truth about his executed parents and what they stood for, his sister Susan, who dies of a "failure of analysis," and himself. Daniel is quick to ensure the reader in this painful and at times frantic search, which takes us from the opening of the novel in 1967, back to the 1940s and 50s. The time shifts are frequent; even more frequent are the shifts from third to first person narration. But the novel is so engrossing that the reader is soon caught up in the destinies of not only Daniel and Susan, but also the fate of their parents. This efficacious juxtaposition of the two separate narratives culminates in one of three possible endings offered by Daniel, the poignant dovetailing of the two funeral scenes. (Daniel's book also includes a penetrating analysis of United States foreign policy, and its inevitable repercussions on domestic affairs.) Daniel himself is not always admirable, but he is neither sentimental nor dishonest.

Daniel allows the reader glimpses of his creative process as he works to shape his book. We observe him excavating the ruins of his past, ferreting out from the deepest recesses of his memory any material that might be relevant to his book. The reader is alerted to be chary, for Daniel's memory is limited and fallible; at times Daniel resorts to his imagination. After detailing his father's courageous action on the bus in Peekskill, Daniel asks, "How do I know this? If I was crouched behind a seat, how do I remember this?" Later, as he searches for

clues to his parents' guilt or innocence, Daniel tells us, "I have put down everything I can remember of their actions and conversations in this period prior to their arrests. Or I think I have." (BD, p. 145) After recounting one of his visits to his parents in prison, Daniel confesses, "Probably none of this is true. There's a lot more I can't remember." (BD, p. 266)

But in Daniel's book there is also evidence that he is trying to report events with some objectivity. The FBI men that badger his parents "look neither as handsome as in the movies nor as ugly as my parents' revulsion makes them." (BD, p. 120) While their parents languished in jail, Daniel and Susan were supposed to present themselves at public appearances as good, fine children. Those who knew them, Daniel tells us, saw that they were weird and demanding. Talking to Phyllis on the phone after he arrived in California to find Mindish, Daniel had to admit that his whole trip was insane, but he felt compelled to make it.

We also observe Daniel laboring to achieve the best possible arrangement of his materials: "Here do the scene of Rochelle and her two children" (BD, p. 135); "Save this space for the letter my father wrote back" (BD, p. 170); or, "As I work out the chronology I believe this period at Frieda's coincide with the first of the government's superseding indictments." (BD, p. 172) When he is in California Daniel is confused because he does not "know what to write to convey the temperature change of the book." (BD, p. 279)

If the reader is conscious of Daniel laying bare his soul,
Daniel is also very conscious of his readers. One of his paragraphs is titled "A NOTE TO THE READER." (BD, p. 66) This soon follows:

Daniel leaned forward and pressed the cigarette lighter. His hand remained poised. Do you believe it? Shall I continue? Do you want to know the effect of three concentric circles of heating element glowing orange in a black night of rain upon the tender white girl-flesh of my wife's ass? Who are you anyway? Who told you you could read this? Is nothing sacred? (BD, p. 72)

Finally, there is the execution of his parents. The reader should not be surprised that the Isaacsons will be electrocuted. (Among other adumbrations, the words "current" and "electric" appear repeatedly in the novel.) The reader may, however, expect that Daniel will spare him of the lurid details of the execution. Daniel shatters that illusion: "I suppose you think I can't do the electrocution. I know there is a you. There has always been a you. YOU: I will show you that I can do the electrocution." (BD, p. 312) And he does.

There has not been a great deal of smoothness, sameness, or predictability in Daniel's life. His book mirrors this. There are the two separate narratives, and Daniel's mind jumps quickly and unexpectedly from one to the other as his psyche intuits the parallels. Daniel also switches frequently from first to third person narration. Could I have really suffered these horrors. Could all of this have really happened to me? Maybe "Daniel" can bear it better. In his book Daniel also includes a few lines of verse, a clever mantra that is yet another portent of the fate that awaits his parents, a number of erudite disquisitions, including one on the Cold War, and graphic accounts of various tortures that have been used by ruling classes during
the past several centuries. It all adds up to:

DANIEL'S BOOK: A Life Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctoral Degree in Social Biology, Gross Entomology, Women's Anatomy, Children's Cacophony, Arch Demonology, Eschatology, and Thermal Pollution. (EP, p. 318)

By submitting his life, Daniel may be saving it. His book can help him come to grips with the truth about himself and his past, and enable him to exorcise some of the venomous rage that killed his sister.

The very favorable book reviews that greeted Daniel suggest that this novel faces little danger of going out of print. Aaron L. Fessler called it "a magnificent achievement, not only as a work of fiction fecund in word and image, but as a stirring and provocative presentation of the feeling of dissent rampant in the country today. Everyone who reads it will be touched." According to Stanley Kaufman, Doctorow wrote "the political novel of our age, the best American work of its kind" in the last quarter century. Kaufman adds that "Daniel is beautiful and harrowing, rhapsodic and exact." Joseph Catinella wrote that "Doctorow is that rare American novelist who is completely serious about politics, at ease with larger abstractions, and capable of welding deeply human concerns with reverberant historical notes." Peter S. Prescott wrote that "every scene is perfectly realized and every part feeds into the whole - the themes and symbols echoing and reverberating..." Prescott called Daniel "a ferocious feat of the imagination," and added, "The year is not half spent, and a

better novel may yet appear, but I wouldn't wait for it."9

Jerome Charyn said that "the book does take hold of us and
force us to squint at ourselves because of its ability to energize
the wreckage of our own past."10 Joyce Carol Oates, writing in
the Detroit News, praised Daniel as

a nearly perfect work of art, a cause for rejoicing...
The tension that Doctorow builds up—and this work is
a kind of intellectual thriller—is sometimes nearly
unbearable. Daniel not only compels a reader to read it—
eagerly, fearfully, perhaps desperately—but to assimilate
its terrible wisdom into the reader's life, so that life
itself seems altered. I can think of no higher praise
for a work of fiction.

The Christian Science Monitor, warning the reader that Daniel may
be unpleasant to read, noted that "there is no gainsaying Mr.
Doctorow's talent. His book will not fade away like so many of
his contemporaries', with the end of the year. It is far too
brilliant for that." The Minneapolis Tribune extended the plaudit
that Daniel is the finest work of fiction in recent years...

Finally, the Chicago News! reviewer was moved to write, "Superb,
brilliant, horrifying, magnificent...sheer power.... It left me
dazed and drained!"

A decade before the appearance of Daniel, Philip Roth, in his
essay "Writing American Fiction," tried to explain the predicament
that he and other literary artists faced:

...the American writer in the middle of the twentieth
century has his hands full in trying to understand, and
then describe, and then make credible much of the Ameri-
can reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates,
and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's
own meager imagination. The actuality is continually
outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures

almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.\footnote{11} Of course Roth's own imagination is anything but meager, and it is to Doctorow's credit that he has, by his own "ferocious feat of the imagination," been able to construct a work of art, based on a bonafide cause célèbre, that perhaps should be the envy of any historian or journalist who has explored the same territory. If the American novelist now does indeed have a difficult time trying to make credible much of American reality, perhaps it is because, as Doctorow hopes to reveal, so much of it is truly incredible.

Ralph Ellison, in an essay discussing the writer's experience in the United States, wrote:

\begin{quote}
In Green Hills of Africa Ernest Hemingway reminds us that both Tolstoy and and Stendahl had seen war, that Flaubert had seen a revolution and the Commune, that Dostoeievsky had been sent to Siberia and that such experiences were important in shaping the art of these great masters. And he goes on to observe that "writers are forged in injustice as a sword is forged."\footnote{12}
\end{quote}

E.L. Doctorow lived through three wars and the Cold War, and the spectre of the injustices engendered by these events haunts Daniel. A reading of Daniel may not render the Cold War any less incredible, but it does help to illuminate its etiology, which will be explored in chapter two. The Cold War took the lives of Daniel's parents and his sister, and Daniel himself certainly has not escaped unscathed. The less obvious victims, Doctorow intimates, may number in the millions. Doctorow's novel is a vitriolic indictment of American society and its leaders. The Cold War is shown to be

\footnote{11. Klein, p. 144.}
not an aberration but a logical extension of American foreign policy. A novel that is highly critical of the dominant values of American society is hardly an aberration either. There has been a long and honored tradition of social protest writing in American literature, and before I begin the discussion of Doctorow's novel, I would like to examine this tradition in which he is writing.
It is perhaps an ironic feature of American literary history that social protest literature has had a long and respectable past, that society would find acceptable the kinds of criticism which frankly attempt to subvert the values of that society. ROBERT H. WOODWARD and JAMES J. CLARK

Journalists and teachers are often bullied or fired in my country— for saying this or that. But writers of novels and plays and short stories and poems have never been hurt or hampered much. They haven't even been noticed much by federal, state, or local governments, no matter how insolent or blasphemous or treasonous those writers may be. This has been going on now for nearly two hundred years. KURT VONNEGUT, JR.
Chapter I

The Radical American Tradition

That there is a radical tradition in American literature is quite incontrovertible. In the preface of their book The Social Rebel in American Literature Robert H. Woodward and James J. Clark write that

although American society is noted for the high degree of conformity that it imposes on its members and for the materialistic values that seem often to take precedence over the human ones, it is a significant fact that much of the serious literature of America has—since its beginnings been one of criticism, dissent, rebellion— a double-sided mirror that reflects not only social practices but also the underlying ideals and aspirations of America. The theme of social rebellion is a fundamental one—perhaps the fundamental one— in American literature.¹

Granville Hicks would concur. The tradition referred to by the title of his book The Great Tradition is that one which points out the flaws of American society. In 1969, in a new afterword to his book, Hicks had modified his position somewhat:

"This is the great tradition of American literature," I cried out. "Ours has been a critical literature, critical of greed, cowardness, and meanness. There is truth in the latter part of the statement, but I am not sure there is any one tradition, let alone a great one. The American writers past and present I most enjoy seem to me a mixed lot. But I do think that one value The Great Tradition has is as a record of the critical spirit in our literature; few American writers have been at peace with their society.²

Hicks' later stance seems to me more tenable; there is a great tradition of social protest writing in American literature. (It is beyond the scope of this paper to defend the idea that it is the great tradition.) Woodward and Clark explain further the critical tradition in American literature:

It has been observed of serious literature in general that one of its principal functions is to jar the complacency of the reader, to challenge him to reconsider his values and those of his society.... In American literature this feature of literature has been particularly pronounced. The American writer is frequently a writer in revolt, and though the particular attitudes or conventions against which he has revolted have changed through the course of American history, some of them have remained constant: social and political injustice, the hypocrisy stemming from puritanical assumptions about the nature of man, the excess of materialism, an awesome respect for the past. In more general terms, the rebellion...strikes a blow at the presiding status quo, or what has now become labeled the "Establishment."

What American writers have often noticed is the hiatus between the professed ideals of their society and its actual practices; they are disturbed by the frequency with which these ideals are either ignored or flouted. Many literary critics have also discussed this phenomenon. Daniel Aaron believes that

American literature, for all its affirmative spirit, is the most searching and unabashed criticism of our national limitations that exists, the product of 150 years of quarreling between the writer and his society. The social criticism of writers, both the open and the veiled kind, has usually come from an extreme sensitiveness to the disparity between ideals and practices, but it has also reflected the hostility of the artist to a world that slighted his needs and holds his values in contempt.

Ralph Ellison has also pointed out the lacuna between the ideals and practices, and like other observers he is well aware that this is not merely a recent occurrence. Rather,

the contradiction between these noble ideals (e.g. founding fathers' commitment to a system which would guarantee all of its citizens equality of opportunity) and the actualities of our conduct generated a guilt, an unease of spirit, from the very beginning, and... the American novel at its best has always been concerned with this basic moral predicament.5

It is only to be expected that a number of writers critical of American society should examine in their fiction the political situation that must bear considerable responsibility for the society's shortcomings. As Michael Millgate in his book American Social Fiction: James to Cozzens, notes,

American writers have repeatedly been worried, confused, or angered--rarely amused--by the irreconcilability of American ideals and American experience, and one result of this sense of the gulf between the way things should be and the way things are, has been a readiness to regard the novel as a political instrument.6

E.L. Doctorow is not as overtly political as say, Harriet Beecher Stowe in Uncle Tom's Cabin or Upton Sinclair in The Jungle, but The Book of Daniel is related to the tradition that Millgate cites. Of course many writers who have severely criticized American society have not viewed their art as political, and in many cases their art is not generally considered political. As Marius Bewley and others have pointed out, much American literature is very symbolic.7

It was not until the 1800s that American literature really flowered, and the writers of the nineteenth century did not take long to expose the deficiencies in the great American experiment. Daniel Aaron writes,

From its beginnings, American literature has been hortatory and didactic, a literature of "exposure," of the first person, and although the moral tone becomes less obvious and persistent after the mid-nineteenth century, it never disappears. The didactic note sounds not only in the angry "protest" novels that have periodically aroused a lethargic public since the days of Uncle Tom's Cabin, but also in the less evangelical and more truly dangerous novels like Huckleberry Finn where the moral burden is masked in genial humor.

If Aaron is correct in asserting that the moral tone becomes less obvious and persistent after the middle of the nineteenth century, Doctorow has done his part to foster its recrudescence. Ralph Ellison, writing about The Red Badge of Courage, avers that its style, which no longer speaks in terms of the traditional American rhetoric, implies a deep skepticism as to the possibility of the old American ideals being revived by a people which has failed to live up to them after having paid so much to defend them in hardship and blood.

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society may, in fact, give us a much more significant revelation of social forces, on a much deeper psychic level, than is provided by those realistic writers who deliberately set out to describe and interpret the society of their time. The important American writers of the pre-Civil War period, particularly Melville, wrote symbolically, and not realistically, without conscious awareness of the social implications of their work. But since they were deeply American, in the quality of their emotional experience as well as in their conscious beliefs, their work had a profound social significance. They gave expression to attitudes that were true not only of themselves but of all Americans. (p. 192).

8. Aaron, p. 20.
Perhaps it is this skepticism that is partly responsible for what Marius Bewley refers to as "those strangely nihilistic glooms that sometimes darken the pages of America's great novelists."\(^{10}\)

"The conviction that injustice and vulgarity grew stronger during the nineteenth century," writes Irving Howe, "is shared by many of our writers— a conviction, finally, that an America is being created which frustrates both the dream of a new Eden and the idea of a democracy resting upon sturdy, independent citizens."\(^{11}\) This is a conviction that has not waned in the writers of the twentieth century, Ellison's statement notwithstanding:

> Perhaps the discomfort about protest in books by Negro authors comes because since the nineteenth century American literature has avoided profound moral searching. It was too painful and besides there were specific problems of language and form to which the writers could address themselves. They did wonderful things, but perhaps they left the real problems untouched.\(^{12}\)

Ellison adds that there are exceptions (e.g. Faulkner) who have continued to pursue the moral themes that Twain worked on. I submit that there are so many "exceptions" that we can say that the profound moral searching has not abated in twentieth-century American literature. In 1959 John F. Sisk, in his essay "Beatniks and Tradition," maintained that "it is in our own century that the subversive tradition has proliferated. For nearly two generations now the American writer has been distinguished by his dissatisfaction with the shape and aims of society..."\(^{13}\)

13. Woodward-Clark, p. 95.
goes on to catalogue some of these writers and their specific dissatisfactions:

...Dreiser's remorseless realism counters the daydream of an acquisitive paradise; Mencken's irreverent mockery counters the stultification that comes from worshipping false gods; Wolfe's restless, romantic search for the meaning of America counters the naive and dangerous clarity with which a business society tries to define America... Salinger's and Capote's sentimental sympathy for the misfit and the outcast counters the callousness that goes with conformity and respectability... Miller's and Kerouac's irrationalism counters the positivism of a society huddled desperately around its nuclear experts.  

There have been many others. Walter B. Rideout notes the consensus among post-World War One writers that the dominant values of their culture are quite intolerable:

...the literature of the 20's, taken as a whole, is permeated with a sense of antagonism toward contemporary society, particularly as that society manifested qualities considered to be "bourgeois." ... the antonym of "bourgeois" was not "worker," but "artist," and the remedy that these writers offered was less frequently to do battle than to make individual escape to Greenwich Village, Paris... to the Left Bank and not the Left Wing. Nevertheless, with an astonishing unanimity postwar writers of any consequence opposed what they conceived to be the dominant class in their society.

Rideout adds that if the writers of the 20's "rather enjoyed viewing themselves as a 'Lost Generation,' they as frequently felt that, like the story of the Indian in the woods; what was lost was actually the camp rather than the hunter; the society rather than the writer." Henry Steele Commager also notes that profound moral searching by American writers has continued long past the end of the 19th century:

...the facts are incontrovertible. From the mid-80's to the second World War the literary protest paralleled the political, and both were directed toward the economic malaise. The parallel was so close as to suggest subservience, yet we know that literature was not only an echo but often— as with The Jungle—a trumpet and an alarm. 17

And Commager is also quite correct in pointing out that it is the economic malaise, or the crass materialism and commercialism of the business civilization, that is most frequently attacked by the estranged American writer.

Woodward and Clark support Commager's position. They write that

the frontier of activity for the activist rebel naturally has changed with the times, but the favorite target for the most sustained and stubborn attacks has been the country's economic structure as it has been interpreted and practiced in the United States. Since the days of James Fenimore Cooper there has been opposition to commercial attitudes and common ethical practices in business... 18

With the growth of the Guilded Age, Commager contends, this opposition continued and even intensified:

American society of Veblen's generation may have been habituated to money standards, but it found few literary spokesmen to justify those standards or even to explain them. Who, in the half-century from Cleveland to Franklin Roosevelt, celebrated business enterprise or the acquisitive society...? Almost all the major writers were critical of those standards, or contemptuous of them... 19

American writers during the decades after Roosevelt have not relented.

During the 1930s it was fashionable for writers to vituperate

18. Woodward-Clark, p. 4.
the economic system, but before the Great Depression officially arrived the literary artists had to have the courage to attack what was almost universally lionized:

In the mid-twenties a distinguished historian described American civilization as "almost wholly a businessman's civilization." ... The advertisers, the radio, the movies, popular journals and newspapers, even churchmen, hastened to welcome the "new era," and colleges and universities were zealous to confer their honorary degrees upon corporation lawyers and stock-brokers. A chorus of praise for what was now, in despite of Jefferson, called the American system ascended the skies. No major novelist joined in the chorus: the novelists remained unreconciled and unregenerate. 20

In Daniel Doctorow shows how American foreign policy is inextricably linked to the preservation of free enterprise as it has traditionally been interpreted and practiced in the United States. American foreign policy decisions can be most smoothly implemented if the public comes to view them as sacrosanct and necessary. Therefore those who challenge official United States foreign policy decisions or the free enterprise system which largely determines them are ipso facto traitors, in collusion with satanic forces of foreign countries. Since the system itself is presented as basically inviolable, any serious flaws detected in it must be caused by the insidious collaboration of foreign agents. (This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.)

Henry Steele Commager finds it difficult to fathom why American writers should find the dominant culture and its economic system so repugnant:

Never before in American literature and rarely in the literature of any country had the major writers been so sharply estranged from the society which nourished them and the economy which sustained them as during the half-century between The Rise of Silas Lapham and Grapes of Wrath. The explanation is elusive.21

In 1951 John Aldridge, in his essay "The Search for Values," offers a possible explanation. He wrote, "It seems to me that the best literature in America will continue to be negative so long as the country's values are such that no writer of honesty or insight can possibly take them seriously."22 It is now time to turn to Daniel for a look at these values as they are scrutinized by one writer of honesty and insight.

22. Klein, p. 47.
When a nation is in confusion and disorder patriots are recognized. R.D. LAING

We must be very careful of our selective blindness. The Germans reared children to regard it as their duty to exterminate the Jews, adore their leader, and to kill and die for the Fatherland. The majority of my own generation did not or do not regard it as stark raving mad to feel it better to be dead than red. None of us, I take it, has lost too many hours sleep over the threat of imminent annihilation of the human race and our responsibility for this state of affairs. R.D. LAING

As for the future, that they [Gudrun and Loerke] never mentioned except one laughed out some mocking dream of the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of man's invention: a man invented such a perfect explosive that it blew the earth in two... or else the people of the world divided into two halves, and each half decided it was perfect and right, the other half was wrong and must be destroyed; so another end to the world. D.H. LAWRENCE
Chapter II
The Literary Artist as Social Critic

Rosalie L. Colie, in her essay "Literature and History," claims that "it is idle to try to comprehend much of Brecht's, or Malraux's, or Sartre's work without knowing something of political history, both as the 'background' of which literary students so maddenly speak, and as the foreground and setting of the texts themselves."¹ This is especially true of The Book of Daniel. Although I eventually hope to illustrate that Daniel transcends the limitations of many political novels, it is very much a political novel. One of the major themes pervading Daniel is the American attitude toward "communism." In the final analysis Paul and Rochelle Isaacson undoubtedly could not have been executed if the American public had not become convinced that they were communists. Exploring this theme of anti-communism (which can be seen as a reflection of America's xenophobia), Doctorow tells us some things about "communists" and much about ourselves.

It might be instructive to begin by having a look at how Americans tend to view themselves and their country. Sherwood Anderson, in A Story Teller's Story, wrote that in America something went wrong in the beginning. We pretended to so much and were going to do great things here. This vast land was to be a refuge for all the outlawed brave foolish folk of the world. The declaration of the rights of man was to have a new hearing in a new place. The devil!

We did get ourselves into a bad hole. We were going to be superhuman and it turned out we were the sons of men who were not such devilish fellows after all. You cannot blame us that we are somewhat reluctant about finding out the very human things concerning ourselves. One does hate to come down off the perch. 2

Perhaps the great American experiment began to be measured not against the past experiments of other nations, with which of course it would often compare very favorably, but against some noble ideal that would be quite impossible to attain. When this ideal could not be brought into fruition, there was reluctance to view the failure as a sign of human limitation, or our own weaknesses and mistakes. Rather, our difficulties would come to be projected outward; we blamed the malevolent interference of other nations. The first "red scare" in the United States occurred shortly after the end of World War I, as Doctorow discusses in detail:

On the labor front in 1919 there was an unprecedented number of strikes involving many millions of workers. One of the larger strikes was mounted by the A.F. of L. against the United States Steel Corporation. At that time workers in the steel industry put in an average sixty-eight-hour week for bare subsistence wages.... By branding the strikers Bolsheviks and thereby separating them from their public support, the Corporation broke the strike.... May Day parades in the big cities were attacked by policemen, and soldiers and sailors. Laws against seditious speech were passed in State Legislatures across the country and thousands of people were jailed, including a Socialist Congressman from Milwaukee who was sentenced to twenty years in prison. To say nothing of the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 which took care of thousands more. (BD, p. 34)

These are just a few of the incidents that Doctorow catalogues.

A bit earlier, in a section of Daniel called "An Interesting Phenomenon," Doctorow related what many historians have noted, viz. that the years immediately after a war in America see a

2. Woodward-Clark, p. 168.
waning of the national unity necessary for fighting the war, and a waxing of fierce partisanship:

In the greater arena of social relations—business, labor, the community—violence rises, fear and recrimination dominate public discussion, passion prevails over reason. ... It is attributed to the continuance beyond the end of the war of the war hysteria. Unfortunately, the necessary emotional fever for fighting a war cannot be turned off like a water faucet. Enemies must continue to be found. The mind and heart cannot be demobilized as quickly as the platoon. On the contrary, like a fiery furnace at white heat, it takes a considerable time to cool. (RD, p. 33)

The parallels in American life after World War I and World War II are striking, Doctorow is careful to point out. Because the American public did not really learn from the first tragedy, countless individuals had to suffer from the second one. Paul and Rochelle Isaacson were merely the most obvious victims.

At the Isaacsons' trial the prosecution went to great lengths to link the defendants to communism or communist activity. To increase our understanding of why this strategy was so successful, we should first look at just how hysterical the American public had become over the "red menace." Daniel, as a young child, was taken by his parents to see a Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill, New York. It was an episode that would become indelibly etched in Daniel's memory:

In Peekskill, I see men standing on the road shouting and waving their fists. There is a line of police holding them back. "Go home kikes!" someone yells at our bus. I hear the sound of military music...an American Legion Band...[is] parading to protest the concert. (RD, p. 59)

The worst was yet to come:

Kike. Nigger-lover. Red. Jew Bastard. These words are shouted. The rocks, some of them as big as my head, are propelled by the motives of education. "We'll teach you!" the enraged voices cry. "This will teach you, you commie bastard kikes." (BD, p. 61)

Robeson, a proud black communist, was supposed to have performed a week earlier, but a local mob blocked the approaches, burned up the camp chairs, and also attacked the audience. Federal troops were called in for Robeson's second attempt. Still, Paul Isaacson suffered a severe beating.

Lawyer Jake Ascher, then, was fully aware of the odds against him when he agreed to defend the Isaacsons:

...this was a bad time in history for anyone whom the law turned its eye on who was a Red, or a "progressive" as Communists had come to characterize themselves.... The Democrats under Harry Truman competed with the Republicans in Congress to see who could be rougher on the Left. People were losing their jobs and their careers for things they said or appeals they had supported fifteen years before. People were accused, investigated and fired from their jobs without knowing what the charges were, or who made them. People were blacklisted in their professions.... The fear of Communists taking over the PTA and Community Chest affected the lives of ordinary people in ordinary towns.... there was an internal security bill providing concentration camps for anyone who might be expected to commit espionage. (BD, p. 132, emphasis mine)

Ascher told these things to Rochelle as if she did not know.

Walter and Miriam Schneir augment Ascher's observations:

[In 1950] Time reported that in Detroit the common council had forbade sidewalk news vendors to sell "subversive literature"; in Columbus, Ohio, police juvenile officers warned teen-age clubs to be suspicious of "any new member of a group whose background is not an open book"; in McKeesport, Pa., the city council was readying an ordinance requiring registration of "anyone who engages in activities destined to promote the principles of Communism"; in Houston, Texas, a marauding gang had hurled rocks at the apartment of the state secretary of the Communist Party; in Birmingham, Alabama, a new ordinance banished from the city "anyone caught talking to a Communist in a 'non-public place,' or anyone who passed out literature that could be traced, even remotely, to a Communist hand." Pictured on the same page
with a photo of Julius Rosenberg was one showing members of an impromptu Los Angeles "Crusade Against Communism" beating up surprised workers outside the gates of a local industrial plant. 3

In his novel 1919 John Dos Passos quotes William Howard Taft at a victory celebration: "We've been at war with the devil and it was worth all the suffering it entailed." 4 After World War II there was a concerted effort by American leaders to ensure that when Russia was mentioned satanic visions would again be conjured up. Although the Soviets suffered considerable devastation during World War II, Doctorow writes that "Russia has had the effrontery not to collapse. We are faced with an international atheistic Communist conspiracy of satanic dimension. Which side are you on?" (BD, p. 254) At this time the United States not only had the bomb but also a clear military advantage over the Soviets. However, there is abundant evidence that the United States made little effort to cooperate with Russia after the war ended. Doctorow documents Harold Stimson's efforts to prevent an exacerbation of Cold War tensions, that would stimulate an arms race which would soon pass the point of absurdity:

[Stimson] wants to negotiate a treaty directly with Russia whereby we would impound our bombs, cease their development provided she (and Britain too) would do the same, and that the three nations would agree not to use the bomb unless all three decided on that use. The idea is to cede a military edge that he thinks is temporary anyway to strike an international bargain that has some chance of being kept and saving civilization— not for five years, or twenty years, but forever.... Of Stimson the suspicion leaks through that he has lost his usefulness to us. Instead of thinking of our interests he's thinking of humanity. Let him get Joe Stalin to think of humanity.

To confirm how wrong Stimson is, the Russians themselves

propose at the UN a treaty close to the Stimson model. (BP, p. 259)

Doctorow's analysis is corroborated by historian William A. Williams. Williams notes that Secretary of State Byrnes "was very much against any attempt to cooperate with Russia."5

When the United States began work to develop the atomic bomb, the ostensible purpose of the tight security precautions was to prevent the Germans from learning about the project. The major concern, however, was to make certain that the Russians remained oblivious to the development of this new weapon:

Army intelligence spent considerable time minutely observing any scientists who might be sympathetic to the Soviet Union, and, on occasion, excluding from the project. General [Leslie R.] Groves's feelings about the Soviet Union were frank and clear-cut: "...there was never from about two weeks from the time I took charge of this project," he has recalled, "any illusion of my part but that Russia was our enemy and that the project was conducted on that basis. I didn't go along with the attitude of the country as a whole that Russia was a gallant ally."6

Even though our best scientists made it very clear that Russia, unaided, could develop their bomb within five years or less after we had ours, Groves testified that it would take the Soviets twenty years.'7 Robert Lewin, Daniel Isaacson's foster father, told him that "it was customary to downgrade the Russians' science. People who know something about these things didn't make that mistake. But at the level of Time magazine7 the joke was how they copied everything and claimed it for their own." (BP, p. 238)

7. In The Armies of the Night, Mailer begins his book by quoting a short excerpt from Time about his activities on the Pentagon March. Mailer then writes, "Now we may leave Time in order to find out what really happened."
Our scientists did not make the error of underrating Russian technology, but their voices were drowned out by the clamor of politicians and the military, servilely communicated by the media. So when Russia explodes their bomb in 1949 the American public is shocked.

Doctorow also claims that the American public has misconstrued what occurred at the Yalta Conference:

There is no evidence that even before the end of the war against Germany and Japan a policy of coexistence with the Russians is seriously considered, let alone put to the test. The false popular view of Yalta, the profound confusion of diplomacy with appeasement, Diplomacy in the formulation of Truman, Byrnes and Vandenberg is seen not as a means to create conditions of peaceful postwar detente with the Soviets, but as a means of jamming an American world down Russia's throat. (RD, p. 251)

When the Russians are reluctant to swallow, the American people must be warned of their satanic recalcitrance:

...Truman repeatedly blamed all the troubles of the world on the Soviet Union, and American leaders in and out of government "bombarded the American people with a 'hate the enemy' campaign rarely seen in our history; never, certainly, in peace time." 8

For one young congressman, however, Truman's admonitions are not forceful enough; the New York Journal-American wrote that

Representative Nixon...said today Russia's atomic know-how was "hastened" by the Truman Administration's failure to act against Red spies in the United States.

"If the President says the American people are entitled to know all the facts- I feel the American people are also entitled to know the facts about the espionage ring which was responsible for turning over information on the atom bomb to agents of the Russian government," said Nixon. 9

The Schneir explain Nixon's predilection to attribute any historical occurrences which happen to be unfavorable to the interests of the United States to the treachery of "traitors" like Alger Hiss:

...when Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury, Richard M. Nixon inferred that the former second-echelon State Department official had been the cause of vast changes in the political complexion of the world. Nixon told the House of Representatives:

"Five years ago, at the time of the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944, when Alger Hiss served as director of our secretariat, the number of people in the world in the Soviet orbit was 180,000,000. ... in 1944, before Dumbarton Oaks, Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, the odds were 9 to 1 in our favor. Today, since those conferences, the odds are 5 to 3 against us." 10

The Schneirs elaborate, explaining how terribly simplistic such reasoning is:

Complex happenings, like the Soviet development of the atomic bomb or even the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, were attributed to the malfeasance or perfidy of individuals in the State Department or Democratic party. The assumption underlying this thinking was, apparently, that all history was made and manipulated in the United States; the other 94 per cent of the planet's population did not exist. It was not necessary to formulate policy skillfully so as to deal successfully with a fast-changing world; all that was required was to "clean out the traitors in our midst." Many gave up the difficult search for sensible answers and spent their energies running with the pack in the hunt for scapegoats. 11

Periodically the government even kills some of these scapegoats, but often they are the ones that live on more powerfully than ever. (I will say more about this later.)

Since there were really no important atomic "secrets" to be stolen, why was the American public so willing to believe that there were? The cumulative influence of several years of bombardment from the media must be underscored, and of course there was simple ignorance of basic scientific facts. The Schneirs suggest other possible reasons, including

a pervasive fear of atomic attack on the United States,

10. Schneirs, p. 56.
11. Schneirs, p. 56.
perhaps sown by American guilt over the deaths of so many thousands of civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then too, the political pendulum in the United States after the war swung rather rapidly away from the left-of-center New Deal toward the right. Conservative politicians soon discovered... that charges of laxness regarding atomic security were a convenient club with which to beat the opposition.\footnote{12}

As is well known, the infamous career of Joseph McCarthy owed its success largely to his effective wielding of the cudgel of communism. That this \textit{extreme} fear of communism engendered by McCarthy and his cohorts had no basis in reality has been confirmed even by General Douglas MacArthur, who confessed that our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor with the cry of grave national emergency.... Yet, in retrospect, these disasters seem never to have happened, seem never to have been quite real.\footnote{15}

Again, there is overwhelming evidence that the American public was manipulated by those in power.

One day little Susan Isaacson told another little girl who lived in their lower middle class tenement neighborhood that her parents were in jail. Doctorow tells us that this situation sparked incidents, like the day when someone's older brother was reporting missing in Korea. Daniel does not elaborate—there really is no need to. The Rosenberg children were familiar with this situation. One of the sons of the Rosenbergs recalls an anonymous postcard he received sometime after his parents were executed. It said: "Of course you feel for the loss of your parents, but when you think of all the boys they killed in Korea, you should realize that they deserved to die. Why don't you change

\footnote{12} Schneirs, p. 38.  
\footnote{13} Williams, p. 273.
your names and become Christians."

Daniel Isaacson was told by his classmates at school,

that in prison they pull your fingernails out with a pliers, and they chain you to the wall, and it's always dark, and the rats eat you, and that you have only bread and water to eat, and the bread has worms. I was told that the army had already shot my father because he was a Russian. I was told that General MacArthur flew all the way from Japan to cut off my father's prick with a scissors. (BD, p. 140)

When the mother of a friend of one of the Rosenbergs' children found out who their parents were, she told her son, "That's the last of your Communist friend." The young Rosenberg was then warned, "Don't let me catch you hanging around Lawrence again." The sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children.

What we have, then, is "us" versus "them." Doctorow laments that "from the beginning, once we had that bomb, there was something as inevitable as a self-fulfilling prophecy about the kind of postwar world in which we found ourselves." This inevitability, however, was largely determined long before we developed our bomb; the extreme anti-communism of the Cold War is not really an aberration, but merely an intensification of a mindset that had existed for decades. Long before the bomb, Americans had come to believe that the American way was the only way. Here is Dean Acheson, in an unusually frank admission, explaining and defending the American foreign aid program as it was developing after World War II: "We are willing to help people who believe the way we do, to continue to live the way they want to live."17

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15. Meeropol, p. 112.
Norman Mailer points out that this same mentality could be seen in those extraordinary World War II years when the Wasp admirals, generals, statesmen, legislators, editors, and corporation presidents had whispered to each other that the next war was going to be Christianity vs. Communism...

In Daniel this attitude was also shared by Aunt Frieda. Rather than extending any compassion for her indicted brother, she revealed that she had wholly internalized the Cold War hysteria: "And Paul—can there be a greater tragedy? To turn into a Red. My Pauly, a Communist! And you know there was no more religious man than my father." (RD, p. 158) Carl Jung elaborates on this proclivity to deny evil in ourselves and project it onto "them"; we remain oblivious to that megalomania of ours which leads us to suppose among other things, that Christianity is the only truth and the white Christ the only redeemer. After setting the whole East in turmoil with our science and technology, and exacting tribute from it, we send our missionaries even to China. The comedy of Christianity in Africa is really pitiful. There the stamping out of polygamy, no doubt highly pleasing to God, has given rise to prostitution on such a scale that in Uganda alone 20,000 pounds are spent annually on preventatives of venereal infection. And the good European pays his missionaries for these edifying achievements!19

And so does the good American. William Faulkner has also commented on Americans' blindness to evil within and near them:

...a man right here in Jefferson made a lot of money selling rotten goods to niggers... About four or five years ago he was taken sick. Scared the hell out of him so that when he was up again he joined the church and bought himself a Chinese missionary, $5,000 a year.20

Herman Melville has also written of this phenomenon; Queequeg explained to Ishmael that man's propensity for evil eschewed no racial, national or religious boundaries. Queequeg expressed that he was actuated by a profound desire to learn among the Christians the arts whereby to make his people still happier than they were. But, alas! the practices of whalemens soon convinced him that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father's heathens.... Thought he, it's a wicked world in all meridians; I'll die a pagan.21

Finally, Mailer's illustration of to just what absurd lengths American anti-communism has reached would be more hilarious if less true. Before addressing a crowd at the anti-war march to the Pentagon in 1967, Mailer had an experience he felt important enough to share with the audience:

...I went upstairs to the men's room as a prelude to beginning this oratory...and it was dark, so-ahem-I missed the bowl-all men will know what I mean. Forgiveness might reign. But tomorrow, they will blame that puddle of water on Communists which is the way we do things here in Amurrica...22

One rather naive American visitor in Russia, earlier in this century, claimed, "I have seen the future and it works."

Doctorow, of course, does not share this observation. His novel is anything but a paean to the Russian political experiment. It is the task of writers like Solzhenitsyn to give artistic expression to the failures in the Russian system. Doctorow helps us to understand our own. Daniel also should help us to recognize the tragic consequences of our refusal to recognize our own shadow, and the fatuity of dichotomizing the world into good guys and bad guys, and the greater fatuity of appointing

ourselves the savior of those who have not had the good fortune of being able to experience "the American way."

Doctorow not only limns the pervasive American anti-communism that occasionally flares up to hysteria, but also analyzes why political and military leaders feel behooved to relentlessly remind the American public of the perils of the red menace.

"In 1949, the year the Russians got the bomb," writes Doctorow, C.G. Jung spun three coins and asked the I Ching, a book of ancient Chinese prophecy, what it thought its reception would be in the United States. The I Ching was just about to be published in the United States and nobody here besides Jung and a few Sinologists knew much about it. The I Ching answered that it thought it would make its way very nicely. (BD, p. 284)

To allow the I Ching's prognostication to be true, American political and military leaders realized, would be to squander a major opportunity to inflame the red scare. Of course this opportunity was quickly seized. Even though Russia was never considered a serious military threat to the United States, it was imperative that the American public be led to believe otherwise.

Doctorow writes:

A Congressional Committee in 1947 reports on the unprecedented volume of anti-Soviet propaganda coming out of the U.S. Government. It turns out to be absolutely necessary. On the one hand America considers itself the strongest nation, the first and only nuclear nation, the wealthiest, the most powerful nation in the world. On the other hand it must live in fear of the Russian. Secretary of State Acheson will testify some years afterward that never in the counsels of the Truman cabinet did anyone seriously regard Russia as a military threat— even after they got their bomb. Bipartisan Senator-Statesman Vandenberg tells how the trick is done: "We've got to scare hell out of the American people," he says. (BD, p. 253)

23. Michael Meeropol, in We Are Your Sons, comments, "...though the Rosenberg family believed in Julius and Ethel's innocence,
Henry Wallace knew why. On August 12, 1946,

Wallace charged the Un-American Activities Committee with "political gangsterism and tyranny." Behind its patriotic smokescreen, he said, were "the international capitalists and the munitions makers whose profits go up and down precisely with the degree of international crises that can be whipped up— with the amount of Red scare which can be engendered for the purpose of adding the brains of the American public." 24

When it would be announced that United States troops were being sent into Korea, the American public would be ready. The politicians, with the press as their accomplice, effectively prepared the American people for another war. James Aronson explains just how effectively this was done:

The National Opinion Research Center, in response to the question whether the American public expected a new world war within 25 years, reported the following results: at the end of 1945, the affirmative answer was 52 per cent; end of 1946, 41 per cent; end of 1947, 65 per cent. By March 1948...73 per cent believed a third world war was inevitable. [D.F. Fleming] concluded in The Cold War and Its Origins: "The conversion to a war mentality was already well along.... Throughout this period most of the press continued to fan the war fever." 25

The role of the press in exacerbating Cold War tensions cannot be minimized, as I will explain in the next chapter.

At the funeral of Daniel’s grandmother a man (for whom Daniel expressed his dislike) told Paul Isaacson that

...things will get worse before they get better— the deportations, the contempt proceedings, the blacklists, the jailings— it is all part of the Wall Street conspiracy, it is a reflex of capitalist imperialism trying to shore up its rotting founda-

activity in their behalf, especially taking care of their children, terrified them." (p. 25)


tions. That is the whole purpose of the so-called "cold war." That is the whole purpose of our foreign policy since the death of Roosevelt. American capitalism conceives, quite correctly, that it can only survive in opposition to socialist democracy; that is the real meaning of the Truman Doctrine. (BD, p. 98)

Obviously, the Truman Doctrine must be presented to the American public in a more covert, and palatable, form. So there is a warning that if the spread of communism is not halted, all of the freedoms that Americans hold precious, e.g., freedom of speech and worship, will be expunged. In fact, shortly before the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine, Truman himself said that the United States was "the giant of the economic world" and would therefore "determine the future pattern of economic relations." The pattern was "free private enterprise" which, the President suggested, was the precondition for freedom of speech and worship. Six days later came the [Truman] Doctrine. It was, in effect, a declaration of war, not only against the socialist world which offered no military threat, but also against the people of non-Communist Europe who were demanding liberation from their own politically and economically repressive governments, and who were increasingly looking eastward to socialism, for alternatives. Thus "free private enterprise" was seen threatened by people who had already seized control of production (in Eastern Europe), and by people who were angry at being exploited by economic overlords (in Western Europe and increasingly in Asia). 26

This analysis is corroborated by a State Department Bulletin (XII), which states that

"free enterprise cannot be confined within even our wide borders and continue to exist. The destruction of free enterprise abroad like the destruction of democracy abroad is a threat to free enterprise and democracy at home."... It was argued that "the world was perilously balanced between those who favored state controls on international trade and those who wanted to restore international trade liberation." 27

Worried about another depression, American leaders in the years after World War II based their foreign policy decisions on

26. Aronson, p. 35.
27. Meeropol, p. 370n.
the assumption that only by extending foreign markets could capitalism continue to function effectively. Doctorow, citing the analysis of historian William A. Williams, notes that this has been the traditional American solution; the State Department calls this policy the Open Door. In *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* Williams elaborates:

> Based on the assumption of what Brooks Adams called "America's economic supremacy," the policy of the open door was designed to clear the way and establish the conditions under which America's preponderant economic power would extend the American system throughout the world without the embarrassment and inefficiency of traditional colonialism.\(^{28}\)

At this point it should be stressed that although the American public was led to believe that Russia's acquisition of the a-bomb was the crucial issue, American leaders were really worried about something else. Williams again:

> ...the open-door outlook was based on an economic definition of the world, and this explanation of reality was persistently stressed by America's corporate leadership as it developed its policy toward the Soviet Union and other nations. It was not the possession of the atomic bomb which prompted American leaders to get tough with Russia but rather their open-door outlook which interpreted the bomb as the final guarantee that they could go further faster down the path to world predominance.\(^{29}\)

The Truman Doctrine, like the Marshall Plan, asserts Doctorow, is really designed to ensure that America's traditional open-door expansion is not thwarted:

> The Truman Doctrine will not be announced as a policy of providing military security for the foreign governments who accept our investments, but as a means of protecting freedom-loving nations from Communism. The Marshall Plan will be advertised not as a way of

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28. Williams, p. 50.
29. Williams, p. 229.
ensuring markets abroad for American goods but as a means of helping the countries of Europe recover from the war. (BD, p. 254)

Howard Zinn notes the continuity in American thinking:

America's "open door" policy was similar to that under William McKinley at the turn of the century, a policy of pretending to want nothing but fairness for all while being intensely concerned with American economic access to regions formerly controlled by older empires.30

It would, of course, be incorrect to claim that all foreign aid given by the United States (e.g. in the Marshall Plan) is totally devoid of humanitarian sentiment, but Marshall himself explained what often seems to be the paramount motive:

Unless the [Marshall] plan was adopted, he [Marshall] asserted, "the cumulative loss of foreign markets and sources of supply would unquestionably have a depressing influence on our domestic economy and would drive us to increased measures of government control." By thus defining America's expansion as the key to prosperity, Marshall defined foreign policy as the key to domestic problems and to the survival of democracy at home.31

As Williams points out, it is a mistake to assume that there is a basic difference between the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. In the final analysis the key issue is to prevent increased governmental control of the United States' economy; the Cold War and an expeditious acceleration of the arms race are not seen as too high a price to pay.

In Joseph Conrad's novel Nostromo Charles Gould explains what is needed for the development of one Latin American country.

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security... I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the

31. Williams, p. 271.
material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. 32

Charles Gould, his wife explained, could not exist if he did not idealize every simple feeling, desire or achievement. Because he owned mines of silver, the "incorruptible metal," Gould was certain that his wealth would in time make the Republic of Costaguana a much more civilized country. But the silver mines did not do a great deal to eliminate the country's corruption and poverty. Those who benefited from the "material interests" were the owners of the mines and those who helped to finance them, like the American capitalist Holroyd. Near the end of the novel Dr. Monyham confirms what Conrad has so successfully dramatized for the reader, that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. ...the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty and misrule of a few years back. 33

The makers of American foreign policy are among those who have failed to heed the warning of Nostromo, rejecting its wisdom. Williams explains that the tragedy of American diplomacy "is not that it is evil, but that it denies and subverts American ideas and ideals." He adds that "the Open Door Policy has failed because, while it has built an American empire, it has not initiated and sustained the balanced and equitable development of the areas into which America expanded." 34 The self-interest

33. Conrad, p. 419.
34. Williams, p. 291.
factor in the building of the American empire remains to be acknowledged by American leaders. When these material interests have met with failure, it is never conceded that the flaw might be in the original idea. Rather than looking inward, American leaders, like Truman, have found it easier to blame all the world's problems on Russia. As Doctorow points out, when Churchill delivered his famous 1946 "iron curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri, Truman applauded vigorously. Perhaps he should have reflected on what this unnatural bifurcation of the world really means:

...mankind is now threatened by self-created and deadly dangers that are growing beyond our control. Our world is, so to speak, dissociated like a neurotic, with the Iron Curtain marking the symbolic line of division. Western man, becoming aware of the aggressive will to power of the East, sees himself forced to take extraordinary measures of defense, at the same time as he prides himself on his virtue and good intentions. What he fails to see is that it is his own vices, which he has covered up by good international manners, that are thrown back in his face by the communist world, shamelessly and methodically. What the West has tolerated, but secretly and with a slight sense of shame (the diplomatic lie, systematic deception, veiled threats), comes back into the open and in full measure from the East and ties us up in neurotic knots. It is the face of his own evil shadow that grins at Western man from the other side of the Iron Curtain.

To acknowledge this shadow would lead to a serious reexamination of our real strategies and motivations. Apparently it is much easier to cloak our true desires with the august ideal of stopping the spread of communism. In his novel 1919 Dos Passos wrote, "...at the Harvard Club they're all in the Intelligence Service

making the world safe for the Morgan-Baker-Stillman combination of banks." Dos Passos later added that "if you objected to making the world safe for cost plus democracy you went to jail with Debs." 37 Joseph Freeman, in *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics*, also challenged the official pronouncements for American expansion; he told his father,

> The appetite for money feeds on itself. You get ten thousand and want twenty- you get twenty and want fifty. Look at all your friends hysterically piling up their dunghills of gold. That's Business for you. Then when you get to the top, like the Morgans and Rockefellers, and own the country, you go abroad and pile up more in colonies- and fight for the money of the world. You make wars and kill millions of people for your profit. 38

Sufficient foreign markets, then, are seen by America's leaders as a *sine qua non* for the survival of capitalism as it has been traditionally interpreted and practiced in the United States. Alternatives to the open door policy are not seriously considered. Decisions that determine both foreign and domestic policy are made by a power elite, which secures the necessary funds for its operations by convincing the American public that everything they hold sacred is being inexorably threatened by "an international atheistic communist conspiracy of satanic dimensions."

Like the open door policy, the Cold War has been defined in different ways by different people. Doctorow suggests that "we may tentatively define Cold War as a condition of insipid bomb-falling hostility by which the United States proposed to apply such pressure upon Soviet Russia that its government would collapse and the power of the Bolsheviks be destroyed." (BD, p. 248) Doctorow also discusses the role of the bomb in America's postwar

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37. 1919, p. 211.
38. Woodward-Clark, p. 266.
foreign policy:

After the war our whole foreign policy depended on our having the bomb and the Soviets not having it. It was a terrible miscalculation. It militarized the world. And when they got it the only alternative to admitting our bankruptcy of leadership and national vision was to find conspiracies. It was one or the other. (BD, P. 238)

We know that leaders of nations are not usually very fond of promulgating a bankruptcy of leadership. Had American leaders listened to the arguments of Harry Stimson, they might have saved themselves the trouble of locating conspirators. It is well known that Stimson, Doctorow informs us, "believed that the diplomatic use of a temporary bomb monopoly to ultimately change conditions in Soviet Russia was a terrible miscalculation that would lead to disaster." (BD, p. 249) Doctorow devotes several pages of Daniel to a section entitled True History of the Cold War: A Saga, where he presents Stimson's admonitions:

"If we fail to approach them now but merely continue to negotiate with them having this weapon ostentatiously on our hip, their suspicions and their distrust of our purposes and motives will increase... Unless the Soviets are voluntarily invited into the partnership upon a basis of cooperation and trust, we are going to maintain the Anglo-Saxon block over against the Soviet in the possession of this weapon. Such a condition will almost certainly stimulate feverish activity on the part of the Soviet toward the development of this bomb in what will in effect be a secret armament race of a rather desperate character. There is evidence to indicate that such activity may have already commenced." Harry, listen to me. This is a moment for remaking the world. (BD, p. 249)

Harry, of course, did not listen. Nor did he listen when, several months before Stimson's memo, the Franck Report of seven Chicago scientists who served on the Metallurgical Laboratory's Committee on Social and Political Implications of Atomic Energy
emphasized that atomic weapons could not possibly remain
an exclusive American monopoly for more than a few years,
that the United States with its heavy concentrations of
industry was particularly vulnerable to atomic warfare,
and that an unannounced atomic attack on Japan would trigger
an atomic armaments race and lessen the likelihood of a
postwar international agreement on the control of atomic
weapons.39

Unfortunately, not everyone in America would view the arms race
with a great deal of remorse, as Howard Zinn has illustrated:

The policy of militaty overkill was deeply embedded in and
perpetuated by, the fundamental characteristics of the Ameri-
can economy: the profit motive. With an annual governmental
military budget soaring into the multibillions- in 1970 it
hit $80 billion- fabulous profits were to be made by big
corporations. The United States in the 1960s was spending
approximately $40 billion a year on weapons systems alone,
two-thirds of the money going to twelve or fifteen industrial
giants- corporations whose main reason for existence was to
fulfill government contracts for death-dealing weapons.
Senator Paul Douglas...pointed out that "six-sevenths of
these contracts are not competitive but what are termed
'single supplier negotiatebale.' In the alleged interest of
secrecy, the government picks a company and draws up a con-
tract in more or less secret negotiations." He also pointed
out that despite initial cost estimates "it is customary for
the ultimate costs to double or treble the original estimates."40

Zinn continues:

The closeness of the connection between business profits
and military expansion is represented in another way. A
report by Senator William Proxmire found that in early 1969
more than 2,000 former upper-echelon military officers were
employed by the one hundred largest defense contractors-
who held 67.4 percent of the military contracts.41

Apparently there is some credence to Eisenhower's military-
industrial complex warning. Meanwhile American leaders continue
to be successful in convincing the public that bigger and deadlier
weapons must be built to keep pace with the communists. The facts,

39. Schneirs, p. 32.
40. Postwar America, p. 76.
41. Postwar America, p. 77.
however, reveal that the United States must bear a brunt of the responsibility for the arms race escalation. Edgar Bottome, in *The Balance of Terror*, explains why:

With minor exceptions the United States has led in the development of military technology and weapons production.... This constant American superiority in thermonuclear weapons and the means to deliver these weapons has meant that throughout the postwar era, only the United States has had the potential to initiate a surprise attack on its opponent. At no time during the past twenty-five years has the United States had less than a two-to-one advantage in nuclear delivery vehicles over the Soviet Union and most of the time it has been better than a four-to-one advantage. The Soviet Union has been placed in a position where all it could do was react to American initiatives in bomber or missile building programs. This American superiority, along with the highly ambitious nature of American foreign policy, has placed the United States in a position of being fundamentally responsible for every major escalation of the arms race.42

We can see that the problem stems largely from a failure of American leadership. The crucial, tragic decision was made before World War II ended, viz. that no postwar effort would be made to cooperate with the Russians. And of course the second tragic mistake was the refusal to confront the first one. Failure to admit error or narrowness of national vision is in no way endemic to American leaders, but perhaps there has evolved something in the American character to exacerbate this problem. Jonathan Root writes:

As Alistair Cooke noted in his book on the Hiss case, *A Generation on Trial*, Americans have what amounts to a religious faith in progress and happiness, and cannot accept as a nation the fact that even when we do our best, things may go wrong. Americans immediately

42. *Postwar America*, p. 75.
start looking for somebody to blame. It is a process not far removed from scapegoating. One of the more salient examples of Cooke's theory occurred shortly after the Russians got the a-bomb. "J. Edgar Hoover has stated that when he determined that 'the basic secrets of nuclear fission had been stolen,' he 'immediately mobilized every resource' of the FBI to 'find the guilty men.' " The fact that there were no basic secrets to be stolen was beside the point.

After the Russians got the bomb and the policy of containment in China failed, an even greater chunk of the national budget was allocated for "security." After giving the matter some thought American leaders were able to conclude that even though the Russians now had the a-bomb the situation was not really so bad after all. The Pentagon came up with an ingenious nostrum:

...perplexed government leaders wondered: What do we do next? According to Joseph and Stewart Alsop, a frequent answer to this question heard from stunned Pentagon strategists was: "Well, the Soviets have the A-bomb but we'll just get the H-bomb, and then everything will still be all right."

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44. Schneirs, p. 414.  
45. The Schneirs cite this comment by Hoover in 1961: "Who, in all good conscience, can say, that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the spies who delivered the secret of the atomic bomb into the hands of the Soviets, should have been spared when their treachery caused the shadow of annihilation to fall upon all of the world's peoples." (p. 425)  
46. Schneirs, p. 54.
Doctorow, however, notes that there might be something amiss
with the Pentagon's panacea:

One Congress after another invested in bombs, and the
bombs got bigger and bigger. We were assured that the
quaint devices that had scorched the populations of
Hiroshima and Nagasaki were obsolete. The more bombs
we built, the more terrified we became. 47

One of the individuals who worked on the development of
the atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, opposed the building of
the hydrogen bomb. He was then classified as a security risk.
Doctorow writes that "although he liked the A-bomb he didn't like
the H-bomb and so would be thought of as a traitor." (BD, p.177)
In Daniel Doctorow intersperses the narrative with a number of
short treatises, including this one on treason:

TREASON the only crime defined in the Constitution.
Tyranny as under the Stuart and Tudor kings character-
ized by the elimination of political dissent under
the laws of treason. . . . Founding Fathers extremely
sensitive to the establishment of a tyranny in this
country by means of ambiguous treason law. Themselves
traitors under British law. Under their formulation
it became possible to be guilty of treason only against
the nation, not the individual ruler or party. Treason
was defined as action rather than thought or speech. . . .
"The decision to impose constitutional safeguards on
treason prosecutions formed part of a broad emerging
American tradition of liberalism. . . . No American has
ever been executed for treason against his country,"
says Nathan Weyl, Treason: The Story of Disloyalty
and Betrayal in American History, published in the year
1950. (BD, p. 183)

Weyl would soon have to make a slight revision in his statement.
And although the founding fathers may have defined treason as
action, there is often some form of retaliation for both thought
and speech if society's leaders deem it necessary. Shortly I
will discuss Doctorow's analysis of how necessary this retaliation
(i.e. threat of corporal punishment, and even death) is.

Paul and Rochelle Isaacson were the first Americans executed for treason. Doctorow intimates, however, that they may have been put to death for a different reason. Daniel recalls his mother telling him that the trial will determine if his father is guilty. When Daniel asks guilty of what, Rochelle replies, "Guilty of being a spy, of giving secrets. But really guilty of wanting a new world of socialism without want." (BD, p. 138) Daniel then began to cry. He knew his father was guilty of that. Ironically, the Isaacsons were executed in a nation that could claim a long and honorable tradition of spying; Harvey Wasserman discloses that by 1901 "unions throughout the country had been infiltrated with company-paid labor spies. A reporter interviewing striking steelworkers in 1901 complained that friendly workers clammed up as soon as the talk turned to the unions."48 This taciturnity revealed the workers' awareness that attempting to organize the working class was "the worst crime you can commit in this...country."49 When Paul Isaacson dreamed of his world of socialism perhaps he momentarily forgot that "all Americans are capitalists, or expected to be."50 And although Paul was a victim of what is called the Cold War, he knew that the significance of his protest had its roots in earlier eras. Williams explains that "what we are accustomed to call the Cold War...is in reality only the most recent phase of a more general conflict between the established system of western capitalism and its internal

49. John Dos Passos, The Big Money, in USA, p. 118.
50. Wasserman, p. 48.
and external opponents.\textsuperscript{51} John Foster Dulles shared Paul's belief that America might be in need of another revolution; they disagreed, however, as to the exact nature of that revolution, as I.F. Stone explains: "Dulles, who was never moved to denounce the 'statism' of Hitler and Mussolini, said in a speech...that 'bloody' revolution might some day be necessary in this country to combat the 'statism' of the New Dealers."\textsuperscript{52}

In Dos Passos' \textit{The Big Money} J.W. remarks, "Once government interference in business is established as a precedent, it means the end of liberty and private initiative in this country."\textsuperscript{53} We have seen that Truman would emphatically agree with this. Perhaps both individuals inherited this bit of wisdom from Woodrow Wilson, who said in 1912 that "if America is not to have free enterprise, then she can have freedom of no sort whatever."\textsuperscript{54} However, at least one of these precious liberties contains a major proviso. When free speech becomes too critical of capitalism, this freedom may have to be sacrificed for a greater good. There are times when free speech becomes too "free."

The source of Paul's umbrage was illuminated by Thoreau a century earlier, when he wrote in \textit{Walden} that "the principal object [of the factory system] is, not that mankind may be well and honestly clad, but, unquestionably, that the corporations may be enriched."\textsuperscript{55} These factories would grow into massive corporations, controlling the bulk of the nation's wealth and

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{51} Williams, p. 10.
  \item\textsuperscript{52} \textit{The Haunted Fifties} (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 15.
  \item\textsuperscript{53} \textit{in USA}, p. 447.
  \item\textsuperscript{54} Williams, p. 58.
  \item\textsuperscript{55} in Sculley Bradley, Richmond C. Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, eds., \textit{The American Tradition in Literature} (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1967)
\end{itemize}
to a considerable degree determining both its domestic and foreign policies. Like Paul Isaacson, it is against this that Julius Rosenberg directed his protest. In prison Rosenberg wrote:

... These so called "honorable" men [big businessmen] ... fear the democratic instincts of the people and the wrath of the American public if they became aware...that by their very nature the cartels are the source of wars and from them alone stems the danger to the peace of the world. They control the press and radio and use it to distort, by repeating high-sounding words over and over again like "free" world and peace.

This analysis may be somewhat simplistic ("from them alone...")), but it undoubtedly also contains considerable truth. Julius Rosenberg also repeatedly emphasized that his case was being used to stifle "progressives" and others critical of the status quo. If the word "traitor" has fallen into disuse, the epithet "communist" remains fashionable today:

"I think we are willing to have a little bit of crud in our lungs and a full stomach rather than a whole lot of clean air and nothing to eat," the Texas legislator... says... in the epilogue of Expendable Americans. "And I don't want a bunch of environmentalists and communists telling me what's good for my life and family."

The "little bit of crud" is asbestos fiber, a severely scarring and highly carcinogenic agent. Of approximately 875 workers exposed at the Tyler asbestos plant of P.P.G. Industries, 260 are statistically expected to develop lung cancer within the next twenty or thirty years, and many others will be incapacitated by asbestosis, a drastic reduction in lung capacity.

If these workers are true "patriots" they will not do anything to

56. Williams cites William L. Clayton, a self-made man who became head of the world's largest cotton export business and then moved into the Roosevelt administration as a policy maker. Clayton says, "The international economic policies of nations...have more to do with creating conditions which lead to war than any other single factor." (p. 233)
57. Meeropol, p. 350.
inhibit the smooth functioning of the economy. The power elite has long recognized this. Zinn notes that a substantial part of the nation has to battle every day to keep the family fed, clothed, sheltered and alive. But the hurt is not so keen that it cannot be suppressed by an injection of nationalism; this has always been the salve for internal discomfort...59

In his novel Boston Upton Sinclair explains how Sacco and Vanzetti achieved with their deaths what would have never been possible had they merely lived out their nondescript lives in relative obscurity:

"If it had not been for these things," says Vanzetti, I might have live out my life, talking at streetcorners to scornng men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for joostice, for man's under-standing of man, as now we do by accident.

"Our words- our lives- our pains- nothing! The taking of our lives- lives of a good shoemaker and poor fish-peddler- all!" That last moment belongs to us- that agony is our triumph."60

In Daniel Sinclair's argument is expanded. As Paul Isaacson paces in his prison cell he associates with Big Bill Haywood, and with Debs and with Mooney and Billings. All these fighters. The Scottsboro Boys. Their stars illuminate the walls, burn away the humiliation. Debs' cell was enormous, as big as the world. That is what the rulers never learn. The properties of steel and stone are subject to moral law.

Nor is death what it seems to be. When the ruling class inflicts death upon those they fear they discover that death itself can live. It is a paradox. Ma Ludlow is alive. Joe Hill is alive. Crispus Attucks. The two Italians speak and stir and smile and raise their fist in the mind of history. I am their comrade, they talk to me, Sacco makes his statement to me.

Socrates was tried. He was found guilty. He was forced to drink hemlock. By this act his persecutors raised him to eternal life and consigned themselves to the real death and total obscurity of persecutors everywhere.

60. Woodward-Clark, p. 253.
Jesus was tried. He was found guilty. He was tortured and executed. If Jesus had not been tried, if he had not been put to death, how would his teachings have endured? (BD, p. 199)

Those in power, however, cannot become overly concerned that their victims might be eventually resurrected for future worship. For the ruling class the crux of the matter is to thwart challenges to their power and authority now. Doctorow explains how the legal system defends that power:

Law, in whatever name, protects privilege. I speak of the law of any state that has not achieved socialism. The sole authority of the law is in its capacity to enforce itself. That capacity expresses itself in trial. There could be no law without trial. Trial is the point of the law. And punishment is the point of the trial— you can’t try someone unless you assume the power to punish him. (BD, p. 200)

Earlier Doctorow had elucidated in greater detail that without the threat of corporal punishment the law has no real efficacy:

... the basis of all class distinctions in society is corporal punishment. Classes are created... and maintained by corporal punishment. The authoritarian head of a society derives his power from the support not of the masses but of the upper classes or privileged bureaucracy which funds his government and divides his rewards. By contrast the loyalty of the masses is maintained only by constant physical intimidation. As societies endure in history they symbolize complex systems of corporal punishment in economic terms. That is why Marx used the word "slavery" to define the role of the working class under capitalism. Slavery is the state of absolute submission to corporal punishment. In times of challenge, however, the ruling classes restore their literal, unsymbolized right of corporal punishment upon the lower classes, usually in the name of law and order. The crime of someone in the lower classes is never against another human being but always against the order and authority of the state. (BD, p. 144)

Paul and Rochelle Isaacson were charged with committing a crime not only against a human being, but against all of humanity. The actual reason for their execution, however, was their failure to grant the state the respect for the one authority that must
never be challenged too seriously—capitalism. We can see an example of Doctorow's argument in this excerpt from Benjamin Franklin's "The Speech of Polly Baker." Polly asks, after being sentenced for the fifth time for having a child out of wedlock:

You have already excluded me from the comforts of your church communion. Is that not sufficient? What need is there then of your additional fines and whipping? You believe I have offended heaven and must suffer eternal fire; will not that be sufficient?61

Doctorow has answered her question.

The law, then, does not mean very much unless it is actually backed up by the threat of physical punishment. Ideally, the ruling class hopes that there will be sufficient respect for the law so that too frequent punishment is obviated. In Daniel we see how the educational system helps to instill this respect for the law (status quo). This inculcation begins very early. When Paul Isaacson glimpsed the beautiful American flag hanging in the courtroom, he recalled that he had once shown exemplary respect for that flag:

Mrs. Goldstein, my fourth-grade teacher, told me of all the children in the class, I had the finest, straightest salute, and I was commended to the notice of the other children: "The way Paul stands, children, that is the way to stand, nice and tall with a straight back when you say the pledge of allegiance." (3D, p. 202)

Doctorow continues:

All societies indoctrinate their children. The marvelous Mrs. Goldstein in total innocence taught us the glorious history of our brave westward expansion: our taming of the barbaric Indians,62 our brave stand

61. Woodward-Clark, p. 111.
62. Theodore Roosevelt explains just how barbaric: "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians,
at the Alamo, the mighty railroads winning the plains. Thus I must understand the nature of the conspiracy against me: it is mounted in full faith and righteousness by the students of Mrs. Goldstein. (BD, p. 203)

Norman Mailer has also written of this indoctrination:

Anyone who has passed through the educational system of America is in unconscious degree somewhere near half a patriot. (We may reduce the fraction when considering progressive schools.) The brain is washed deep, there are reflexes: white shirts, Star-Spangled Banner, saluting the flag. At home is corporation land's whip- the television set.65

Daniel remembers when he was in third grade, the year the Russians exploded their bomb:

There were periodic drills in the event of nuclear bombs falling. We marched into the hallways where there were no windows, and sat hunched against the wall, knees up, arms around knees, head down. I suppose it was 1949. All the schools were very big on air-raid drills. (BD, p. 115)

Daniel's father, enraged that the schools were unthinkingly helping to promote the red scare, told him to refuse to participate in the air-raid drills. Also, Daniel was told that he must not accept the imminence of another war. The press had exhibited model servility in cooperating with the power elite in fostering the red scare, making the following incident, in late 1956, all the more incredible:

In Onondaga County, near Syracuse, New York, the students of the senior class of Solvay High School undertook to enter a class subscription to the New York Times. But the Solvay board of education...forbade the use of the Times in social studies classes on the grounds that the Times had a "Communist slant" in its new stories.64

but I believe nine of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian." (Wasserman, p. 178) 63. Mailer, p. 281.
64. Aronson, p. 152.
One would like to believe that this was a moribund reflex of the Cold War, but a recent article by Dr. Benjamin Fine confirms that this kind of thinking has not disappeared. In fact, censorship appears to be on the rise again:

What started out as a seemingly local quarrel over texts in Kanawha County, W.Va., has now caught fire and brought in its wake the greatest wave of book burning and teacher fear since the McCarthy era. All it takes, usually, is the vocal protest of one parent, if loud enough, to bring the school board to its knees and cause it to run for cover.

Fuel has been added to the censorship fire by the recent statement of U.S. Education Commissioner Terrel H. Bell who urged book publishers to return to the basic values as exemplified in the Bible, century-old McGuffey's Readers and the Wizard of Oz. Dr. Bell suggested that publishers edit their texts so as not to "insult the values of most parents."

Fine concludes:

Because of the current wave of censorship, teachers are afraid to select controversial books and librarians carefully screen out books that might cause a ripple in the community. But, to meet the objections of some parents, all twentieth-century literature would have to be eliminated...65

Much more frightening are the attitudes of this schoolteacher in Ohio, interviewed after the Kent State slayings:

MOTHER: Anyone who appears on the streets of a city like Kent with long hair, dirty clothes or barefooted deserves to be shot.
RESEARCHER: Have I your permission to quote that?
MOTHER: You sure do. It would have been better if the Guard had shot the whole lot of them that morning.
RESEARCHER: But you had three sons there.
MOTHER: If they didn't do what the Guards told them, they should have been mowed down.
PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY (listening in): Is long hair a justification for shooting someone?
MOTHER: Yes. We have got to clean up this nation. And we'll start with the long-hairs.

PROFESSOR: Would you permit one of your sons to be shot simply because he went barefooted?
MOTHER: Yes.
PROFESSOR: Where do you get such ideas?
MOTHER: I teach at the local high school.
PROFESSOR: You mean you are teaching your students such things?
MOTHER: Yes. I teach them the truth. The lazy, the dirty, the ones you see walking the streets and doing nothing ought all to be shot.66

Although this may be an extreme (but by no means unique) case, what is disturbing is the extent to which her attitudes were basically shared by many citizens in other Ohio communities.
Not to mention the communities of the other states.

R.D. Laing demonstrates how necessary it is to the power elite that children not be taught to think too critically:

In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex, we have to destroy our capacity both to see clearly any more what is in front of, and to imagine what is beyond, our noses. Long before a thermonuclear war can come about, we have had to lay waste our own sanity. We begin with the children. It is imperative to catch them in time. Without the most thorough and rapid brainwashing their dirty minds would see through our dirty tricks.67

Of course the educational system is not perfect. There are enough students who resist this brainwashing to deem it important, insofar as possible, to continue the process in colleges and universities, as Doctorow explains:

So the Trustees of Ohio State were right in 1956 when they canned the English instructor for assigning Catcher in the Rye to his freshman class. They knew there is no qualitative difference between the kid who thinks it's funny to fart in chapel, and Che Guevara. They knew that Holden Caulfield would find SDS. (BD, p. 108)

This same fear of critical thinking was evident after the Kent

State tragedy, when a trustee of that university intimated that a large share of the responsibility for the killings would have to be attributed to certain teachers:

TRUSTEE: Why does an excellent English teacher like you feel you have to teach about politics? 68
DAN FULLER: I don't teach politics. I teach American literature to college students who are more than twenty years old.
TRUSTEE: But why even mention politics? It isn't necessary.
FULLER: How can you not mention politics when you're teaching about James T. Farrell and Studs Lonigan?
TRUSTEE: Why do you have to teach such books? Why can't you teach the fine old books that didn't bother with such things?
FULLER: The authors who did the writing determined what I have to teach.
TRUSTEE: But can't you just teach the young people to write correctly, and how to read?
FULLER: I also have to teach them how to think. 69

Thinking, Doctorow informs us, was in danger of becoming a lost art on college campuses during the Cold War years. Paul Isaacson read a New York Times survey that said that almost all political discussion of any kind had disappeared from colleges and universities. Professors feared being misinterpreted, and loyalty oaths were required in state universities. This fear and repression had earlier been illustrated in a novel by Bernard Malamud:

The country was frightened silly of Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers, Communist spies and Congressional

68. In Postwar America, Zinn writes that "after the Kent State University shootings... students reported that FBI men asked them questions about a sociology professor such as: 'Did he advocate any radical views?' 'Did he advocate the overthrow of the mass communications system of the United States?' They also asked whether an English professor 'ever spoke against the government.'"
69. Michener, p. 334.
committees, flying saucers and fellow travelers, their friends and associates, and those who asked them for a match or the time of day. Intellectuals, scientists, teachers were investigated by numerous committees and if found to be good Americans were asked to sign loyalty oaths. Democracy was defended by cripples who crippled it. At Cascadia College the American fear manifested itself, paradoxically, in what was missing: ideas, serious criticism, a liberal position.... No one, for instance, disagreed with Professor Fairchild's dispraise of "Roosevelt socialism"; if one did, disagreement was silent.70

This situation, though few were probably aware of it at the time, may have had as its logical, and almost inevitable, conclusion, events like the student strike at Columbia University, the third possible ending Daniel offers for his book. At the height of the Cold War, however, the Emersonian ideal propounded in "The American Scholar" a century before was apparently no longer operative:

"Free should the scholar be,- free and brave.... It is a shame to him...if he seeks a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich...."71 During the Cold War students also sought a temporary peace.

This conformity that the educational system has often nurtured is hardly a recent phenomenon in America. Sinclair Lewis had documented this procrustean ideal in Babbit, where most of the prosperous citizens in Zenith belonged to the Good Citizens' League.

All members of the League agreed that the working classes must be kept in their place; and all of them perceived that American Democracy did not imply any equality of wealth, but it did demand a wholesome sameness of thought, dress, painting, morals, and vocabulary.72

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71. Bradley, p. 1109.
Thoreau, who championed diversity in *Walden*, has seen his advice go unheeded: "I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account... I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible." 73 Finally the educational system seems to be oblivious to what would appear to be quite axiomatic, viz. that "a sane and normal society is one in which people habitually disagree, because general agreement is relatively rare outside the sphere of instinctive human qualities." 74

If the educational system is not always what it professes to be, other institutions must also present attractive facades, as Doctorow makes clear:

Banks and churches and courtrooms all depend on the appurtenances of theatre. On illusion. Banks, the illusion of stability and honorable dealings to hide the rot and corruption of capitalist exploitation. Churches the illusion of sacred sanctuary for purposes of pacifying social discontent. Courtrooms of course designed to promote the illusion of solemn justice. If there was true justice why would such trippings be necessary? Wouldn't a table and chairs and an ordinary room serve just as well? (BD, p. 214)

Walter B. Rideout notes that the legal system has been a frequent target of attack of American writers; in most socialist novels: "the whole apparatus of the law is... corrupt, for it is designed, not to produce justice, but to protect the property rights of capital against the human rights of labor." 75 In his recently published book *On Doing Time* Norton Sobell observes, "I saw our case as an integral part of the Establishment's national policy. Any political trial is used to implement national policy, both domestic and foreign." 76

73. Bradley, p. 1109.
74. Jung, p. 46.
75. Rideout, p. 82.
Churches, or established religion, have also received very few encomiums from American writers. According to Rideout,

formal Christianity is almost invariably stigmatized as conservative and antidemocratic.... Most churches...have become merely part of the ideological camouflage developed by ruthless business enterprise, which professes to accept the teachings of Jesus while acting with unChristlike selfishness, cruelty and greed. 77

Edward Bellamy metaphorically describes the nature of his society in 1877, comparing

society as it then was to a prodigious coach which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road. The driver was hunger, and permitted no lagging, though the pace was necessarily very slow. Despite the difficulty of drawing the coach at all along so hard a road, the top was covered with passengers who never got down, even at the steepest ascents. These seats on top were very breezy and comfortable. Well up out of the dust, their occupants could enjoy the scenery at their leisure, or critically discuss the merits of the straining team. 78

Bellamy assures us that those who are on the top, distinguished only by fortune, did indeed express their commiseration for those who pulled the coach, especially at bad places in the road. The toilers were urged to have patience, and reminded that their sufferings would be compensated in another world. Sinclair Lewis wrote about a doctor who was a freethinker and never went to church. This physician failed to realize that it is a "great mistake for any doctor not to identify himself with some good solid religious denomination, whether he believes the stuff or not.... A priest or a preacher can send you an awful lot of business." 79

77. Rideout, p. 77.
Batcliffite, a politician in Henry Adams' novel Democracy, understood the situation, and "always attended morning service...not wholly on the ground of religious conviction, but because a large number of his constituents were church-going people and he would not willingly shock their principles so long as he needed their votes." In The Iron Heel Jack London wrote of a man, "a pillar of the church and heavy contributor to foreign missions, [who] worked his shop girls ten hours a day on a starvation wage, and thereby directly encouraged prostitution." The churches, banks, courts, and the educational system have all been remarkably successful in promoting and retaining the respect of the public. Michael Meeropol points out just how successful:

Repression is the last resort when all other elements of persuasion have failed. It is a measure of how successful the ideological process has been, that the repressive activities of the government in the late 1940s and again in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not involve killing more than a handful of people. Comparing that to the Spanish Civil War, the suppressions in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia and Eastern Europe, and the recent slaughter in Chile should give one an idea of just how slight repressive measures were.

And finally there is Disneyland. In a very interesting scene near the end of his novel Doctorow has Daniel visit Disneyland, the culmination of his California sojourn where he hopes to learn the truth about his parents from their betrayer, Selig Mindish. Doctorow takes us on a tour of Disneyland, offering us an explanation of what it is all about. At Disneyland (which is,

82. Meeropol, p. 359.
Doctorow notes, shaped like a womb), the customer is invited "not to experience the controlled thrills of a carny ride, but to participate in the mythic rituals of culture." (BD, p. 302) Doctorow explains that the Disneyland customer is removed by two ontological degrees from the cultural artifacts that he observes. The real meaning, and effect, of literary works like Alice in Wonderland and Huckleberry Finn, and historical realities like nineteenth century slave trading on the Mississippi River, and piracy on the high seas ("a hundred and fifty years of harassment of European mercantile exploration and trade"), is lost on the customer. Instead, in a process not unlike osmosis, the customer receives a vicarious thrill, remaining oblivious to some of the more unsavory aspects of his cultural heritage.

Doctorow catalogues a number of corporations that have shows and exhibits at Disneyland: Monsanto Chemical Co., Bell Telephone, General Electric, Coca-Cola, McDonnell Aircraft, Goodyear, Carnation Milk, Sunkist, Eastman Kodak, Upjohn Pharmaceuticals, Insurance Company of North America, United Air Lines, and Bank of America. (BD, p. 305) The customer may leave with the impression (no less significant if it is unconscious) that Mark Twain may well have been one of the founders of one of these corporations, that Huck himself would find the corporate mentality congenial. The real meaning of Twain's novel must remain largely the province of those who study it in literature classes. Doctorow concludes:

Obviously there are political implications. What Disneyland proposes is a technique of abbreviated shorthand culture for the masses, a mindless thrill, like an electric shock, that insists at the same time on the recipient's rich psychic relation to his country's history and language and literature. In a forthcoming
time of highly governed masses in an overpopulated world, this technique may be extremely useful both as a substitute for education and, eventually, as a substitute for experience. (BD, p. 305)

Perhaps we will not need a substitute for thinking. We seem to get along quite well without it. One of the disturbing lessons of Daniel is man's complacency, his readiness to blindly serve authority. Describing the Pentagon march, Doctorow writes that

there was room to see where the MP's and the marshals stood in rank at the steps of the front entrance. One could examine the mandarin faces. God was on their side. No matter what is laid down there will be people to put their lives on it. Soldiers will instantly appear, fall into rank, and be ready to die for it. And scientists who are happy to direct their research toward it. And keen-witted academics who in all rationality develop the truth of it. And poets who find their voice in proclaiming the personal feeling of it. And people will go on and make their living from it. And the religious will pray for a just end to it, in terms satisfactory to it. (BD, p. 272)

H.L. Mencken made the same point in "Duty":

There will always remain a safe majority that is willing to do whatever is ordained that accepts docilely the government it is born under, obeys its laws, and supports its theory. But that majority does not comprise the men who render the highest and most intelligent services to the race; it comprises those who render nothing save their obedience. 83

So long as this obedience is faithfully rendered, however, the power elite will be quite satisfied. And Doctorow elucidates one of the reasons for the fealty of the masses:

The average human being's capacity for allegiance is indiscriminate, like pure sexual appetite, except that it increases with age. Whether to TV programs, ball games, wine grapes, high schools or 60-foot steel-and-titanium missiles, our loyalties will fix with passionate

83. Woodward-Clark
disregard for what they fix on.\(^8^4\)

In *Nostromo* Conrad offered a similar explanation for the compliance of the masses: "The popular mind is incapable of skepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny."\(^8^5\) In *Daniel* we see that man is also at the mercy of those who are inspired by something less than visions of a high destiny. Doctorow laments how really few individuals seem to have the desire to look behind the illusion, to pierce the facade and find the reality. Human beings must become more critical.

This is the same exhortation of Thoreau in "Civil Disobedience."

Few people, Thoreau observed, served their state as men. They merely offer their bodies to be used as machines. Thoreau made clear the fate of the dissenters: "A very few,--as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and *men*--serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; they are commonly treated as enemies by it."\(^8^6\) *Daniel* reveals why. When Daniel participated in the march to the Pentagon, he was in the company of William Sloane Coffin, Norman Mailer, Robert Lowell, and thousands of others. But as in Thoreau's time, this "wise minority" is also ignored. The war will continue for a long time. Doctorow demonstrates that the Vietnam war is a logical, maybe ineluctable, outgrowth of the Open Door policy and the Cold War mentality. Daniel must protest against the same forces and the same ideologies that

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86. Bradley, p. 1464.
claimed the lives of his parents. The late 50s may have seen an abatement of overt Cold War repression but many more victims would be immolated. Michael Meeropol discusses this link that Doctorow so cogently exposes:

We, our parents, the American left are not the sole victims of the Cold War- we have all been victimized. To control public opinion, government agencies fabricated the case against our parents. They convinced American citizens of the dangers of Communism, as well as of the necessity for secrecy, undercover agents, conspiracy trials and surveillance. Next, they sold the public on the arms race, exorbitant military expenditures, and, by extension, imperialism. So when American leaders plotted the Vietnam war, few listened to dissenters who warned that we were supporting a dictatorship and killing an entire people.... Our parents died because they adamantly opposed this whole pattern of deception, but the message of the last twenty years is clear. We will all be destroyed if we do not stand up for the truth. 87

A more balanced assessment, however, might at least acknowledge, in the words of one senior information officer at Strategic Air Command headquarters, "that the bombing of Vietnam and Cambodia did, after all, supply our flight crews with combat experience." 88

In Daniel E.L. Doctorow has provided the reader with an incisive analysis of the chasm between the ideals professed by America's rhetoric and the American reality. This chasm reached one of its greatest breaths in the decade after the end of World War II, as the trial of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson reminds us. Analyzing the proletarian novels written in America, Rideout informs us that

capitalist justice is always class justice; if property relationships are endangered, the whole legal apparatus is brought to bear against the offender. When strikers are brought into the courts...no really fair trial can be expected by either striker or reader. The jury, usually composed of petty-bourgeois individuals, is prejudiced, the prosecution lawyers exploit the unsanctified attitude of radicals toward God and country, the defense lawyers may very well be in cahoots with the prosecution, and the judge either consciously or unconsciously responds to the dominant economic pressures of the community.89

The Isaacsons were not strikers, but many of the same barriers were erected against them, as their lives were a protest against the same injustices. It is now time to take a look at their trial.

89. Rideout, p. 199
In my mind, the collapse of the atom was the collapse of the whole world. KANDINSKY

It seems to be one of the self-punitive characteristics of tyranny, whether the tyrant be a man, a community, or a caste, to have a pusillanimous fear of its victim.... This fear... has always been met by the same one antidote—terrible cruelty to the tyrant's victim. G.W. CABLE
Chapter III
The Trial (With Apologies to Franz Kafka)

There are many close parallels between the trial of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson and the Rosenberg-Sobell case.\footnote{For the reader interested in exploring the Rosenberg-Sobell trial in depth, see The Judgment of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg by John Wexley, and Invitation to an Inquest: A New Look at the Rosenberg-Sobell Case by Walter and Miriam Schneir. Wexley's book, currently out of print, is soon expected out in paperback. There is a Penguin edition of the Schneirs' book with a new (1973) introduction. The recently published books by Sobell (On Doing Time) and the Rosenbergs' sons (We Are Your Sons: The Legacy of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg) by Robert and Michael Meeropol would also be helpful.} I will point out a number of these similarities, especially as they help to illuminate the failure of American justice, a failure whose origins Doctorow has so skillfully traced. Since Daniel is a work of imaginative art, Doctorow is of course free to construct his own "reality" of the trial, and the variations from the actual case may be as interesting as the parallels. For a genuine understanding of Cold War America, Daniel compares very favorably with the best that has been written on the Rosenberg-Sobell trial. And as a work of art, it may give us more.

One of the individuals Daniel meets in his search for the truth about his parents is Jack P. Fein, who reassessed the Isaacsons' case ten years after they were executed. Fein told Daniel that the idea that any information Selig Mindish had would be valuable to the Russians was insane. After the FBI
arrested Paul, Doctorow wrote that the Isaacsons were arrested for conspiring to give the Russians the secret of television. If this sounds ludicrous, the charges in the actual indictment of the Isaacsons are no less absurd. Americans had come to believe that their scientific capabilities were vastly superior to other nations! If Russia develops a television set, then we know that they had to have stolen its technical secrets from us. This is the mentality that led to such consternation when Russia orbited Sputnik. When the Isaacsons are pronounced guilty, Doctorow presents the reader with the verdict: "The Isaacsons are convicted of conspiracy to give the Soviet Union the secret of the atom bomb. No- the secret of the hydrogen bomb. Or is it the cobalt bomb? Or the neutron bomb. Or napalm. Something like that." (BD, p. 221) If the American public was stunned when Russia exploded their bomb, Truman and Eisenhower were not surprised. After hearing that America's bomb monopoly had ended, Truman remarked:

Ever since atomic energy was first released by man, the eventual development of this new force by other nations was to be expected. This probability has always been taken into account by us.

Nearly four years ago I pointed out that "scientific opinion appears to be practically unanimous that the essential theoretical knowledge upon which the discovery is based is already widely known. There is also substantial agreement that foreign research can come abreast of our present theoretical knowledge in time." 2

Nor was Eisenhower perturbed by the announcement, commenting that

2. Schneirs, p. 52.
the news we have been given by the President merely confirms scientific predictions. I see no reason why a development that was anticipated years ago should cause any revolutionary change in our thinking or in our actions.3

Although Americans may have been intellectually prepared for this news, the Schneirs explain, they were not emotionally prepared. American leaders now had to face the realization that their refusal to try to cooperate with Russia after the war may have been a grave error. And, as Doctorow has explained, either this error is acknowledged, or conspiracies must be found to shroud the bankruptcy of leadership. Edward U. Condon's admonition three years earlier was very prophetic; in a magazine article titled "An Appeal to Reason," he wrote:

The laws of nature, some seem to think, are ours exclusively, and that we can keep others from learning by locking up what we have learned in the laboratory...

It is sinister indeed how one evil step leads to another. Having created an air of suspicion and mistrust, there will be persons among us who think other nations can know nothing except what is learned by espionage. So, when other countries make atom bombs, these persons will cry "treason" at our scientists, for they will find it inconceivable that another country could make a bomb in any other way except by aid from Americans.4

Senator Karl Mundt validated the accuracy of Condon's scenario, claiming that it now appears that earlier and prevailing laxity in safeguarding this country against Communist espionage has permitted what were once the secrets of our atom bomb to fall into the hands of America's only potential enemy.5

This sounds strikingly similar to the remarks of Representative

5. Schneirs, p. 53.
Nixon. It can only be attributed to Mundt’s laxity in allowing his own secret wisdom to fall into the hands of Nixon. Or was it Nixon’s laxity...

It is important to understand that the Isaacsons were charged not with committing espionage, but with conspiracy to commit espionage. This means that no (tangible) evidence is needed to ascertain their guilt; the government would merely have to prove that they intended to do something. Rochelle elaborates:

Coincidentally enough under the law the testimony of our so-called accomplice is considered evidence. Am I a fool that I can’t see what this means? Do I have to be a lawyer to understand that this allows them to put Dr. Mindish on the stand and by Jake’s own precious law anything Mindish says against us has the weight of evidence. As surely as the gun convicts the murderer. (BD, p. 206)

Jake Ascher explains further the overwhelming odds against the Isaacsons:

...if Mindish testifies he has met with famous Thos. Fleming, who is known in certain circles as Talkative Tom because he has been used by the government in three trials already, and Fleming who is brought from his prison cell to the courtroom testifies he took orders from Kusnetsov of the Soviet Govt, how, not being there, can my clients deny that? Yet they are held to account for it. They are held to account for the Soviet Union. They are held to account for the condition of the world today. And all the indictment states is that they met with Mindish in the kitchen of their own house. (BD, p. 220)

In the Rosenberg-Sobell case, the prosecution’s charge, and rationale for the charge, is exactly the same, namely, to utilize the anxious mood of the times and seek a maximum penalty under a minimum charge. He [government prosecutor] decided not to charge the Rosenbergs and Sobell with espionage, which would be hard to prove and which was threatened by the statute of limitations, but with a conspiracy to commit espionage. This eliminated
the necessity for presenting direct proof that the
Rosenbergs and Sobell had spied, and required only
that he build a mountain of circumstantial evidence
that they intended to spy. He was further aided by
a federal court rule which, in contrast to almost all
state courts, permits one accomplice to give uncorroborated
testimony against another.

This strategy was in no way original. Defending Eugene Debs
on a conspiracy charge, Clarence Darrow told the court that
conspiracy "from the days of tyranny in England down to the
day the General Managers' Association used it as a club, has
been the favorite weapon of every tyrant. It is an effort to
punish the crime of thought." As we have seen, it is the
ideas of people like the Isaacsons that must not be allowed
to become too ripe in America.

While the Isaacsons were tried for conspiracy to commit
espionage, which denied them the safeguards of the ordinary
rules of evidence, it was for treason that they were punished,
which is, Doctorow notes, the "worst possible crime" that can
be committed against one's country. The Isaacsons are presented
as the mortal enemies of all American citizens— including,
of course, the jurors on whose judgment their fate depends.
Rochelle, like her husband, was fully cognizant of this, and
asked her lawyer for the precise meaning of treason. Ascher
informed her that "treason consists of making war against your
country or giving aid and comfort to an enemy at war with your
country. It is defined in the Constitution." (DD, p. 217)
Ascher objected during the trial that the jury was being influenced
by the prosecution to see the Isaacsons as heinous traitors,

6. Root, p. 112
helping them to forget (assuming that they were capable of making the distinction) that treason was not what the Isaacsons were indicted for:

Implications of treason are fed like sugar cubes to the 12-headed animal which is Justice. In Feuerman's opening remarks. In the way questions are asked. In support of lines of questioning where cases of treason are cited and the judge endorses the relevance of the citation. Ascher trusts only a trained judicial mind to understand in the leisure of a study of the transcript, the abuse of due process in trying someone under one law as if he had broken another. (BD, p. 217)

Doctorow writes: "If the twentieth century teaches anything, it is that destruction of meaning in language precedes all other destruction." George Orwell had also written about this in "Politics and the English Language" in 1946, the same year of Condon's warning. And of course we now have the lessons of the Watergate rhetoric. Robert Meeropol recalls that his teacher in eighth grade taught him that

southern historians had written many of the history texts, watering down the Confederacy's essentially treasonous act of secession. I was struck by the fact that the same southerners who publicly waved the rebel flag at football games and supported the Confederacy—which fought the United States government—were advocating that all left-wingers should be thrown in jail or worse for their beliefs."

It is unlikely that the jury that convicted the Isaacsons would be any more perspicacious in grasping this contradiction than the football fans were.

Judge Hirsch ruled that the Isaacsons' political beliefs and associations could be questioned for the purpose of establishing a motivation for their crime. This sealed their fate.

Whether they declared their communism or took the Fifth, the jury would see them as communists. And, as Ascher was well aware, if they were communists they must be liars. If they were liars, then Mindish must be telling the truth. On the witness stand Mindish actually began to smile. Doctorow writes, "The man was an idiot." (BD, p. 296) Jack P. Fein told Daniel that the case against his parents was nothing, and added,

All the government had was Mindish's accomplice testimony that to believe you'd have to believe it's possible that a radio repairman was trained and educated enough to draw intricate plans of the most sophisticated kind, and that he would reduce them so that they would fit on dental x-ray film— I still don't understand why anyone would have to do that. It was too much. (BD, p. 227)

In the Rosenberg trial, David Greenglass, the man the government touted as brilliant enough to have drawn intricate and vital secrets of the atom bomb, had taken eight courses at Brooklyn Polytech, and failed all eight. (He also had occasion to smile on the witness stand.) Like Mindish's testimony, Greenglass's was crucial for a government conviction. The Schneirs suggest how reliable Greenglass was:

...during her first conference with her attorneys, Ruth Greenglass did not relate to them any aspect of the story of the crime she later told at the trial; instead, she expressed the belief that she and her husband were "the object of persecution" and asserted that David "would say things were so even if they were not."10

In addition, one of the attorneys for the government "offered the opinion that David was a man with 'no conscience at all' and added: 'If I were a judge, I wouldn't take his testimony too seriously.'"11 Finally, Harry Gold, another indispensable

10. Schneirs, p. 208.
link in the Rosenberg case, explained that he "had become so tangled up in this web of lies that it was easier to continue telling an occasional one than to try and straighten the whole hideous mess out." 12

In a letter to Rochelle, Paul wrote:

Amazing the strong sense one gets of Judge Hirsch and Prosecutor Feuerman working together like a team. It couldn't be my imagination. Hirsch makes no effort to disguise where his sympathies lie. Their collusion is quite shameless— they are like bricklayers methodically sealing us up. But their arrogance will destroy them in the end. (BP, p. 213)

Again and again Paul appeared to be incapable of accepting emotionally how truly determined the judge and prosecutor were to win their case. Paul did not want to jettison his faith in American democracy. Judge Hirsch's most intimate professional secret was his desire to become a member of the Supreme Court. A conviction in the Isaacson case would clear a major hurdle. In the Rosenberg case, Judge Kaufman also made little attempt to camouflage his sympathies:

It is difficult to make people realize that this country is engaged in a life and death struggle with a completely different system... All of our democratic institutions are...directly involved in this great conflict. I believe that never at any time in our history were we ever confronted to the same degree that we are today with such a challenge to our very existence... 13

After explaining that in Russia not one day would have been allocated for someone accused of conspiracy to destroy Russia, and reminding the Rosenbergs how fortunate they were to live in a nation that truly expended itself to give them a fair

trial, Kaufman continued:

...they made a choice of devoting themselves to the Russian ideology of denial of God, denial of the sanctity of the individual and aggression against free men everywhere instead of serving the cause of liberty and freedom. I consider your crime worse than murder. Plain deliberate contemplated murder is dwarfed in magnitude by comparison with the crime you have committed.... I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb has already caused...the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 and who knows but that millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason. Indeed, by your betrayal you have undoubtedly altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country. I...assume that the basic Marxist goal of world revolution and the destruction of capitalism was well known to the defendants, if in fact not subscribed to by them, when they passed what they knew was this nation's most deadly and closely guarded secret weapon to the Soviet agents. 14

The carefully selected jury would be sure to grant the Rosenbergs no more sympathy than their judge did.

Paul told Rochelle that they should not really expect justice of a trial conducted by the same people that arrested them and put them in jail. As Doctorow pointed out earlier, the FBI had been arresting people and convicting them in the same press release. Rochelle knew what this meant: "Here in the country where she was born a defendant can be found guilty of being brought to court as a defendant." (RD, p. 207) When Ascher asked for the names of the government witnesses, he was given a list containing nearly a hundred names, precluding any possibility of his preparing cross examination. In the Rosenberg trial, the government announced the names of eminent atomic scientists

(e.g. Harold Urey and J. Robert Oppenheimer) that they would have testify for them. For obvious reasons they were never called. Doctorow wrote that it would be ridiculous to expect the jury to contain even one communist. Of course in the Rosenberg trial too all communists were carefully excluded from the jury. So were all Jews. And so was anyone who read a single liberal publication. But the Rosenbergs were tried by their peers.

Without the staunch and nearly unanimous support of the media, the prosecution would have undoubtedly found it much more difficult (if not impossible) to convict the Israels. The death sentence would have been out of the question. Daniel explains:

It was a weird time. The newspapers were constantly trying my parents in releases from the Justice Department. There was never in any announcement from J. Edgar Hoover a presumption of innocence. An image grew of my father as a master spy. As a master spy and ringleader. Over a period of a few weeks he became more and more prominent in any discussion of various spy arrests. Dr. Mindish was portrayed as one of those who carried out his orders. (BD, p. 176)

Daniel's father had complained, "Before our trial even started we were found guilty by the paid hirlings of the kept press. There was no possibility for a fair trial." (BD, p. 266) Daniel would hear from his foster father a confirmation of the truth of Paul's contention. The Schneirs explain how unanimous the press's condemnation was:

Throughout the United States during the spring and summer of 1951, no publication expressed the view that the Rosenbergs and Sobell might conceivably be innocent as they claimed. This apparently complete consensus... was ended in late August 1951 by the National Guardian. 16

15. From the recent television documentary The Unquiet Death of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.
The circulation of the National Guardian was dwarfed by the size of the large dailies of major cities. In the Rosenberg and Isaacson cases the trial was actually a mere formality, with the defendants' guilt a foregone conclusion:

As was true in all the other spy arrests that year [1950], the Department of Justice in Washington issued a long press release stating as unquestioned fact the allegation against Rosenberg, so that in a very real sense the crux of the government's case was presented in the press long before it was presented in a court of law or even to a grand jury.\(^7\)

Not only did the press proclaim their guilt, but also urged that they receive the maximum punishment; "most of the press, including some of the most eminent American newspapers, unreservedly approved the death penalty."\(^8\) An editorial in the Hearst press emphasized the grave necessity of capital punishment:

The importance of the trial cannot be minimized. Its findings disclosed in shuddering detail the Red cancer in the American body politic—a cancer which the government is now forced to obliterate in self-defense. The sentences indicate the scalpel which prosecutors can be expected to use in that operation.\(^9\)

Several days after the fighting commenced in Korea, another editorial, by Hearst columnist Westbrook Pegler, appealed to Americans to realize that even the death of the Rosenbergs would not be sufficient:

The only sensible and courageous way to deal with Communists in our midst is to make membership in Communist organizations or covert subsidies a capital offense and shoot or otherwise put to death all persons convicted of such.\(^{10}\)

\(^7\) Schneirs, p. 80.  
\(^8\) Schneirs, p. 175.  
\(^9\) Aronson, p. 59.  
\(^{10}\) Schneirs, p. 78.
The Catholic magazine *America* saw the death sentence as an
asseveration that the voice of humanity would triumph over
its most perfidious enemies:

Their crime, in sober truth, must be measured by a
new calculus: the megadeath, or death of a million
human beings. The Rosenbergs enabled Russia, by a
mere silent threat of atomic warfare, to stand up
to the free world pending what may become an atomic
showdown of unimaginable carnage and devastation.
The Rosenbergs were mortal enemies, not merely
of the United States, but of the entire human race.
They were willing slaves of a conspiracy against
humanity—unrepentent to the very end. The will to
execute them was an affirmation by *America*, as the
voice of humanity, of its will to survive.21

Before the Rosenbergs were even indicted, the media had prepared
Americans for this showdown with Russia. After the Russians
exploded the a-bomb, *Atomics*, a scientific periodical, editorialized:

Though the announcement is but a few days old, the
news has already rocked the nation; it is being screamed
from banner headlines in every newspaper from Los
Angeles to Portland, Maine, and radio commentators
have worked themselves into a minor panic, many of
them have the country practically at war with Russia.22

This panic did not subside as the incarcerated "scapegoats"
appealed their case in vain. World opinion continued to clamor
vociferously for mercy for the Rosenbergs, but the press of the
United States did its best to stifle this uproar. Aronson notes
that "the *Herald Tribune*, along with every other newspaper
in New York, consistently ignored [defense] committee press
releases for clemency from notable figures in every part of the
world."23 It is not that the press is "evil", avers I.F. Stone.
He explains: "Most of my colleagues agree with the Government
and write the accepted thing because that is what they believe;

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23. Aronson, p. 60.
they are indeed— with honorable exceptions— as suspicious of
the non-conformist as any group in Kiwanis.” 24 It can be argued
that the press, like America’s political and military leaders,
evinced a paucity of leadership and national vision. Others
may contend that the press will never be anything more than a
mirror of a complacent and uncritical public. Irving Kristol
believes that

while Americans certainly do not get newspapers as
good as they need, they probably do get newspapers
as good as they deserve. They don’t get the truth
about themselves, their nation and the world, because
they don’t really want it badly enough. 25

Doctorow is certainly not the first American writer to
involve against the press. Thoreau, in "A Plea for Captain
John Brown," lamented,

I do not chance to know an [magazine or newspaper]
editor in the country who will deliberately print
anything which he knows will ultimately and permanently
reduce the number of his subscribers. They do not
believe that it would be expedient. How then can they
print truth? 26

Upton Sinclair bewailed the fate of any maverick magazine that
might challenge the hegemony of Big Business in America:

Ten years ago Henry D. Lloyd told all the truth about
the Standard Oil Company in his Wealth versus Common-
wealth, and the book was allowed to die, and you hardly
ever hear of it. And now, at last, two magazines
have the courage to tackle Standard Oil again, and
what happens? The newspapers ridicule the authors,
the churches defend the criminals, and the government—
does nothing.

Jack London branded the press the tool of the ruling class;

25. In Elizabeth Janeway, ed., The Writer’s World (New York:
26. In Sheila Delaney, ed., Counter-Tradition: The Literature of
he claimed that its editors were loath to criticize the status quo:

They [editors] draw their salaries for the policy they maintain. Their policy is to print nothing that is a vital menace to the established... The press of the United States? It is a parasitic growth that battens on the capitalist class. Its function is to serve the established by moulding public opinion, and right well it serves it. 28

The press did not exonerate itself from these charges during the Cold War era!

Given the political hysteria of the times, which as we have seen was greatly inflamed by the press, it was impossible for the Isaacsons to receive even a simulacrum of a fair trial. Reviewing the strategy his parents chose to adopt Daniel wondered if they should have tried a different approach: "...they didn't say of course, what else could we expect, they said, You are making a mockery of American justice!" (BD, p. 51) Doctorow explained the quandary this way:

...the radical wastes his opportunity if he seriously considers the issues of his trial. If he is found guilty it is the ruling power's decision that he cannot be tolerated. If he is found innocent it is the ruling power's decision that he need not be feared. The radical must not argue his innocence, for the trial is not of his making; he must argue his ideas. (BD, p. 200)

I.F. Stone explains the danger of arguing that one is not a subversive:

To plead that one is not "subversive" by the standards of the committee or of that ex parte blacklist drawn up by the Attorney General is to accept the right to establish a standard of orthodoxy and hereby in American political and religious thinking.

29. Stone, p. 42.
Many others have pointed out this contradiction—American rhetoric lauds diversity while American reality may punish non-conformity. This is especially true, Daniel reveals, if one's aberration from orthodoxy is in his economic beliefs.

Daniel's foster father asserted that Ascher probably made a crucial error in his strategy by granting the government the one premise he shouldn't have—that there was a crime committed at all. Daniel countered this hypothesis by blurt ing out, "But Mindish confessed!" Robert Lewin rejoined,

Yes. And Ascher's one chance was to discredit the confession... It's not what you'd call ordinary procedure. But everything was loaded against them and something extraordinary was required. There was a very slim chance—for all the massive righteousness and fear of the time, and the relentless federal machinery—there was still a way to bring in the other verdict. And that was to prove the Isaacsons innocent by proving Mindish innocent. 30

Lewin expands his argument:

...the more Ascher attacked Selig Mindish the more he led to the government's strength. After all it finally boils down to which testimony the jury is going to believe. If the defense tacitly joins the prosecution in assuming a crime of espionage was indeed committed, where shall the distinction be made as to who was and who was not involved? ...in this light even testimony developed by the defense, Mindish's questionable citizenship, operates for the prosecution. If he is not a citizen he is a foreigner, with foreign loyalties. His own testimony tends to be supported.... Ascher was asking an American jury to believe that a man would be evil enough to put the finger on his innocent friend of fifteen years, practically a father to them by his own characterization. Closer than family, 31 as he also described the relationship....

30. In the Rosenberg case, the crime committed by David Greenglass was the theft of a small amount of uranium from Los Alamos.
31. In the Rosenberg case, it was family—David Greenglass testified against his own sister and brother-in-law, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.
Like Ascher, the Rosenbergs' attorney, Emanuel Bloch, was a man of courage, decency, and integrity. But he was not brilliant, and only a truly brilliant lawyer would have had even a chance of winning this case. Michael Meeropol explains why Julius Rosenberg and Bloch decided on their tactics:

In prison awaiting trial he [Julius] agreed with a fellow prisoner's assessment that he would be convicted. He understood that, given the temper of the times, he had very little chance with the jury... Bloch concurred. Under those circumstances the defense strategy at the trial was restricted to creating a good impression in the hope of forestalling the death penalty, even if it meant not challenging all the prosecution's assertions.32

Today, in more halcyon times, it is easy to second guess this decision.

The Isaacsons did not use the one option that could have saved them. In the execution chamber was a phone linking the Isaacsons to Washington; they were told that if they named other conspirators, they would not be killed. They would not name others. This is another example where Doctorow closely follows the details of the Rosenberg trial. Michael Meeropol reports that his parents were also exhorted to name others if they hoped to live:

On June 2 [1953], John V. Bennett, the Director of the Bureau of Prisons, visited my parents as a direct emissary of Attorney General Brownell. He made a flagrant "talk or die" offer which our parents reacted to with a press release condemning the offer and insisting upon their innocence. The Justice Department responded by claiming the visit was "routine," no deal had been offered.33

32. Meeropol, p. 10.
33. Meeropol, p. 207.
The Rosenbergs stated that the offer of a deal indicated that the government had its own doubts concerning the case, and added that their dignity was not for sale.

Although Rochelle had no doubts about the outcome of their trial, she could not be certain what the penalty would be. As Robert Lewin explained to Daniel, the government wanted to take the case as far as it could, and by warning the Isaacsons that they would die if they did not name others, the death sentence itself was used as an investigative procedure. Writing about the Sacco-Vanzetti affair in Boston, Upton Sinclair asked, "Was there really a chance? Or was it merely that those in charge of affairs wanted it to seem that way?"\textsuperscript{34} If the same question is asked about the Isaacsons, Doctorow has answered it:

> The President of the United States had called in the Attorney General of the United States before he announced his decision on the Isaacson petition for clemency. It is believed that the Attorney General said to the President, "Mr. President, these folks have got to fry." (\textit{DD}, p. 312)\textsuperscript{35}

("The electric chair as methodology of capitalist economics."")

In the Rosenberg case, Eisenhower was warned by the State Department that his refusal to grant the clemency that was repeatedly urged by nations overseas might tarnish America's image. But it would take more than this admonition to deter him. Michael Meeropol writes:

> Eisenhower no doubt summarized his own attitude in his reaction to Brownell's importuning at a cabinet meeting: "My only concern is in the area of statecraft— the effect of the action." Guilt, innocence or mercy were absent from his calculations.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Woodward-Clark, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{35} Meeropol, p. 231.
A lengthy prison term could prove that the power elite is serious. The execution of a man and his wife would underscore their point.

While his parents were incarcerated, young Daniel told his psychologist that when people are in jail they are kept apart, and they are killed. The psychologist retorted that Daniel was needlessly alarmed, because very few people do something serious enough to lose their lives. But Daniel would not be deceived; he could intuit the times better than most. A decade and a half after his parents were killed, Daniel was told by Robert Lewin that the government could no longer do what they did then to gain a conviction. (Morton Sobell has made the same point about the Rosenberg-Sobell trial.) In the early 1950s most liberals were so cowed by the government's repression that they refused to have anything to do with the Rosenberg case. Before the Isaacsons' trial began, Ascher seemed to be less than fully cognizant of the odds against him. After Rochelle lamented that no one, not even those who were sympathetic, considered that her husband might be innocent, Ascher remarked,

Even among the educated.... That is the effect of a Federal Grand Jury indictment. It strains the presumption of innocence. But don't worry, a court is still a court, and that is where it will be decided. Not on 174th Street, but in the courtroom. (BD, p. 135)

Sardonically, the case was decided, in a very real sense, on 174th Street. The people on 174th Street were a microcosm of America: overcome with hysteria and fear, too intimidated to question the actions of their leaders, and quick to judge. If the results of the trial would be completely different today, Doctorow still confronts us with this question: "...if justice
cannot be made to operate under the worst possible conditions of social hysteria. "What does it matter how it operates at other times?" (BD, p. 243)

A decade after the Isaacsons were executed, Jack Fein informed Daniel that there was an FBI file on the case but it remained classified because it favored the defense. In the Rosenberg case, the FBI has also refused to divulge the contents of its files. Times have changed, and America of the 1970s is not the McCarthy era. But the crux of an allegation made by Jean Paul Sartre more than two decades ago may still be true:

"By killing the Rosenbergs you have quite simply tried to halt the progress of science by human sacrifice. Magic, witch hunts, auto-da-fe's, sacrifices—we are here getting to the point: your country is sick with fear...you are afraid of the shadow of your own bomb...."

...it must be a serious crime that would bring a Court of Inquiry down on a man.  FRAULEIN BURSTNER

Certainly I am surprised, but I am by no means very much surprised.  JOSEPH K
Chapter IV
"The Gambler Has No Rights"

Unlike his sister Susan, who is so consumed by rage that any balanced assessment of her parents is precluded, Daniel can and does make a sincere effort to probe the truth of their existence. Daniel's search returns to the time when Paul and Rochelle were students at CCNY, where their passion for justice and the liberation of the poor was already very evident. Although not even "liberated" from their own poverty, both of them "religiously hold out portions of their wealth for the Scottsboro Boys, or to free Tom Mooney, or for the Loyalists. LIFT THE ARMS EMBARGO!" (BD, p.209) Paul and Rochelle were generous with their time as well as their "wealth":

...Paul stands at the gate distributing the mimeographed leaflet protesting-what? The rape of Ethiopia, the giveaway of Czechoslovakia, Georgia chain gangs, the D.A.R., the A.F.L. The president of City College is said to support Mussolini. OUST ROBINSON! Rochelle is active organizing the union in her office. The people are uniting, offering a common front against the spread of Fascism. (BD, p.210)

Rochelle fell for her husband, Daniel tells us, at a Loyalist rally. Paul was not a practical fellow and his practical political understanding of the necessities of daily revolutionary life had been fused by the heat of too much belief. They were members of a party, after all.... The day-to-day intricacies of strategy and tactics did not command his attention. The issues commanded his attention. The ends in view. (BD, p.212)

Paul wasted no time in communicating these issues to his young son. Daniel would never forget the lectures:
He wanted me to grow up right. He wrestled society for my soul. He worked on me to counteract the bad influences of my culture. That was our relationship—his teaching me how to be a psychic alien.... Did I ever wonder why my radio programs had commercials? He'd find me reading the back of my cereal box at breakfast, and break the ad down and show me what it appealed to, how it was intended to make me believe something that wasn't— that eating the cereal would make me an athlete. There were foods one didn't eat, like bananas, because they were the fruit of some notorious exploitation. There were companies whose products we boycotted because of their politics or labor history.... He didn't like National Biscuit Company. He didn't like Standard Oil. He didn't like General Motors— not that we were ever in a position to buy a car. He didn't like General Motors because they were owned by DuPont, and DuPont had cartel agreements with I.G. Farben of Nazi Germany. (BD, p.45)

These are just a few of the "issues" that Daniel recounts.

Daniel listened, we are told, because that is the price that had to be paid for his father's attention. Daniel loved it at his father's radio shop; in its safe enclosure his father was too busy with his work to deliver lectures:

History had no pattern in those moments. Imperialism, the last phase of capitalism, did not exist.... When he was busy, I could secretly feel about him as other boys felt all the time about their fathers. And I didn't have to worry about the forces set against us in our struggle. (BD, p.50)

Perhaps Paul, in his fiery idealism, burdened young Daniel with too much awareness too soon, the relentless presentation of ideology absorbing much of the energy needed for the insouciant pursuits of youth.

Paul did more than talk about justice and sacrifice. His courage in resisting the crazed mob after the Robeson concert prevented the overturning of the bus, and the crushing to death of the passengers. Paul was the only one on the bus who did any-
thing. Daniel would always remember the incident:

...I could not forget the calm ferocity of his decision, folding his glasses against his chest and handing them to Minish. I could not forget the commitment in his absurdly naked eyes; or in his act, the quality of calmly experienced, planned revolutionary sacrifice. (BD, p. 64)

The reason Paul had tried to get the attention of the police, Daniel decided, was because he believed that "the Law would arrest the Fascist hoodlums. That is what put him at the door and made him vulnerable." (BD, p. 64)

Paul was vulnerable because he steadfastly refused to believe that the system he continually vituperated could ultimately fail him. Paul was unable to abandon the idea that if the crucial moment did come the system would act with enough benevolence not to betray him. Daniel writes,

My father never really believed that it would happen. My mother wasn't to be surprised from the day they were indicted. But he never believed it was possible. He believed in the beneficence of his ideals, and could not appreciate that anyone could find them offensive enough, threatening enough to do that. His ideas were an extension of himself, and he meant only well... He would never forget that America was not the cafeteria at City College, and as often as it was proved to him he forgot it. (BD, p. 51)

When the FBI knocked at the door, Rochelle was frightened, but Paul urged her not to become alarmed. Because they had done nothing wrong there was nothing to be afraid of. This same reassurance was given to Daniel when he visited his father in prison; he was told not to worry, because Paul had it on good authority that public sentiment would gather to prevent the outrage of their deaths from occurring. Insisting that innocent people cannot be put to death in America, Paul asserted, "The truth will reclaim us." (BD, p. 265)
Rochelle knew better; in her own way, Daniel believes, she was the more committed radical:

Because, look, the implication of all the things he used to flagellate himself was that American democracy wasn't democratic enough. He continued to be astonished, insulted, outraged, that it wasn't purer, freer, finer, more ideal. Finding proof of it over and over again... How much confirmation did he need? Why did he expect so much of a system he knew by definition could never satisfy his standards of justice? A system he was committed to opposing because he had a better one in mind. (BD, p.51)

Daniel recalls his father becoming furious when he listened to a program called Radio Town Meeting of the Air, because the questions debated were always loaded, and the strong speaker was always a right-winger! Still Paul continued to listen, and, in Rochelle's words, eat his heart out. Rochelle reminded Paul that he knew who owned the airways and the radio stations, and he knew it was all rigged. But Paul never failed to be amazed or shocked every time the system did not meet his standard of justice. For example, Paul found it unbelievable that Congress could pass a bill that put the Communist Party in this quandary: if it did not register it broke the law, while registration would be considered tantamount to overthrowing the United States. At the funeral of Daniel's grandmother there was a man who also found something unbelievable— that Paul would expect otherwise:

Do you have a lingering respect for the United States Congress that you are so astonished? Do you expect more from these avatars? Half of them are criminals; and the other half a petty bourgeois profiteers. Every southern Congressman is in office illegally, and each session they all vote to increase the appropriation of the Un-American Activities Committee. What is so unbelievable? (BD, p.98)

Rochelle, more of a pragmatist, became impatient with the lectures Paul delivered to Daniel;
She probably thought he wasted too much of himself, and me, on what should be accepted as a matter of course. It was nonsense to distinguish one capitalist perfidy from another. She put them all down and that was the end of it. (BD, p.45)

Rochelle, understanding the system, knew that it could never satisfy her standards of justice, and therefore harbored few illusions. Daniel writes that "the whole thing with Rochelle was defending herself against the vicious double-crossing trick that life was." (BD, p.53) Daniel makes it patently clear that Doctorow cannot agree with those individuals who attribute all of the evil and suffering in the world to capitalism. Paul Isaacson may have believed that "everything that happened was inevitable according to the Marxian analysis," but Doctorow knows that life is much more complex than that. (BD, p.46) Even if one could eradicate the perfidy and greed of America's corporate, political and military leaders, he still must contend with the human condition.

Daniel tells us more about Rochelle's political beliefs:

Her politics was not theoretical or abstract.... Her politics was like grandma's religion- some purchase on the future against the terrible life of the present.... The coming of socialism would sanctify those who had suffered. You went out and took your stand, and did what had to be done, not because you expected anything from it, but because some day there would be retribution and you wanted just a little of it to bear your name. (BD, p.53)

Unlike Paul, Daniel speculates, Rochelle would never have become a Red had she not been poor. One of the great ironies in the novel is Daniel's revelation that Rochelle "had a profound dis-taste for the common man. Her life was a matter of taking pains to distinguish herself from her neighbors." (BD, p.107)

Rochelle and Paul did share many basic assumptions about
the nature of American society. But neither their personalities nor their Weltanschauung were always in complete accord or even similar. When they joined the party they found that its monolithic structure had little respect for human differences and even less regard for the lives of its members if the strength of the party itself was threatened. Within a day after the Isaacsons were arrested, the party had expunged them from their records, refusing to have anything more to do with them—until the Isaacsons received their death sentences. Then they could be used for their propaganda value. Rochelle loathed the party's narrowness of vision, its insolence, and its subordination of the individual for a "greater good." Ruminating on Mindish's comradeship, which took their lives, Rochelle thought,

My God how I hate them all, how I despise their pompous little egos and their discussions and resolutions and breast-beating; with their arrogance as they delivered to us each week the truth, the gospel according to 11th Street. Always they treated Paul like a child and with his mind! a mind so fine, so superior to theirs except in the grubby self-serving politics of the Party. He was always being censured, he was never quite in step.... Communists have no respect for people, only for positions. It is as if we never existed. (BD, p.219)

For Fanny Ascher, the party must not be burdened with all of the reproach. When Daniel interviewed her, she expressed her bitterness for the case, blaming it for ruining her husband's health and eventually taking his life. Asked if she didn't think that the Isaacsons were innocent, she replied, "They were not innocent of permitting themselves to be used... And of using other people in their fanaticism." (BD, p.232)

Describing his parents just before their execution, with Paul's faith and illusions finally shattered, Daniel reports:
Nothing had gone right. No cause had rallied. The world had not flamed to revolution. The issue of the commutation of the sentence, their chance for life, seemed to have turned on the quality, the gentility, the manners, of the people fighting for them. The cause seemed to have been discredited as a political maneuver. As if there was some grand fusion of associative guilt— the Isaacsons confirmed in their guilt because of who campaigned for their freedom, and their supporters discredited because they campaigned for the Isaacsons. (BD, p. 312)

The fate of the Isaacsons was put most succinctly by Jack Fein: "...between the FBI and the CP your folks never had a chance," he told Daniel. (BD, p. 228) Which is another great irony. The party, which the Isaacsons joined in the hope of actuating their ideals, was in no small measure responsible for their deaths. Paul and Rochelle were forced to conclude that the party was guilty of many of the same abuses that it claimed to be trying to correct. But Paul, Daniel tells us, "had that analytic cool; he claimed to believe in the insignificance of personal experience within the pattern of history. He even wrote that when he was in jail." (BD, p. 43) Rochelle looked at the matter a little differently. In one of her last letters to Paul, Rochelle wrote, "The gambler has no rights." Daniel comments:

It is a non sequitur. It is a line that makes no other sense. Its context is one of those miserable conversations they were allowed to have through the wire mesh once a week... as he tried to get her approval for what he had done alone, for the complicity he had forced upon them, for the defense they had offered; for the gamble of her life and his. (BD, p. 297)

Paul made the decision to gamble their lives for something he deemed far more significant, for a larger historical purpose. The Isaacsons' tragic destiny was largely the result of the decision to select the party as the vehicle for the realization
of their ideals. Strapped to their electric chairs, the Isaacsons died knowing that for the party the idea was paramount, the individual of only secondary importance.

When Daniel's grandmother ran away again, he told the black janitor Williams that she was crazy. Williams retorted, "Not crazy as some." (BD, p.104) Daniel realized that Williams was referring to his parents. Today (especially with the benefit of hindsight) it is easy to criticize the Isaacsons, easy to ridicule their party membership. We also see that Paul's gamble of their lives was based on a naive and simplistic view of history. But what if the Isaacsons had not taken their stand, what if they had sacrificed their integrity? If repression is offered no resistance, will it become any less virulent? According to Artie Sternlicht, the revolution has a surfeit of martyrs. But if the Isaacsons had talked, and blacklisted others to satisfy the demands of the government for more conspirators, who knows how many more innocent people might have suffered? Had there been no one courageous enough to resist, how much worse would the repression have become? The Isaacsons' sacrifice of their lives helps to spare us, in a small way, the agony of answering these questions.¹

¹ The Isaacsons are not the Rosenbergs. Those who seek autobiographical information about the Rosenbergs should consult other sources. It was not Doctorow's purpose to write their autobiography.
Human beings can be awful cruel to one another.
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

The evil that men do lives after them. ANTHONY, at Caesar's burial

The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her children gazing on... WALT WHITMAN
Chapter V
"A Failure of Analysis"

We will now examine the effect of the Isaacsons' tragic death on their children. Only Paul and Rochelle were directly killed by the government, but others also suffered greatly, especially their children. Although there is no question that Daniel has been deeply scarred by the loss of his parents, his sister has been much more seriously wounded. Shortly before her attempted suicide, Susan had spent some time with a "revolutionary" named Artie Sternlicht and his wife. To better understand Susan's self-destructive politics, we will first take a look at Sternlicht, who shares a number of her political assumptions.

Daniel saw Sternlicht's name on a poster container in Susan's car, and decided to visit him. One thing that Sternlicht made very clear to Daniel was that he believed that the Isaacsons did not conduct themselves very intelligently at their trial. Sternlicht also asserted that the radical must not argue his innocence, but his ideas:

...The way they handled themselves at their trial was pathetic. I mean they played it by their rules. The government's rules.... Instead of standing up and saying fuck you, do what you want, I can't get an honest trial anyway with you fuckers- they made motions; they pleaded innocent, they spoke only when spoken to, they played the game. All right? The whole frame of reference brought them down because they acted like defendants at a trial. (BP, p.166)

There is a real possibility that this viewpoint really crushed Susan. Sternlicht was equally critical of the old American
Communists, and explained to Daniel what was wrong with them:

They were into the system. They wore ties. They held
down jobs. They put people up for president. They
thought politics is something you do at a meeting. When
they got busted they called it tyranny. They were Russian
tit suckers. Who's free in Russia? (BD, p.166)

When an interviewer from *Cosmopolitan* told Sternlicht that
certain individuals have stated that the peace movement cannot
afford people like him, Sternlicht suggested the crux of the matter
was quite the opposite:

The question is can the revolution afford the peace
movement. You mean those dudes who march down the
street and think they're changing something? Peace
marches are for the middle class to get its rocks off.
The peace movement is part of the war. Heads or tails
it's the same coin. The Indian or the buffalo, it's
the same fucking nickel. Right? And they're both
extinct. (BD, p.149)

Sternlicht believed that the "fac peace movement" was a waste
of time— one must put down anything that is less than a revolu-
tion. Sternlicht also claimed that he did not worry about dying,
because if you are not willing to die there can be no revolution.

Sternlicht would have little patience with the Lewins; we
know Susan had little patience with them. She showed her grat-
titude for her foster parents, who labored selflessly to give her
a good home and a stable environment, by putting them down for
their cautiousness. When it developed that Daniel did not agree
with all of her ideas, Susan began to cry and said to Robert
Lewin: "And you know. I blame you... I blame you all for this
piece of shit brother of mine." (BD, p.94) Earlier, Susan in-
formed Daniel that he had "all the political development of a
retard," and suggested, "Go back to the stacks, Daniel. The
world needs another graduate student." (BD, p.94) Daniel's
rejoinder was that he did not have to go out and get beat up to justify his existence, which enraged Susan even more. A major criticism leveled at the students of Kent State would apply a fortiori to Susan. As Michener says in his study of the case:

[The university's] most promising scholars had been so diverted by politics that they were ignoring those basic studies which have been the very foundation of political action.... There seemed to be a lack of dedication to knowledge, as if societies or lives could be held together without it. We were especially disturbed by the lack of formal knowledge on the part of the young radicals; they seemed not to know that men like Marx and Lenin studied endlessly before they developed their ideas and that Americans like Thomas Jefferson and Sam Adams were patient scholars before they became revolutionary leaders. They were irritated when we pressed for specific answers as to what they would do if their revolution succeeded; Abbie Hoffman's famous reply can be considered amusing: "Abolish pay toilets man, that's the goal of our revolution. Eternal life and free toilets." Such a wisecrack has a place in any movement, for it jollies up the debate, but to accept it for the hard, bitter analysis that men and movements require is to accept rubbish.

It would be difficult to justify the dogmatism exhibited by Susan in any individual, even one who has lucubrated for decades in his field. If Susan was a "promising scholar," her lack of patience and unbridled fury destroyed her and the possibility of bringing any of her ideals into fruition.

Early in his book Daniel wrote: "In Susan resides the fateful family gift for having definite feelings. Always taking stands, even as a kid. A moralist, a judge. This is right, that is wrong, this is good, that is bad." (BD, p.19) As she grew older Susan also developed an extreme self-righteousness. She lost her respect for Dr. Duberstein when she learned that he played golf twice a week! She became so enraged and so intolerant

1. Michener, p. 461.
of her own brother that Daniel was forced to conclude, "There is some evidence that she was driven finally to eradicate him from her consciousness by the radical means of eradicating her consciousness." (BD, p. 95)

Discussing his sister's funeral, Daniel wrote: "She died of a failure of analysis." (BD, p.317) Susan was too impatient to take the time to analyze the complexities of the human condition. She seemed to believe that all of her own exigencies and life's problems could be solved by radical political action. She sought to liberate others before she had even embarked on her own liberation. According to M.-L. von Franz,

...in our time genuine liberation can start only with a psychological transformation. To what end does one liberate one's country if afterward there is no meaningful goal of life—no goal for which it is worthwhile to be free? If man no longer finds any meaning in his life, it makes no difference whether he wastes away under a communist or under a capitalist regime. Only if he can use his freedom to create something meaningful is it relevant that he should be free. That is why finding the inner meaning of life is more important to the individual than anything else...2

Susan ignored Duberstein's warning about becoming too involved in political activities. She invested too much of her energy trying to vindicate the name of her parents. In a letter to Daniel, referring to their altercation of the previous Christmas, Susan wrote:

You couldn't have come on that way unless you believe the Isaacsons are guilty. That's what I didn't want to understand at the time. You think they are guilty. It's enough to take someone's life away. (BD, p.89)

Daniel himself has stated in his book that he finds no clues to prove his parents either guilty or innocent, and adds that perhaps

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they are neither guilty nor innocent. The truth may be elusive for Daniel, but for Susan it never is. Daniel explains what Susan meant when she said, "They're still fucking us":

She didn't mean Paul and Rochelle. That's what I would have meant. What she meant was first everyone else and now the Left. The Isaacsons are nothing to the New Left. And if they can't make it with them who else is there? You get the picture. Goodbye, Daniel. (BD, p.169)

When the New Left did not become as enamored with her parents as she was, Susan's life lost its meaning. Her entire raison d'être seemed to be contingent upon the New Left embracing the Isaacsons as two of their heroes. Because they did not, she was crushed, and lost her will to live.

Watching his moribund sister lying on her asylum bed, Daniel wrote:

Today Susan is a starfish. Today she practices the silence of the starfish. There are few silences deeper than the silence of the starfish. There are not many degrees of life lower before there is no life. (BD, p.223)

Later Daniel added:

A starfish is not outraged. We must preserve our diminishing energies insofar as we direct them to the true objectives. A certain portion of the energy must be used for the regeneration of energy. (BD, p.226)

Tragically, Susan's outrage was nearly boundless. All of her energy had been spent. All life in her vanished as she failed to regenerate any energy. Discussing his parents, Daniel wrote: "To desire social justice was a way of living without envy, which is the emotion of a loser. It was a way of transforming envy into constructive outgoing hate." (BD, p.43) Susan was incapable of channeling her emotions into a constructive outlet. Instead of vindicating her parents, she compounded their tragedy.
What Susan never seemed to realize was that her misfortunes and her suffering did not make her unique. She did not stop to consider that millions before her had suffered great pains and grave injustices, yet many of these people were thankful for being lucky enough to have simply survived. Daniel detailed the terrible suffering of their grandmother. And their foster mother, Daniel informs us, was "a refugee, hunted by the Nazis all across Europe as a kid. Who am I to claim privilege by my suffering." (bd. p. 38) When Daniel encountered Linda Mindish in California, he discovered that she had also suffered, perhaps even more than the Isaccsons' children. Linda Mindish explained,

In many ways I had it worse. Your parents after all were heroes to some elements. Today I understand you can find Isaccson streets all through Eastern Europe. But Selig Mindish was a hero to no one. ... What my father did brings no honor to himself or his family. You lose friends for something like that. You go to jail, where your health breaks. And afterwards you make no new friends... there used to be times when I wished strongly, very strongly, that my father might be executed, that we could change places, the Isaccsons and Mindishes... (bd. p. 290)

Susan would probably dismiss what Linda Mindish has said as blatantly untrue. Daniel will probably at least give it some serious thought. Linda also told Daniel that the experiences she suffered enabled her to discover resources of character in herself that might have otherwise remained untapped. Susan's suffering did not strengthen her; Daniel's might. He is still struggling. There is no question that Daniel has suffered some very severe psychic wounds. Daniel himself is largely responsible for what are perhaps the two most disturbing scenes in the entire novel. In one of these scenes Daniel, with his wife Phyllis and baby son Paul riding with him, turned off his windshield wipers.
and drove his sister's car 85mph in the rain. He did not assuage his wife's panic when he quietly explained to her that there was considerable play in the steering, the front wheels were unaligned, the brakes were worn and the tires slick. Daniel refused to drive slowly until Phyllis agreed to remove her pants so that Daniel might humiliate her. There is evidence that Daniel had degraded Phyllis on other occasions. When Daniel was questioned by Phyllis's parents about the bruises they noticed on their daughter's upper legs, he evaded the question by mumbling and feigning not to understand. In another frightening passage, Doctorow does a masterful job of limning the terror of Daniel's young son as he is thrown higher and higher into the air. Daniel tells us,

> In the park I threw Paul into the air and caught him, and he laughed. I threw my son in the air a little higher and he screeched a little louder as I caught him. I tossed my son higher and higher, and now he laughed no longer but cried out. Still I did not stop and threw him higher and caught him closer to the ground. Then Phyllis was begging me to stop. The baby now shut his mouth, concentrating on his fear, his small face, my Isaacson face, locked in absolute dumb dread of the breath-taking flight into the sky and the even more terrifying fall toward earth. I can't bear to think about this murder-ous feeling. I enjoyed the fear in his mother. When I finally stopped she grabbed Paul and sat down on a bench and hugged him and sat hugging him. He was white. (BD, p.145)

We see that Daniel is burdened with a tremendous hatred that he must exorcise. Daniel does not try to deny that he has this hatred. He does not dissemble, he does not report his actions as less than very disturbing and extremely immature. He is struggling to overcome his rage, because only then is there the possibility of his acting with some purpose, responsibility and consistency. Until he gives his actions some kind of recognizable pattern,
however, Daniel does not feel that he should be condemned:

...it enrages me that anyone, let alone my kid sister, could have characterized my actions, could have found in what I was doing and the way I was acting enough consistency, enough of a pattern, to make a confident moral judgment. (BD, p. 224)

Earlier Daniel had explained why he did not especially care for "confident moral judgments": "Of one thing we are sure. Everything is elusive. God is elusive. Revolutionary morality is elusive. Justice is elusive. "Human character." (BD, p. 54) Daniel also seems aware that the truth about himself is elusive. Unlike his sister Susan, though, he appears to be willing to look for it.

As we read Daniel's book we can find some evidence that Daniel is maturing. At one point his mind returns to the time when he was in the Shelter. He recalls that he did imitations of one of the most pathetic children there, the Inertia Kid. He now views the incident with shame, noting that "in order to do like he did you had to disconnect your heart muscle, you had to give up your heart..." (BD, p. 137) When Duberstein asked Daniel why he resented anyone who tried to help Susan, he responded, "Screw off, Doc. Go find your golf clubs and play a round with Dwight David Eisenhower." (BD, p. 38) He admits that this remark is witless and anachronistic, and astonishes even him. Before he joined the march on the Pentagon, where he would turn in his draft card, Daniel was amazed to learn that Phyllis considered taking the baby on the march. The same baby that Daniel had terrified by repeatedly flinging into the air. There may be hope.

Winthrop Path at the Lewins' house had 147 steps, and for
Daniel it was a source of great satisfaction knowing it would always be that number. Gratitude for a little stability and certainty in a chaotic life. And, unlike Susan, Daniel was grateful to his foster parents:

Suspense is all Robert Lewin can look forward to as the father of these children. He doesn't even have the assurance of his own genes. I feel such sad tenderness for the guy, I put my arm around his shoulder. He's no slouch. He works like hell, and belongs to committees, and practices law for poor people and writes for the law journals. He is big in the ACLU. He is popular with his classes, a thorn in the Dean's side, a demonstrator against Dow Chemical recruiters.

Daniel and Susan have often been very cruel to their foster parents. Yet, Daniel tells us, neither of the Lewins is capable of regretting what they have done for their children. While Susan puts down the Lewins for their cautiousness, Daniel notes some of the things she might have been grateful for:

Each child had a room of his own. Lise bought them clothes that fit. It was life in the middle class and it was unbelievably good. Bob Lewin... came on in a way that seemed to suggest that it might be possible to live comfortably and yet with honor. Their new parents never shouted, life didn't beat out that rhythm of crisis and training for crisis. There was an absence of ideology and relentless moral sentim... There was an assumption that constantly surprised Daniel, that took getting used to: It was all right every now and then to enjoy yourself and have a good time. (BD, p.74)

Robert Lewin, Daniel tells us, hoped to stabilize him with responsibility. Maybe some day Daniel would also come to share Robert Lewin's love of the law. Daniel writes:

My lawyer father is no accident, and it is no accident that he loves American law, an institution that constantly fails and that he constantly loves, like a bad child who someday in his love will not fail, stabilized with responsibility. (BD, p.171)

Daniel had previously pointed out that Robert Lewin loved the law
even though he was fully cognizant that it was vulnerable to the mentality of the people who live by it. Daniel's foster father does all he can to see that the law evolves toward perfection.

But is that enough? Daniel cannot help but show his admiration for his foster father, who gives a supreme effort to make the system work. Daniel would have to admit that Robert Lewin has made some significant accomplishments working within the system. Robert Lewin, it would seem, is a model very worthy of Daniel's emulation. But there stirs within Daniel a profound conflict: does he have the patience to work within the system, or, like his executed father, will the system never be able to adequately satisfy his standards of justice? Would Daniel be willing to work within the system if it could be changed only slowly? Or will he become so enraged that he abandons any hope of achieving his ideals with anything less than the eradication of the existing system? This is truly one of the major conflicts in the novel, and Doctorow presents no simple solutions. As we have seen, Daniel feels compelled to express his admiration for Robert Lewin, who, incidentally, advised the University of Virginia students who found no less than seventeen abuses of due process as grounds for a retrial for the Isaacsons). But in addition to Daniel's expression of esteem there is also this:

Robert Lewin is still at work on a way to reverse the verdict. I am beginning to be intolerant of reformers. Ascher depending on the appellate courts. I am beginning to be nauseated by men of good will. We are dealing here with a failure to make connections. The failure to make connections is complicity. Reform is complicity.

It is complicity in the system to be appalled with the moral structure of the system. (EP, p.243)
In one of the three endings Daniel offers for his book, the juxtaposition of the funerals of his parents and his sister, he recounts the effect of Susan's death on the Lewins: "My mother wears a black hat with a veil over her eyes. Her eyes are swollen and red and her mouth is turned down in ugly grief. My father wears a dark suit and tie. He is demolished." (BD, p.316)

The Lewins truly care, they give of themselves, they try to live just and meaningful lives. They celebrate victories, they suffer defeats. They know joy, they endure sorrow. They simply do the best they can working within the system. They try to accept the human condition, defining what they believe is possible by acknowledging its parameters. They are not under the illusion that political action will engender a utopia. What Susan did not learn, and what Daniel hopefully may yet learn, is that not all of the suffering and evil in the world can be blamed on repressive governments. Doctorow does not gainsay that many of the injustices suffered by man can be remedied by political action. But his novel serves as an equally cogent reminder that man is fallible and limited, and that chance, luck, accidents or fate will not disappear under any political system.

Daniel knows that the evils of American society that Sternlicht and Susan loathed are hardly indigenous to the United States. Rather, "all societies are armed societies. All citizens are soldiers. All Governments stand ready to commit their citizens to death in the interest of their government." (BD, p.85) This point is accentuated by the following passage:

A MESSAGE OF CONSOLATION TO MY GREEK BROTHERS IN THEIR PRISON CAMPS, AND TO MY HAITIAN BROTHERS AND NICARAGUAN BROTHERS AND BRAZILIAN BROTHERS AND SOUTH AFRICAN
BROTHERS AND SPANISH BROTHERS AND TO MY
BROTHERS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, ALL IN THEIR PRISON CAMPS:
YOU ARE IN THE FREE WORLD! (BD, p. 253)

Daniel knows that evil does not respect the boundary of Churchill's
iron curtain. Neither does human weakness and limitation. When
their parents were taken away from them, Daniel and Susan stayed
with Aunt Frieda for five weeks. She could not put up with them
any longer. In retrospect Daniel is able to feel sorry for Aunt
Frieda because he realizes that she was merely a limited person.
And Daniel knows that, to varying degrees, we are all limited
persons. So, unlike Susan, he knows that no political system
can extirpate all evils. There will always remain the problems
of the human heart. Near the end of his book Daniel devotes a
page to the discussion of human heart transplants. He notes that
these operations are not very successful, and adds that "doctors
still have a lot to learn about why we reject our hearts." (BD, p.
309) Daniel had previously illustrated the problem this way:

A medical textbook. On the white and shining pages are
photographs of three female bodies. Little, withered
Grandma with her head of wildly twisted grey hair. Rochelle,
strong, breasty, stocky, prim mouthed. And Susan in her
thin gold granny glasses.... The meaning of the picture is
in the thin, diagrammatic arrow line, colored red, that
runs from Grandma's breast through your mama's and into
your sister's. The red line describes the progress of
madness inherited through the heart. (BD, p. 83)

That madness may be inherited through the human heart seems to
be part of the human condition. Doctorow is optimistic enough,
however, to believe that madness is not necessarily inherited.
The process is not ineluctable. Included among the subjects
that he will take up later in his book, Daniel informs us, is
the Isaacson Foundation. Under this he writes,
IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART? (BD, p. 27)

Because Daniel has asked this question, there is at least the possibility that he may find an answer. Susan did not get the matter out of her heart, and it destroyed her. Daniel is working to purge his heart of rage and bitterness. The writing of his book is his catharsis. Daniel knows that his suffering makes him neither unique nor privileged. Perhaps the most fitting monument to his parents’ memory would be the living of some of their best ideals in his own life.

One day when Daniel was a young child playing on the porch he saw a woman walking home carrying her groceries. When Daniel looked up he saw a car skid up onto the sidewalk and smash her right through the schoolyard fence, killing her. Why does Daniel include this incident in his book? Maybe to accentuate the fact that he is aware of, and trying to accept, something that his sister could not— that life itself often delivers harsh, cruel, and fatal blows, and that evils like this will never be remedied— or satisfactorily explained— by any political system. Jung explained it like this:

The sad truth is that man's real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites— day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. We are not even sure that one will prevail against the other, that good will overcome evil, or joy defeat pain. Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be, and if it were not so, existence would come to an end.

Daniel can remain cognizant of this and still work for meaningful

social and political change. It might help him to do what Susan could not do—develop realistic goals and be thankful that some of them can be realized. Daniel's book suggests that his stint on life's battleground may be far from over.
If an artist falsifies his report as to the nature of man, as to his own nature, as to the nature of his ideal of the perfect, as to the nature of his ideal of this or the other, of god, if god exist, of the life force, of the nature of good and evil, if good and evil exist, of the force with which he believes or disbelieves this, that or the other, of the degree in which he suffers or is made glad; if the artist falsifies his reports on these matters or on any other matter in order that he may conform to the taste of his time, to the proprieties of a sovereign, to the conveniences of a preconceived code of ethics, then that artist lies. EZRA POUND

Literature that is not the breath of contemporary society, that dares not transmit the pains and fears of that society, that does not warn in time against threatening moral and social dangers—such literature does not deserve the name of literature; it is only a facade. ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

It may well be that a work of art has moral effects; but to demand moral aims and purposes from the artist means to botch his job for him. GOETHE
Chapter VI
The Social Critic as Literary Artist

The Book of Daniel might be categorized as either a political novel or as a historical novel. It can be viewed as a political novel because it is, as we have seen, a very serious critique of American foreign policy and the effects of that policy on the domestic political scene. It is a historical novel insofar as it not only includes numerous passages relating various aspects of United States history, but also because it is modeled in many ways on the actual Rosenberg-Sobell case. In addition, Daniel could be classified as a "social, protest" novel, as it shares a number of common elements with that genre. Bearing this in mind, we are confronted with the fact, according to Rideout, that "we still know very little about the enormously complicated relation between a society and its literature."¹ Sartre believes that this is a problem not only for those who criticize literature, but also for those who create it; he has stated that "the problem that the writer has to solve for himself and to make clear to others is the problem of the relation of ends and means."² The problem can also be perceived this way: when John Barth was asked if he could not imagine circumstances which would lead to political commitment in his writing, he replied, with no equivocation,

¹ Rideout, p. vii.
Not only can I not imagine it, I would be distressed if my fiction ever became political in any way. If it came to "committed art" or "pure" art— to use the corny old terms in which the Europeans still always debate the issue—I would mount the ramparts for pure art every time. But it's a stupid dichotomy to make. All you have to do is think of the great nineteenth century Russian novelists and you see how it breaks down. Is Dostoevski a pure or committed artist?

It is a stupid dichotomy to make because the issue is one of extreme complexity. We will try to keep this complexity in mind as we evaluate Daniel.

Barth is certainly not the only writer who would become distressed if his fiction became in any way political. Other writers would not be bothered by this at all, and of course some make a conscious effort to be political. There would probably be less disagreement, however, with Wayne C. Booth's contention that "an author has an obligation to be as clear about his moral position as he possibly can be." The assumption here, of course, is that most writers do have, in the broadest sense, a moral position.

Joyce Cary certainly believes that they do:

All writers have, and must have, to compose any kind of story, some picture of the world, and of what is right and wrong in that world. All the great writers are obsessed with their theme. They're sure they're right, and their message would save the world. This is as true of Lawrence as of Tolstoy, or Dante, or the monkish author of Everyman.

A political novelist, like Doctorow in Daniel, will also have a picture of what is right and wrong with the nation(s) that he writes about. And if Doctorow is not obsessed with his theme,

he leaves the reader no doubt that he is very concerned. If it is ludicrous to believe that one's message can save the world, in a nuclear age it may not be less absurd to ignore the issues that Doctorow raises. Doctorow may be somewhat reluctant to claim that he is sure that he is right; like Daniel, he knows that the truth is elusive. But Doctorow has marshalled some weighty evidence to support his contentions. The author of Daniel is both disturbed, and at times incensed, by the callous greed, stupidity, and hypocrisy that is often foisted as American leadership. If Doctorow's anger is at times hardly camouflaged, it is nonetheless balanced by a positive concern for the plight of humanity. Although Doctorow writes, and writes very adroitly, about politics, he has also embraced a larger theme, the one that we see in all great literature—the human condition itself. Without minimizing the truly momentous role politics plays in the era of the super bomb, Doctorow does not allow us to forget that politics is just one aspect of the human condition. While Doctorow does extend great commiseration to those who suffer, directly or indirectly, from the political climate of their nation, those whose suffering must be imputed to nothing less than the human condition itself are allocated no less sympathy. Doctorow would seem to share Eudora Welty's belief that

indifference would indeed be corrupting to the fiction writer, indifference to any part of man's plight. Passion is the chief ingredient of good fiction. It flames right out of sympathy for the human condition and goes into all great writing.

Walter Rideout, evaluating radical novels written in the United States since 1900, explains the key flaw in one group of them:

...the big, plain awkward fact is that a majority of the writers were socialists first, novelists second, had something to say before they had a way of saying it. For them art was means, not end or, what is of course best, means-end. Hence the greater part of this fiction is of more interest now to the historian than the critic.7

A comment by William Faulkner stresses the same point Rideout made. Conducting a series of lectures in Japan, Faulkner was asked his opinion of other American writers. When a student inquired specifically about Upton Sinclair, he received this response:

Mr. Sinclair was a second rate writer with a first rate message. He was so busy trying to tell the world his message, that he didn't take the time to make himself a first rate artist. Though he was a first rate man, he was not a first rate writer."8

Doctorow has not made the same mistake in Daniel. Although he may be very concerned with his "message," he has taken great care that it is not subordinated to his craft. As we read Daniel we are often very conscious of the author doing his best to impart the optimal shape and form to his materials.

Discussing novelists of the nineteenth century who criticized the economic conditions of the United States, Claude Flory notes that

...often the authors— even Bellamy in regard to Looking Backward, the most famous of these economic novels—point out what the reader soon discovers as truth, that "barely enough story was left to decently drape the skeleton of the argument, and not enough, I fear, in spots, even for that purpose."9

7. Rideout, p. 86.
(The individual Flory cites in his quote, incidentally, is
Bellamy.) What these writers have failed to do is what Ford
Madox Ford, according to Booth, always attempted in his fiction.
Booth writes that for Ford

the common aim of good modern novelists like James, Crane,
Conrad and himself is "to take the reader, immerse him in
an Affair so completely that he was unconscious either of
the fact that he was reading or of the identity of the
author, so that in the end he might say— and believe: 'I
have been [there], I have been.""10

Although at times we may be very conscious of Daniel working on
his book, Doctorow has been able to successfully immerse the
reader not only in one "affair" but two. The reader is soon
cought up in the two separate narratives, anxious to learn the
fate not only of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson but also their children's.
Doctorow, like the writers Flory mentioned, may have an argument,
and feel very deeply about it, but his gripping story remains in
ascendancy. One of the reasons that we become immersed in the
story in Daniel is because of Doctorow's skillful characterization,
which is, Arthur Quinn has observed, something that is often sorely
lacking in "protest" fiction:

From the historian's point of view, the fiction of protest
has its value in its representation of the feeling of the
times. But its importance as literature rests upon other
considerations. If criticism of life is to be significant,
it must be written by a man who has a broad knowledge not
only of the surface but also of the fundamental springs of
human conduct. However just his imagination may be, how-
ever generous his motives, his work will not endure if he
submerges his characters to his desire for reform.11

11. American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New
Writers who understand or dramatize no more than the surface of their characters will produce what E.M. Forester has called "flat characters." To understand only the surface of a character is really not to understand the character at all. Doctorow probes beneath the surface, giving his characters a complexity that mirrors the world they inhabit. Paul and Rochelle were both party members, but they are presented as two very different people, and even Paul, who believed what was happening was inevitable according to the Marxian analysis, is far more than simply the stereotype of a "commie." Susan and Sternlicht would both be viewed by some as New Left fanatics, but they are hardly similar personalities; Susan could have benefited from some of Sternlicht's "humor." Perhaps the most complex character of all is Daniel, who is at the end of the novel still searching for himself. There is a distinct possibility that he can avoid the tragedy that killed his sister. Doctorow might have simply drawn thinly disguised portraits of the Rosenbergs and their children, but, as an artist concerned with more than merely presenting a certain political ideology, he has skillfully created some memorable characters of his own.

Like Doctorow, Theodore Dreiser also based some of his novels (e.g. An American Tragedy) on incidents drawn from history, striving to achieve a greater sense of "reality." According to Millgate,

Dreiser's immersion in the social fact is perhaps his greatest source of strength, but his failure to organize his material is his greatest weakness. His passion for social documentation becomes an obsession which...operates in complete disregard for literary form.12

12. Woodward-Clark, p. 11.
If Millgate's indictment is largely accurate, Doctorow has not made the same mistake. As we read Doctorow's novel we sense that we are in the presence of a real artist. Throughout his book Daniel attempts to give the best possible organization to his material; literary form is not relegated to a secondary concern. As one rereads Daniel he becomes even more aware of just how well the novel is organized, how carefully individual scenes, passages and even words have been chosen. This would be difficult to deny even by those who find Doctorow's politics unacceptable.

Another danger for the novelist of social protest, Millgate explains, is that "there is a tendency for the social material, the 'information,' to become separated out from the ostensible action of the novel." In Daniel there is indeed more than a modicum of various kinds of 'social material' presented, but this data is effectively woven into the book's structure and contributes vitally to the novel's meaning. For example, without the discussions of the Cold War and treason, most readers would probably be less convinced of why the Isaacsons' trial was necessary, and how little chance they stood of being acquitted. The graphic descriptions of tortures practiced by ruling classes of various nations during the past several centuries might convince the reader that "progress" is being made, or remind him that even the most "civilized" nations have not completely abandoned this barbarism. Joseph Conrad alerted his readers that in Nostromo the few historical allusions are never dragged in for the sake of parading my unique erudition, but that each of them is closely related to actuality; either throwing

13. Woodward-Clark, p. 11.
a light on the nature of current events or affecting directly the fortunes of the people of whom I speak. In Daniel there are, of course, more than a few historical allusions, but Doctorow also has a higher purpose than merely flaunting his sagacity. Booth explains why we may be able to justify Doctorow's use of his scholarly treatises and other commentary:

Much commentary that seems excessive if judged by the narrow standards of function is wholly defensible when seen as contributing to our sense of traveling with a trustworthy companion, an author who is sincerely battling to do justice to his materials.

And Daniel is certainly doing that in his book. Daniel feels that he has some very important things to say, but he is always concerned about how his feelings are communicated.

For Rideout, the function of all literature, including the novel,

is to make the reader aware, and the better the book the greater the degree of possible awareness. A novel does not send its reader to the barricades or the altar, but rather enlarges his experience, makes him realize more fully the possibilities of the human being. The novel, whatever its formal ideology, is essentially a humanizing force.

Daniel, unlike some of the protest literature that has preceded it, is not a clarion to revolution. (In fact, the dissolution of Susan's life may serve as a warning against charging the barricades.) Since Daniel does help make the reader aware of the complexity of the human condition, it is for that reason alone a humanizing force. In fact, it can be argued that literature that captures the multifariousness of the human condition

15. Booth, p. 213.
is really more of a humanizing force than much social protest literature. This is the point Clarence Darrow tried to make in "Realism in Literature and Art" (1899), where he had objected to "thesis novels" because they falsified human nature in order to teach a theoretical lesson. . . . [He] argued that simply by presenting the world exactly as it was the artist could not "help but catch the inspiration that is filling all the world's best minds with the hope of greater justice and more equal social life."17

Doctorow has also tried to present the world as it is, with all of its complexity. He has also given us the necessary first step in achieving a greater justice, as Daniel heightens our awareness of origins of America's failures. I have tried to explain why I believe that Daniel is a work of art, and not a piece of propaganda. Quinn explains how the political novel can lapse into propaganda:

Propaganda usually means bad art, for in order to drive home a projected reform, a novelist generally overemphasizes the evil he is describing in relation to the complete picture of life. Everything he says may be correct, in detail, yet it may present an untrue picture of life because other elements in the picture are omitted. Nothing can be more untrue than a fact when the fact is distorted. And the fiction of protest must stand or fall by its reality in this larger sense.18

Again, Doctorow makes an effort to remind us that much of the evil in the world cannot be imputed to unwise political decisions or corrupt political regimes. Daniel exhorts us to remember that evil has many sources. Evil can be classified into two very different types, what Robert Bone has labeled "remediable and ir-remediable evil. The first, roughly speaking, is the domain of

17. Rideout, p. 29.
18. Quinn, p. 624.
politics and science; the second, of art and religion." 19
There is a real danger in overemphasizing the remediable evil,
and being unable to accept the irremediable, a distinction that
Susan was apparently unable to make. As Bone explains, "If one
attends primarily to remediable evil, one may be tempted to make larger
claims for politics than history can justify. One may end by making
politics the touchstone of man's humanity..." 20 Susan made
politics the touchstone of the Lewins' humanity, and also her
brother's, denouncing them because they were not far enough to
the left. Doctorow, of course, has a larger vision.

Can the vision in Daniel really affect the way Americans look
at themselves and their country? Is it unrealistic to expect
one novel, by a writer who had previously languished in obscurity,
to change anything? Many writers in the radical American tradition,
one senses, entertained the hope that they were not writing in vain,
that in some way their efforts might make the great American experiment
a little more successful. The ultimate optimism of many of the
radical American writers is also embraced by the English poet
Stephen Spender. Spender has written that he cannot
accept the despairing view of George Orwell in... Inside
the Whale. Orwell says in words which I paraphrase:
"Accept the fact that you can do absolutely nothing to
alter the condition of the world today. Make a virtue
of necessity, and like Jonah, use your art to get inside
the whale. Don't object, don't rebel, just accept every-
thing and then make the best of the circumstances of a
life of private sensations and experiences which is still
possible to you." His own book, 1984, like Camus' novel,

19. "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of the Imagination" in Anger and
Beyond: The Negro Writer in the United States, ed. Herbert Hill
The Plague, refutes him. It is still possible, by trying to see the largest truth about the time in which we live, and by simply stating it, to get outside the whale.21 Doctorow seems to share Spender's belief. He is not yet ready to jump into Jonah.

Robert Coover, who has been working on his own novel about the Rosenbergs, was asked if he had read Doctorow's. Coover replied,

I have now, although I deliberately avoided it when I first heard about it. It sounded like the transformation of real experience I wouldn't be the least interested in. But then I happened to meet Doctorow and I felt guilty about not having read so well-received a book. So I went home and read it. Well, I was enormously impressed. It's a superb, extremely wise, and mature book.22

Coover's appraisal confirms what the reviewers said about Daniel. One hopes that this novel will be taken seriously. It would also be comforting (if a bit utopian) if some of America's leaders would take writers like Doctorow more seriously. Henry Miller once lamented that "America is no place for an artist. A corn-fed hog enjoys a better life than a creative writer."23 This has to be one of the flaws in the great American experiment. There is at least the possibility that America perpetuates this flaw at its own peril.

Bibliography

Vita Auctoris