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Psychocultural analysis stands as a signal accomplishment of the 1930s U.S. assimilation of European refugee-intellectuals. Scholars in the U.S. had been moving toward a kind of psychocultural analysis well in advance of the Great Migration—the U.S. was not an intellectual vacuum or wasteland—nevertheless, it was through their interdisciplinary collaboration, fueled by the specter of war, that these international peers stimulated one of the most wide-ranging, dynamic, and productive exchanges of ideas of the century. Through the lens of Erich Fromm’s *Escape from Freedom*, this article explores psychoculturalism’s emergence in the interstices between cultures, nations, ideas, and disciplines—between Europeans and Americans, psychoanalysts and social scientists. © 2011 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

*Escape from Freedom* is “nothing less than a masterpiece,” the Jewish Broadway director, critic, and producer Harold Clurman wrote Erich Fromm in an effusive piece of fan mail. “You have taken a really important thesis and, with an admirable expositional skill, have given it a clarity, a force and a usefulness that are beyond anything I have seen in this field” (Clurman, 1942). What had captivated Clurman was Fromm’s adroit capacity to frame and explain the deeper societal and cultural forces animating contemporary events, specifically—one can infer from the content of the book and the year of Clurman’s correspondence, 1942—the war. “In your book, what is valuable in psychoanalysis, in the methodology of Marx, and, in the truest sense, a classic philosophy of life have been integrated with a remarkably wholesome and realistic feeling for our time,” he wrote the book’s author (Clurman, 1942). When confronted with the full extent of the atrocities of war, Americans strained for understanding. What would lead a modern, ostensibly civilized nation to engage in the barbaric extermination of an entire ethnus, an ethnus that lived not in a distant land, not in some dark, forgotten corner of the globe, but next door and around the block? What in the German psyche could have inspired such aggression? Like Clurman, many turned to neo-Freudian psychoanalysis via Fromm’s book and others of its kind. A psychocultural classic, it remains in print nearly seventy years later.

*Escape from Freedom* may have been written by one man, an exiled German-Jewish psychoanalyst, but it was nevertheless a by-product of a near-decade-long collaboration that was international and interdisciplinary in scope, born of intellectual ambition and political expediency, social pressure and biographical predilections. In the 1930s, the late U.S. cultural historian Warren Susman observed, “the idea of culture was domesticated.” Americans began “thinking in terms of patterns of behavior and belief, values and life-styles, symbols and meanings,” he argued (Susman, 1984, p. 154). In Susman’s analysis, neo-Freudianism stood out in this domestication process, concurring with Robert LeVine’s later observation that...

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from 1918 to 1939 psychocultural studies “was arguably one of the most exciting intellectual explorations launched by American social science in the 20th century” (LeVine, 2001, p. 809). For a generation prior to Fromm’s arrival and the migration of other neo-Freudians such as Karen Horney, American social scientists had been incorporating Freudian analysis into their research (Gitre, 2010). It was an ongoing project, a lively debate, and a growth area in several disciplines, yet it was also hamstrung, namely by Freud’s biologism. Fromm and Horney helped to overcome this impasse, making them enemies of some but allies of many others, particularly like-minded culturalists. As Clurman’s letter to Fromm indicates, none of this occurred in a vacuum. The spread of psychoculturalism in the U.S. is inseparable from the rise of fascism in Europe. Through books like Escape from Freedom, Americans learned how to reconceive not only their enemies’ values and beliefs, emotional states of mind and behaviors—but also their own.

Within the last decade and a half, scholars in various fields—from art history to law, to cultural geography and ethics—have inaugurated what has been called in intellectual genuflexion to the linguistic turn the “emotional turn” (Stearns, 1994; Stearns & Stearns, 1985; Pfister & Schnog, 1997; Blackburn, 1998; Lewis & Stearns, 1998; Miller, 1998; Chodorow, 1999; Schlaeger & Stedman, 1999; Illouz, 2008; Reddy, 2001; Rosenwein, 2002; Corrigan, 2004; Lear, 2004; Nussbaum, 2004; Davidson, Bondi, & Smith, 2005; Gouk & Hills, 2005; Bourke, 2006; Kingston & Ferry, 2008; Kagan, 2007; Wickberg, 2007; Scott, forthcoming). Scholars seem far enough removed from the anti-psychiatry movement of the early 1970s—ignited by the emergence of the New Left and stoked by the importation of French theory (and at the hands of which the neo-Freudian legacy suffered)—to recognize the value of exploring psychologies of culture and the culture of psychologies. Peeling back “the image” and “the text”—signs, spectacles, and representations—they are making bolder, more substantive claims about human nature and the humanity of culture, about the emotions and impulses, sentiments and moods that make us who we are individually and collectively. To be sure, plenty of these men and women never abandoned psychoanalysis (Brooks & Woloch, 2000), just as plenty of others want nothing to do with the finer points of Freudian analysis. Still, the Viennese doctor and his followers are back in fashion. This essay contributes to this invigorating conversation by reasserting and reassessing its historical lineage, contending that much of what is taking place today is as much as anything a rediscovery of an older psychocultural movement and moment whose strengths and shortcomings bear revisiting.

Arguing for continuity, this essay seeks to redress the reductive tendencies of the neo-Freudian and psychocultural historiography. As LeVine rightly emphasizes, psychoculturalism “should be thought of not as a school of thought but rather as a field of inquiry in which scholars seeking to bring together psychological and psychiatric with sociological or cultural perspectives experimented in devising a variety of new theoretical models, field methods, and research programs” (LeVine, 2001, p. 808). On the one side, there are those who situate neo-Freudianism within psychoanalysis or psychology proper (Flax, 1995; Kurzweil, 1996; Benjamin, 2007, pp. 127ff; Taylor, 2009, Chapter 5), as a revisionist stem branching off of “orthodox” or “classical” psychoanalysis. On the other side are the social scientists and humanities scholars, who tend to subsume the movement in, with, and under their individual disciplines, as a subdisciplinary movement. The anthropologist George Stocking well articulates what has long been the consensus among his colleagues and historians of the movement in general: “If we focus primarily on the American scene . . . it is evident that the movement [known in his field as “culture and personality”] may be interpreted in part as a development of the internal discourse of the discipline,” he maintains (Stocking, 1986, p. 5; cf. Lagemann, 1989; Neiburg, Goldman & Gow, 1998; Hegeman, 1999; Hofstede, 2001, pp. 13ff; Manganaro, 2002;
Meyerowitz, 2010). Trying to enlarge the intellectual topography, sociologist Neil McLaughlin has insisted that neo-Freudianism was not an “academic school of thought at all” but was, instead, “a unique blend of professional therapy, social science theory, intellectual movement, and literary phenomena” (McLaughlin, 1998; contra, McLaughlin, 1996, 1999). Still, as the title of this welcomed defense, “Why Do Schools of Thought Fail?” (McLaughlin, 1998) and of another McLaughlin article, “Optimal Marginality” (2001), indicate, constrictive historiographical traditions continue to betray even the best of intentions. This essay contends against marginality and, along with it, the “exile” narrative of European refuges, which, refuses to take leave (Cusset, 2008). It seeks not only to highlight continuities between our present psychocultural moment and traces of its history but also to proffer a modest contribution to a larger, concurrently emergent field of intellectual inquiry, known generally as “transnational” (or global) studies (Palmier, 2006; Heilbron, Guilhot, & Jeanpierre, 2008; Wheatland, 2009).

In the 1930s, 1940s, and into the 1950s, neo-Freudian psychoculturalism flourished because of its syncretism, because it migrated so readily between reason and emotion; science and therapy; culture, society, and individual human biology; normalcy and maladjustment; psychology, sociology, and anthropology; one person and another; as well as between nations. Indeed, while boosters embraced the movement’s ideas, they shunned its nomenclature—not least “neo-Freudian” (Fromm, 1968). Tracing the contextual ligaments and ideational consequences of *Escape from Freedom*, this article explores these in-between places. It begins by examining the initial contact between U.S.-based social scientists and psychiatrists and German psychoanalysts, charting out what became a highly productive, mutually beneficial relationship. From there, the second section explores the substantive intellectual content of psychocultural analysis, observing how a revised Freudianism made its way into American social theory. The third section embeds these conversations in a larger field of inquiry, for what underwrote psychoanalytic–social scientific assimilation were not ideas alone but politics and economics, institutions and ideology—and war. Neo-Freudians from both sides of the Atlantic proved themselves unapologetically dedicated to the Allied cause, and to great effect, as indicated by the widespread appeal and ideational influence of Fromm’s book. The section culminates in an analysis of *Escape from Freedom*’s content and reception. The following pages will take a (more or less) synchronic approach to neo-Freudian psychoculturalism. It leaves the development of individual careers and the intellectual trajectories of participants to other historians. It also pays little attention to the rivalries and infighting, the rampant gossip and machinations, of the players involved. Instead, the goal of the essay is to interrogate what made the writing and reception of *Escape from Freedom* possible and thereby to illuminate, however partially, the motivations, ideals, and ambitions animating this phenomenal but under-appreciated movement’s propagation and appeal. The piece concludes by observing its success and, as a consequence, its ambiguous legacy.

**NEO-FREUDIANISM COMES TO AMERICA**

Nineteen thirty has been called a “red-letter year” for psychoanalysis in the U.S. (Millet, 1995 [1966], p. 554). Before that year an American serious about psychoanalysis would have traveled to the movement’s “flagship” city, Berlin, to acquire rudimentary psychoanalytic training (Zaretsky, 2004, p. 180; Strozier, 2004 [2001], pp. 78ff), either there or perhaps to Freud’s Vienna, for the U.S. had yet to establish an independent institutional presence. The American Psychoanalytic Association, indeed, could boast that year of no more than sixty-five members (Hendrick, 1999 [1934], p. 353). The banner event kicking off this red-letter
moment was the United States’ hosting of the First International Congress on Mental Health, in Washington, D.C. Between May 4 and May 10 it attracted some 4,000 participants to the nation’s sweltering capital. They hailed from Australia, Africa, several South American countries, most European states, New Zealand, Russia, China, and Japan. Twelve hundred were honored with a reception at the White House hosted by President Hoover, who had agreed to be the congress’s honorary president. The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Association for the Study of the Feebleminded, the American Occupational Therapy Association, American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers, and a Conference on Nursing and Nursing Education all held events in conjunction.

“Never in the world’s history has there been such a large gathering of people actively interested in psychiatry and allied subjects,” beamed the psychiatrist and co-editor of the Journal of Mental Science, J. R. Lord, who was especially proud of his colleagues in the British delegation (Lord, 1930, p. 457). This was no exaggeration. Everyone was there or seemed to be: Adolf Meyer, Frankwood E. Williams, Secretary of the Interior Ray L. Wilbur, France’s Édouard Toulouse, William Alanson Whyte.

It was an international turning of the tide for psychoanalysis, marking a literal and symbolic shift in influence and power from the Continent to the U.S. At the congress’s opening a few European analysts, prominently Fritz Wittels and Otto Rank, already resided in the U.S. Their European colleagues would receive not only invitations to attend but also financial assistance. Psychoanalysts from the Continent included Sándor Rádo, the managing editor of Imago and secretary of the German Psychoanalytic Society; Van Ophuijsen; Franz Alexander; René Spitz; Oscar Pfister from Switzerland; the English nurse Mary Chadwick; and the feminist Freud, Helene Deutsch. The latter traveled first class, receiving a “Hollywood-like impression of American life,” writes Paul Roazen (1992 [1985], p. 272). Wittels had plotted Deutsch’s U.S. entrance, placing articles in newspapers touting her credentials, which certainly must have helped. “My room is so full of flowers that for lack of space I must write on my knee,” she wrote back to her husband Felix after arriving (as quoted in Roazen, 1992 [1985], p. 274). While in the U.S., she put out “feelers,” looking, like Rádo, for new opportunities in America. But it was Alexander who received the plummiest initial offer, a visiting professorship from the University of Chicago. Alexander, she complained to her husband, “is esteemed much higher in America than Freud, and in spite of the bad lectures that he gave, he had a magic power that made all homosexual men in highest places his slaves” (as quoted in Roazen, 1992 [1985], pp. 274–275). Undeterred, she and her husband would eventually relocate to Boston, where she helped establish the fledgling Boston Psychoanalytic Society’s Training Institute. A. A. Brill, an American, helped Rádo relocate, too, to New York City. There he helped organize the New York Psychoanalytical Institute, modeled on the institute in Berlin. Hanns Sachs, a law-trained lay analyst, later took up an appointment much like Alexander’s at Harvard’s medical school. A member of the inner circle, in Berlin he had trained Alexander, Michael Balint, Erich Fromm, Rudolf Löwenstein, and Karen Horney. The Viennese neurologist and analyst Herman Nunberg relocated to Philadelphia, as did Otto Rank when he finally settled. Robert Wälder, René Spitz, Annie Reich, Edith Jacobson, Ernst and Marianne Kris, the Bibrings, Ernst Simmel, Otto Fenichel, Martin Grotjahn, Robert Waelder, Richard Sterba, Heinz Hartman, David Rapaport, Therese Benedek, Abram Kardiner, Fritz Wittels, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Erik Erikson, and seemingly everyone else of import had fled the Continent for foreign shores, including Freud and his daughter Anna, who relocated to London.

“The refugee analysts arrived at the right place at the right time,” observed the Berlin-born American sociologist Lewis Coser (Coser, 1984, p. 42). The tide was sweeping not only westward from Europe to the U.S., but also eastward from the Midwest to the Boston-to-Washington,
D.C., corridor. Chicago had its ambitions, of course. With the hiring of Alexander, the university could boast that it had appointed the world’s first professorship in psychoanalysis. In the city there was considerable money and interest to support psychoanalytic training and therapy, too. When Alexander returned in 1932 after a short stint in Boston, he further solidified relationships among local elites and soon secured funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, Rosenwald Foundation, and Macy Foundation, among other grant-giving philanthropies, to establish his own psychoanalytic institute—enough to offer Karen Horney of the Berlin Institute a substantial annual salary of $15,000 to be his associate director (Pollock, 1983, p. 11). There was also considerable interest outside the psychiatric and analytic community. During Alexander’s one-year visiting appointment at the University of Chicago, he was practically shunned by most of the medical school and, indeed, had to turn to other university divisions for intellectual support. He surrounded himself with a group of well-placed scholars who were keen to see psychoanalysis more fully incorporated into mainstream academia. They included, in addition to the two men who had hired Alexander—Robert Maynard Hutchins, the university’s president, and Frank McLean, the director of the university’s medical clinic and husband of the soon-to-be Chicago “doyenne of psychoanalysts” Helen McLean (Landau & Hodges, 1991, p. 308)—but also William F. Ogburn, L. L. Thurstone, Charles Merriam, Frank Knight, T. V. Smith, Mortimer Adler, and the rising scholars Harold Lasswell and John Dollard (Gitre, 2010).

Still, Alexander would have to compete with the East Coast, and not for funding alone. The Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis trained some of the country’s top analysts, including the Menningers; and in the integration of psychoanalysis into other academic disciplines, the university would remain a hub. Yet especially where the latter was concerned, Chicago was quickly eclipsed by developments along the East Coast, owing significantly to the great influx of European émigrés. Horney stayed in Chicago only two years as associate director, and then moved to Manhattan. Her friend and fellow analyst Erich Fromm visited Chicago as a guest lecturer during that time and was favorably impressed by the university’s Social Sciences Division; and as the exiled Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (ISR) searched for a new residence in the U.S. initially vied for Chicago (Wheatland, 2009); nevertheless, in 1934 the Institute and Fromm settled in Manhattan at Columbia University. By then, Yale University had already lured Edward Sapir and John Dollard away from Chicago to help build their new Institute of Human Relations. Later it acquired Lasswell, who also taught a little at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan, alongside Horney, Fromm, Ralph Linton, Margaret Mead, and Harmon Ephron (Tentative program, 1941).

Fromm and Horney wasted little time making New York City their home (and sparking a romantic relationship), although Fromm found himself often on the road in the beginning. Still in his early thirties, he was something of a wunderkind. By the age of twenty-two, he had already earned his PhD in sociology from the University of Heidelberg under the sociologist Alfred Weber, Max Weber’s less celebrated brother. Several years later in 1928, he entered didactical analysis with Hanns Sachs and took up psychoanalytic studies with Karl Abraham. A year after that, he helped found the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute and the following year became a member of the Institute for Social Research in charge of social psychology research (Jay, 1973, 1986; Brunner, 1994). He also opened his own private practice. His senior by fifteen years, Horney had trained, too, under Abraham, in the 1910s while a student at Berlin University. Much to her advantage, and unlike Fromm, she possessed the M.D. After directing a World War I military neurological hospital, she established an independent practice and helped found the Berlin Analytic Institute and the Berlin Polyclinic. According to Edward Clemmens, she had even been hand picked by Freud to assist Alexander in Chicago (Clemmens, 1984). The one was a rising star, the other an established figure. Both, though,
had yet to make an independent mark of their own. Converging on New York City in 1934, Fromm threw himself into social research projects for the ISR (Brunner, 1994; Wheatland, 2009), traveled, taught a little at Columbia, joined the fledgling New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and reestablished his private practice. For her part, Horney joined the New York Psychoanalytic Institute as well before breaking off to form a competing institute several years later.

For both analysts, the move was filled with uncertainty as well as a sense of new possibilities. Recently divorced, Horney saw her “fortunes [rise] rapidly” in the city, writes her biographer Bernard Paris (1999, p. 1). She soon became a minor celebrity, at least among intellectuals and the intellectually inclined. When she lectured at the New School she packed the lecture hall, Walter Bonime recollected (Bonime, 1989). Fromm’s fortunes rose rapidly as well—a little too rapidly for the liking of the ISR’s director, Max Horkheimer. “[Fromm] does not particularly appeal to me,” Horkheimer complained in a private missive. “He has productive ideas, but he wants to be on good terms with too many people at once, and doesn’t want to miss anything. It is quite pleasant to talk to him, but my impression is that it is quite pleasant for very many people” (as quoted in Wheatland, 2009, p. 83). Horkheimer’s American booster, Robert Lynd, and Lynd’s wife Helen had helped introduce Fromm around town. They also hired him to be Helen’s therapist to help her overcome writer’s block (Wheatland, 2009, p. 356, n. 41). (This for Fromm was something of a pattern, especially in the beginning. Many of his patients were, like the Lynds and later David Riesman, academics. In addition to these, Horney and Fromm also became friends of Harry Stack Sullivan, a well-connected American clinical psychiatrist who was vice president of the American Psychoanalytic Association and president of the newly organized William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation. In a Christmas 1928 visit to Berlin, Sullivan had already vetted Alexander for the position at University of Chicago (Zaretsky, 2004, p. 380, n. 97). While in Berlin, he briefly met Horney as well. After their move to Manhattan, Fromm and Horney became fixtures in his “Zodiac” group/club, a salon first convened in a Prohibition-era New York City speakeasy by Sullivan, his analyst Clara Thompson, William Silverberg, and a few others. Over the next dozen years, salon participants also included the anthropologists Ruth Benedict, Mead, Linton, Sapir, and Dollard (Taylor, 2009, p. 104). (Each member was required to pick an animal as their sign and identity for the meetings.)

What was being forged in this East–West convergence of social scientists and psychoanalysts went far beyond the personal, the social, and institutional, well beyond plum academic appointments and enviable dinner party invitations. What was materializing along the Northeast–Midatlantic corridor Warren Susman described as “undoubtedly the most important development” of the period intellectually (Susman, 1984, p. 166)—namely, the emergence of neo-Freudianism.

Both sides had been working toward this convergence well ahead of Fromm’s and Horney’s arrival. Sullivan’s biography and shift toward what he called a socially oriented “interpersonal” psychoanalysis is emblematic of the American trajectory. A psychiatrist with expertise in schizophrenia, he first met Edward Sapir in Chicago while attending a professional meeting. The two became fast friends, and Sullivan also became Sapir’s analyst. Two years later, Harold Lasswell met up with Sullivan while the two were touring analytic centers in Europe (Muth, Finley, & Muth, 1990, p. 10). Both he and Sapir (and Kimball Young, according to Young) then introduced Sullivan to the work of the pragmatist George Herbert Mead (Lindstrom & Hardert, 1988; Evans, 1996), a Chicago icon whose philosophy one might describe as interpersonalist. Sullivan was so impressed by what was happening at Chicago that in 1930 he made plans to join Lasswell and Sapir to pursue the fusion of psychiatry and the
social sciences (he was waylaid when funding fell through) (Evans, 1996, p. 40). When Yale hired Sapir and Dollard, Sullivan instead followed the two up the corridor, relocating from Maryland to New York City, where established his own practice. Soon Sullivan was presenting at social science society meetings, seminars, and colloquia, and publishing in the American Journal of Sociology, although perhaps his greatest asset was the journal he himself launched in 1938—Psychiatry: Journal of the Biology and Pathology of Interpersonal Relations (Bazerman, 2005). For scholars and psychiatrists interested in advancing psychocultural analysis, it would become the place to publish. Benedict, Sapir, Mead, M. F. Ashley Montagu, Melford Spiro, Robert Merton, Thompson, Erikson, Talcott Parsons, Erving Goffman, Lasswell, Riesman—they would all publish in the journal. “Harry Stack Sullivan was a social scientist whose specialty was psychiatry,” observed his biographer, Helen Swick Perry, commenting on his ecumenicism and support of psychiatry’s broader intellectual diffusion (1982, p. 258).

Several of the European analysts were likewise moving in the same diffusionist direction before 1930. Notably in the case of Alexander, gentle prodding was already coming from abroad from the British-born American psychiatrist William Healy. While visiting Berlin, Healy, who specialized in juvenile delinquency, challenged Alexander’s individualistic approach to criminal psychology. Locating delinquency in the mechanisms of the guilty conscience might explain crime in Europe but not in the U.S., Healy argued. “Crime in the United States,” he suggested to Alexander, “was not so much an individual act, the result of neurotic confusion, but rather a social phenomenon: organized crime, a part of the total social structure, its understanding was more a sociological than an individual psychology problem” (Alexander, 1960, p. 93). Healy told Alexander he should visit the U.S. so he could see firsthand what he meant. Their exchange led not only to the Berliner’s invitation to the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene. It also led to a positively received and reviewed co-authored book, Roots of Crime (Alexander & Healy, 1935). Fromm and Horney, too, had been moving in this direction, demonstrating an even stronger premigration revisionist impulse than Alexander. Fromm’s doctorate in sociology, as opposed to medicine, had from the outset of his analytic career fostered a divided intellectual outlook (Fromm, 1970). Ahead of the move he had already abandoned a strictly biological psychoanalytic framework, although up until at least 1932, by his own admission, he continued to adhere to a Freudian libido theory (Fromm, 1970, p. 139, n. 1). Horney had as well, for reasons that were personal and professional as well as intellectual. By the mid-1920s she was melding classical Freudianism and Simmelian sociology in defense of a biologically specific “female psychology.” “Our whole civilization is a masculine civilization. The State, the laws, morality, religion and the sciences are the creation of men,” she wrote acidly in 1926, citing Simmel’s Philosophische Kultur (Horney, 1926, p. 325). Continental psychoanalysis’s male-dominated inner circle was spared no exception. Her unassuageable irritation with Freud, in particular for his preferential treatment of Deutsch, only strengthened her feminist critique and resolve, further loosening the bonds of analytic loyalty (Mead, 1977). Plainly, all three of these were moving away from classical Freudianism, the latter two more than Alexander, prior to the 1930s. Interactions with the Americans did not revolutionize their thinking. Nevertheless, the move did coax and encourage particular, rather advantageous predilections.

1. To give some indication of psychiatry’s interdisciplinarity, of the nearly two hundred initial contributors, nineteen were sociologists, thirty anthropologists, seven political scientists, six educators, four social workers, three lawyers and psychiatric and social workers, two philosophers and historians (Sullivan, 1947, p. 433).

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Nothing has done more to obscure or skew psychoculturalism’s transatlantic history than simple chauvinism. Freud famously encouraged it among his followers. “They are interested primarily in material things; what you call genuine interest is highly deceptive,” he warned Alexander upon learning of his University of Chicago visiting professorship offer. “They took you in in Chicago. I know from my own experiences in the States that masterful way of giving lip service... I hope America will leave something intact of the real Alexander” (Alexander, 1960, pp. 98–101). As Alexander and the other émigrés veered away from orthodoxy, the lip service and materialism of the Americans was often blamed. This was true especially of Fromm, who took to defending the U.S. against European prejudice. In the pages of the leftist magazine Dissent—a magazine he had a hand in launching—he was famously disparaged for defending, in the words of his rival and IHR replacement Herbert Marcuse, America’s “status quo” (Marcuse, 1955, p. 256). The Americans were not without blame, and not merely for their affection for earthly comforts. They could be equally superior when it served their personal and professional purposes. Mead thought Horney “one of the first prominent human scientists” (Mead, 1977) and benefited immensely from their friendship, yet in her boosterism of anthropology routinely relegated psychoanalysis to a subservient disciplinary (and thus intellectual) position. Reflecting on informal psychocultural-analytic dialogues between herself, Benedict, Dollard, Fromm, and Horney—perhaps in the Zodiac salon—Mead recurred to her competitive self-confidence, which she asserted through superior competence. “Karen and Erich wanted to make judgments of cultures about which they had only our few minutes of reporting, while we wanted them to match our mastery of our material with their mastery of theirs. Somehow they both resented—or perhaps John resented for them—our control of our material,” she commented (Mead, 1977). The prejudices entertained in the jostle for status have obscured what was at stake in these cross-disciplinary. It still does to this very day.

At base, what revisionist psychoanalysts and Freudian psychiatrists seemed to promise American social theorists and researchers was a solution to what by 1930 had been a decades-old intellectual quandary. It boiled down to a conflict over the sources and processes of social causation. U.S. social theory had long been dependent on, if not in fact synonymous with, social Darwinism. Sociologists in particular, as the dean of the discipline Albion Small admitted, had been missionaries of its gospel, “zealously publishing the proposition that society is something that has been evolved” and “boldly assuming responsibility for showing how it was evolved” (Small, 1916, p. 795). What social scientists quite self-consciously lacked, however, was a consensus-building model that explained how society(ies) in fact evolve. Their challenge was to explain social causation without resorting to biological determinism, mechanistic economic models, or the (seemingly) inexact discourses of the established humanities. Small explained the need using imagery recalling the photographer Eadweard Muybridge’s motion studies of galloping racehorses:

[I]f we do not pry back of the omnibus terms “society,” “association,” “activities,” we are stopping short with composite mental snapshots of reality which are as different from the whole of reality as a snapshot of a horse at a given point in the circuit is from the whole race he is running. In other words, we are still putting so much emphasis on the process of life as such, in its merely formal aspects, that we make little impression with our attention to the content or substantive aspects. The essence of human life is not the ways in which it conducts itself, but the inchoate and developing personalities that conduct themselves in those ways. (Small, 1916, pp. 847–848)
What, in other words, made the film roll? How did one snapshot lead to another to form a seamless, integrated whole? Small's Chicago colleague W. I. Thomas was likewise concerned by the lacuna. "Everything is to be regarded as having an origin and a development, and we can not afford to overlook the genesis and the stages of change," he wrote (Thomas, 1909, p. 3). What social theory needed was, in other words, said Small, a "master-key to all metamorphoses," for without it all they had to offer were mere strands of merely interesting "statical" observations (Small, 1916, p. 794).

The quest for such a master-key helped generate interest in psychoanalysis among the Chicago social scientists and humanities scholars who surrounded Alexander. Nevertheless, up until 1930, as Lasswell admitted in Psychopathology and Politics, the social scientific deployment of psychoanalysis was still only “provisional,” based on a theory that was “incomplete” (Lasswell, 1986 [1930], p. 275). The problem with Freud was not sex, at least not simply sex. As far as many U.S. social scientists were concerned, he appeared, for all his genius, something of a relic. The social psychologist and sociologist Read Bain put the prejudice of the Americans bluntly. “The Freudians are belated individualists, rugged and atomistic, in a world that is rapidly becoming organic, relativistic, and sociocentric,” he wrote (Bain, 1936, p. 204). Under the influence of pragmatism and progressivism, interwar-period social scientists were jettisoning Darwinian evolution all over the place, especially their dependence on biology-inspired instincts. “These are days of considerable unrest in both abnormal psychology and social sciences,” read a 1924 editorial in an issue dedicated to the instincts debate (Editorial, 1924, p. 1). One of the country’s chief proponents of the biological model, William McDougall, who was featured in the issue, was plainly on the defensive. Two years prior he had already complained in the same journal, “[H]ardly a week passes without the appearance of some article which attacks these attempts [to advance instincts in the social sciences], pours scorn or ridicule upon them, and proposes to repudiate completely the notion of Instinct in Man, or at least complains in severe terms of the abuse or excessive use of the notion by the social scientists” (McDougall, 1921–1922, p. 285). He was still complaining, now in 1924 with even more reason, that the “reactionary and obscurantist tide” was continuing to flow away from him (McDougall, 1924, p. 13). Certainly this was true at Chicago. “The instincts were going down the drain very fast you see,” Ruth Cavan, who was a graduate student then, recalled. The whole sociology department had become “anti-instinct” (Cavan, 1972). Orthodox Freudians’ reliance on instinctivism to explain causality ran counter to the centrist current of sociocentric U.S. social theory, especially after the First World War.

Scholars and analysts interested in bridging the disciplines needed to overcome the limitations of psychoanalysis’s regnant biocentrism. Those more inclined toward orthodoxy resisted this, for what had attracted many of them in the first place was precisely the Viennese doctor’s intensive individuation, besides his probing intelligence. It bore the closest resemblance, they thought, to the gold standard of social scientific investigative research: the empirically rich and demanding natural sciences. “An intensive standpoint has two distinguishing characteristics: it is prolonged and complex,” Lasswell wrote. “The observer focuses his attention upon the subject for a protracted period of time and uses special ways of exposing structure and functions. The psychoanalyst may see the analysand for an hour a day for months or years, and he uses the technique of prolonged free association (and of interpretation) in order to uncover the significant features of the pattern in front of him” (Lasswell, 1939, pp. 375–376). For scholars such as Lasswell, social theory, whether it was based on psychoanalysis or some other psychology, had to be built from the ground up, by the accumulation of “life histories,” “life documents,” or “personal data”—interviews, recordings of
therapy sessions, personality tests, and so forth. This, Lasswell and others asserted, is simply how one goes about being a scientist, by amassing, analyzing, and interpreting data.

American proto-neo-Freudian psychoculturalists ahead of the Great Migration of European scholars were groping toward a solution, one that respected the value and integrity of precise data (the subject, the patient), as well as the need for systematicity and comprehensiveness. To be worthy of the appellation “social scientific,” psychoculturalism needed to be quantitatively exact, they understood, but also qualitatively all-encompassing. Many were, like Lasswell, dedicated to a modified form of individuation. Through the amassing of cases of social maladjustment, psychosis, and neurosis, they believed they were accumulating a empirical fund out of which they would be able to make larger meta-claims about the social psychology of communities, tribes, and collective populations—that is, society. They themselves understood well enough the challenges of this cumulative method and the messiness of human subjectivity, their own included. But this was the challenge of any human science. While Alexander was still living in Berlin, his future American colleagues were already beginning to debate the merits and limitations of shifting their research efforts away from a fine-grained, bottom-up, aggregated form of psychocultural analysis toward a top-down, generalizable form of analysis aimed at universal applicability. Spearheaded by Sullivan, the SSRC in 1928 in conjunction with the American Psychiatric Association had inaugurated a “personality investigation” colloquia series. Lasswell and Sullivan chaired the first colloquium, which included W. I. Thomas, Clifford R. Shaw, Robert Park, William A. White, Frank H. Knight, Ernest Groves, William Healy, and Elton Mayo. Participants at the second convened a year later, where this debate bubbled over, included, in addition to several of these, Herbert Blumer, Ernest Burgess, James Plant, Mark May, Lawrence K. Frank, and Edward Sapir. These were the country’s leading social scientists and psychiatrists, with Chicago being well represented. One might reasonably credit the event with having effectively launched “personality and culture” studies.

Centering on the limitations of “personal data,” the debate erupted after Sapir delivered a paper on ethnographic methods. The anthropologist, who was at this point still teaching in Chicago’s joint anthropology–sociology department, was decidedly in Lasswell’s camp, emphasizing in his presentation the indispensability of painstaking fieldwork, the long, arduous process of accumulating data for analysis and interpretation. It was, he said, “a big job,” for “every single fact with reference to its personal, not merely tribal, reality” had to be weighed (Proceedings, Second Colloquium, 1930, p. 958). Lawrence Frank, an education specialist, appreciated Sapir’s paper. But he had other interests to stake out. From 1923 until 1929 he was the director of the prestigious Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation (LSRM), whose raison d’être was “the application of the social sciences for the purpose of reform.” Frank had a vested interest in intensifying the broadest application of psychocultural analysis. With reformist concerns that were decidedly presentist, he pushed Sapir. Could the anthropologist’s approach to tribal cultures be used in a “program of personality research” devoted not only to indigenous peoples and developing cultures but also to Western cultures—namely, France’s, England’s, or Germany’s? Sapir ventured that this was possible but that it would be extraordinarily time consuming, warning Frank, “I don’t think it is possible to sail into an ethnological field with a few generalities in one’s mind, ask a few questions and expect to get anything that is worthy of serious consideration. The work will require years of careful approach” (Proceedings, Second Colloquium, 1930, p. 958).

Unsatisfied, Frank continued prodding. “What I am trying to bring out is a rather explicit question as to how far this group considers it necessary to make what might be called a cultural study as either a preliminary to or as contemporary with the personality study of other
groups,” he wondered. “In other words, are we facing the problem here of what such a study would involve in terms of either a clinical approach to a few selected individuals or/and a careful investigation of the whole cultural contrast as we see it in the larger studies which the social scientists are concerned with.” He thought this a “very real question” that he and the others ought to consider, because it might suggest “new types of approach[es]” to psychocultural analysis (Proceedings, Second Colloquium, 1930, p. 958). Sapir agreed with Frank, although he held fast to his insistence that collecting “personal data” from these cultures was paramount, adding that it ought to be a “joint enterprise of well trained field ethnologists, primitive linguists, psychologists, psychiatrists, economists, and other social scientists,” given the complexity of analysis (Proceedings, Second Colloquium, 1930, p. 959). One can imagine the cognitive gears continuing to churn in Frank’s mind, sensing more expansive sociocultural possibilities for the application of psychoanalysis, especially toward social reform.

The stakes had been mapped out. This is what Fromm, Horney, and Alexander walked into. Should they stick with the stricter psychoanalysts or befriend the psychoculturalists? Fromm made his decision rather easily and for his lack of a medical degree would be (and was) shunted from the orthodox community (Plant, 2005). Horney was equally eager to reach a broader audience. For her, too, the decision was plainly commonsensical. All vestiges of biological determinism had to go. They would agree with Dewey and other progressives that one starts and ends not with the individual and their internal instincts (or drives), but with the dynamic tensions created in the interpersonal space between as well as within individuals and their society/culture (Fromm, 1961). To be a “neo” was therefore to agree with Freud that one’s personality was the dynamic, dialectical product of internal and internalized forces (insecurity, repression, anxiety), while concurrently accepting as axiomatic the social scientist’s contention that one cannot know human beings apart from the social and the cultural and the “role” of the individual in those structures. Less committed to a gendered (sexually specific) psychology, Fromm’s cleaving was particularly decisive. “Contrary to Freud’s view point,” Fromm wrote in Escape from Freedom, “...[m]an’s nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product; as a matter of fact, man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], pp. 10–11).

One need only peruse some of the footnotes in Fromm’s and Horney’s principle post-emigration writings to see evidence of where they settled intellectually and the company they kept. To defend his full departure from orthodoxy, Fromm cited his closest confidant, Horney, but also Sullivan, Dewey, Benedict, Linton, Mead, Sapir, and Abram Kardiner. According to Thomas Wheatland, the very title of the book, Escape from Freedom, was the product of a convivial exchanged between Fromm and his good friend Robert Lynd, who served as a sounding board while he worked on the manuscript (Wheatland, 2009, p. 358, n. 71). Two other Americans, Mead and Benedict, had made a marked imprint on Horney’s intellectual development, too, and it plainly showed. “Making further use of anthropological findings we must recognize that some of our conceptions about human nature are rather naïve, for example the idea that competitiveness, sibling rivalry, kinship between affection and sexuality, are trends inherent in human nature,” she wrote in The Neurotic Personality of Our Time (1937), which was the first book in this collaborative exchange to reach a broader audience. “Our conception of normality is arrived at by the approval of certain standards of behavior and feelings within a certain group which imposes these standards upon its members. But the standards vary with culture, period, class and sex” (Horney, 1937, p. 18). Horney vetted these ideas in the newly launched American Sociological Review, and would air them again after the book came out in the leading academic journal in sociology, The American Journal of Sociology.
The journal dedicated an issue to Freud’s import for American social sciences following his passing in 1939 (Horney, 1936, 1939).

To be sure, this was not a parasitic affair. Americans benefited, too, especially proto-neo-Freudians like Frank. Through the “psychocultural approach,” the “unresolvable dilemma” of the “individual versus society” was finally, by his lights, solvable. “Just as the emergence of the doctrine of individual responsibility brought an enormous gain to the individual and to society, so the doctrine of cultural determination will bring another great step forward in human life,” he wrote. “It will give us both the courage and the faith to undertake the remaking of our culture, and it will provide the criteria for the new patterns and sanctions for the human needs of individuals who vary in capacities and skills but are basically alike in their physiological, psychological, and social requirements, and especially in their need of a common faith” (Frank, 1936, pp. 343–344). Social Gospelers had passed through the threshold of the sinful self to a sinful society decades ago. Walter Rauschenbusch led the charge back in 1913. “Our philosophical and economic individualism has affected our religious thought so deeply that we hardly comprehend the prophetic views of an organic national life and of national sin and salvation. We usually conceive of the community as a loose sand-heap of individuals and this difference in the fundamental point of view distorts the utterances of the prophets as soon as we handle them,” Rauschenbusch wrote (Rauschenbusch, 1913, p. 10). American psychoculturalists were now raising their own progressive (sociocentric) voice. There is a “growing realization among thoughtful persons that our culture is sick, mentally disordered, and in need of treatment,” Frank declared, seizing the moment (Frank, 1936, p. 335). In support of his observations he highlighted the writings of Mead, Burgess, Otto Rank, and Sapir, as well as, approvingly, an important article he had just come across as he was putting the finishing touches on this 1936 essay, “Society as Patient.” It was Horney’s American Sociological Review article, “Culture and Neurosis” (1936).

To see how neo-Freudian émigrés were influencing and recalibrating the atomistic–sociocentric debate, consider Sapir’s less sanguine response. Commenting on a series of papers presented at a symposium on psychiatry and the social sciences, published in the American Journal of Sociology six months after Frank’s 1936 article, Sapir highlighted Sullivan’s and Alexander’s contributions as especially promising. Also, he praised the entire lot for attending to the import of “society” and “culture” on the shaping of personality. The “extreme individualism of earlier psychiatry is evidently passing,” he applauded. “At long last the actual human being, always set in a significant situation, never a mere biological illustration or a long-suffering carrier of cultural items, has been caught prowling about the premises of society, of culture, of history” (Sapir, 1937, p. 863). All the same, he was patently disconcerted by the thoroughness with which the socially determinant, culturalist position had been appropriated by the other side. “Too great agility has been gained over the years in jumping from the individual to the collectivity and from collectivity via romantic anthropological paths back again to the culture-saturated individual,” he wrote (Sapir, 1937, p. 863). “An age-old blindness tends to be corrected by opened eyes that are too confident and undiscriminating, and one wonders whether the special viewpoint of psychiatry is not tending to yield too readily to the enlightened prejudices of anthropology and sociology” (Sapir, 1937, pp. 865–866). Sapir was so concerned with revisionist psychiatry losing sight of the “individual personality” that its practitioners had better be reigned back in, that they should not be “given the privilege of making a psychological analysis of society and culture as such,” he warned. “[The psychoanalyst/iatrist] cannot tell us what any cultural pattern is ‘all about’ in psychological terms, for we cannot allow him to indulge in the time-honored pursuit of identifying society with a personality, or culture with actual behavior” (Sapir, 1937, p. 869). After lecturing the psychiatrists, Sapir
went so far as to demand of anthropologists and sociologists that it was their “duty” to hold these errant analysts to “the very strictest account” (Sapir, 1937, p. 870). This had become and would continue to be a recurring critical refrain of the man who helped established “culture and personality” studies (Darnell, Irvine, & Handler, 1999).

European neo-Freudians and American psychoanalysts and psychiatrists were not entirely culpable for this cleavage that so concerned Sapir. On the other side, among social scientists, as Sapir himself admitted, there had been a “complementary move” toward a “psychiatric sociology” (Sapir, 1937, p. 863). Though not often recognized as such, Robert Merton’s work on **anomie** is a perfect example of this. Among America’s top midcentury sociologists, Merton put **anomie** on the social sciences’ conceptual radar in a pacesetting article, “Social Structure and Anomie.” Cited more than 530 times between its publication in 1938 and 2004 (Nichols, 2010, p. 85), this watershed piece was, according to Piotr Sztompka, “the most-quoted paper in the literature on deviance” for a decade and a half, utterly dominating the field (Merton & Sztompka, 1996, p. 3; cf. Passas and Agnew, 1997). For all the attention the article has received, however, what is customarily (if not entirely) neglected by historians and interpreters is the degree to which Merton was immersed in the individuation–sociocentric Freudian debate (Haney, 2008; Nichols, 2010). The goal in writing “Social Structure and Anomie,” Merton wrote, was to establish a “coherent, systematic approach to the study of socio-cultural sources of deviate behavior,” and that entailed discovering why “some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct”—what he called maladjustment, or **anomie** (Merton, 1938, p. 672).

Toward this end, Merton relied not on the classical Freudians but on the neo-Freudians. To open the piece he led off with an important point of order—namely, discrediting the most influential and ambitious Anglo-American defender of psychoanalytic orthodoxy, Ernest Jones, and in particular his atomistic biology. In so doing, Merton was clearly choosing sides, feeling Jones irredeemably incapable of accounting for the “nonbiological conditions” that produced **anomie**. Throughout his essay the sociologist turned repeatedly to the writings of neo-Freudian analysts and likeminded social scientists: Kingsley Davis (who had written on mental hygiene and class structure), his mentor Talcott Parsons, Sapir, Dollard, and, notably, Ernest Jones’s fierce enemy, Karen Horney. “If the Freudian notion is a variety of the ‘original sin’ dogma,” Merton wrote, contra Jones and in line with other progressives, such as Frank, “then the interpretation advanced in this paper may be called the doctrine of ‘socially derived sin.’” In other words: “the problem is not that of the sickness of an acquisitive society; it is that of the acquisitiveness of a sick society,” he wrote, citing Elton Mayo, who was himself borrowing from the English economic historian and social critic R. H. Tawney (Merton, 1938, p. 674, n. 5). Was Merton taken to task for relying on psychoanalysis or for siding with Frank and Horney? Given the intellectual traction of this article, the evidence suggests, not in the least.

A year later in 1939 Lasswell observed that Freud’s “distinctive terminology” through a “process of liquidation” was well along in “merge[ing] with the broad stream of scientific development” (Lasswell, 1939, p. 375). Not every psychoculturalist was a neo-Freudian advocate. Stiff resistance to Freudian revisionism persisted, not least among classically inclined social scientists unwilling to jettison psychobiological models (Beck, 1936; Green, 1946; Federn, 1939–1940; Witterls, 1939; Bendix, 1952). Moreover, most social scientists oscillated between competing psychologies, Lasswell included, not wanting to commit one way or another. Behavioralism continued to rule in psychology proper and proved quite resistant to outside Freudian influence. Still, revisionist psychoanalysis was a principal, if not in social psychology the principal contributor to the 1930s development of U.S. psychocultural analysis (Benedict,
1934; Bain, 1935; Dollard, 1935; Woodard, 1938; Devereux, 1939; Zilboorg, 1939). It is a story, observed the Berlin-born American sociologist Lewis Coser, “of triumphant achievement” (Coser, 1984, p. 21). Notwithstanding, events overseas had as much to do with this as anything neo-Freudians ever did on their own.

A NEO-FREUDIAN’S WAR

“It is hard to imagine that, prior to 1941, many Americans would have seen Fromm’s thoughts as relevant to any very serious problems we faced,” wrote Edgar Friedenberg, an education professor (Friedenberg, 1962, p. 307). The common perception outside Freudian circles of psychoanalysis prior to the war had been that it was “a rich man’s toy,” Friedenberg wrote, capturing the mainstream consensus. It was a luxury only the rich could afford to indulge. This was true enough for those under private analysis, given the significant demands placed on one’s time and finances. What “put an end to this sort of sentimentality, at least as an effective intellectual force,” however, the professor asserted, was the rise of totalitarian and fascist regimes in Europe (Friedenberg, 1962, p. 307). Political developments abroad effectively waylaid Frank’s and Sapir’s epistemological quarrel, rendering their finer, defensible distinctions pragmatically moot. If they could not settle their differences, the war would.

As the saying went, World War II was everyone’s war, and that included social scientists (Herman, 1995; Price, 2008). In a 1942 American Anthropologist article, Burt Aginsky pleaded with his colleagues, “[T]his war today is a war not only of the armed forces, but a war against social science as it has been practiced during our era. We must either fight and maintain ourselves or lose and see the end of social science” (Aginsky, 1942, p. 522). By mid-1943, according to David Price, “virtually every wartime agency had an anthropologist or two on staff” (Price, 2008, p. 37). In conjunction, the various national social science societies set up internal committees to facilitate further disciplinary cooperation. By any reckoning, the psychoculturalists proved themselves unflaggingly patriotic. Margaret Mead wrote Eleanor Roosevelt a personal letter directly in August 1939 to offer the First Lady her services. In her war-supporting book, And Keep Your Powder Dry, she suffered no second-guessing. “Winning the war is a job of social engineering, we have said. We must understand and use American character in the process. We must develop the insights of social science to a point where we can say how this is to be done,” she asserted (Mead, 1965 [1942], p. 176). The summer before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Horney’s and Thompson’s (revisionist) American Institute for Psychoanalysis, under the auspices of the newly established Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis (AAP), announced a new lecture and seminar series. “Why man in the twentieth century has directed his great talents toward the most widespread destruction of his fellowman that the world has ever witnessed is due for detailed diagnosis this fall,” began one announcement. Mead would be joining Horney, Fromm (listed as “sociologist, author, and lecturer at Columbia University”), Thompson, Bernard Robinson, Harmon Ephron, Ralph Linton, Lasswell, and the political scientist Leo Rosten in this most vital diagnostic effort (Psychoanalysts to diagnose world’s destructive urge, 1941, p. 109).

Mead also assisted Lawrence Frank, Arthur Upham Pope, Gregory Bateson, and Eliot Chapple in launching the higher-profile, nonprofit, patriotic Committee for National Morale (CNM) (Capshew, 1999; Yans-McLaughlin, 1999; Mead, 2005 [1974], pp. 57ff). Affiliated with the interventionist Council for Democracy, the committee functioned under the supposition that government propaganda, geopolitical cultural analysis, and America’s own national morale should not be left in the hands of nonprofessionals but ought instead to be organized and produced by psychocultural experts. The committee’s leadership had wanted to establish
a superagency to disseminate morale and propaganda materials, and though that agency never materialized, the work of CNM and its members was one of the most productive sites of cooperation between the government and the social science community. CNM and its leadership attracted to its Allied cause Ruth Benedict and Fromm, as well as Gordon Allport, Hadley Cantril, Harvey Zorbaugh, Leonard Doob, Clyde Kluckhohn, Erik Erikson, Edwin Boring, Kurt Lewin, Henry Murray, and Geoffrey Gorer, among others. Psychoculturalists worked within and on behalf of an array of agencies and departments, including the State Department, the administration's cabinet, the Office of War Information, and Office of Strategic Services, although most Americans only knew their war-support work by what they read in popular periodicals and lay-accessible books, such as Mead's *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (Friedman, 2000).

Revisionist psychoanalysts and psychiatrists were not to be outshone in their support by their peers in the social sciences. Sullivan is again an exemplar, this time of neo-Freudianism's diffusive war-related influence. When he became a high-level consultant to the U.S. Selective Service in 1940, one of his most critical tasks was to train physicians to assess selectees (Sullivan, 1941; Wake, 2007). The goal was to weed out "maladjusted" men before they ever put on a uniform. In hindsight, the hasty training of these non-psychiatric physicians and screeners proved too successful. Approximately 1.8 million men (12 percent of all examined recruits) were categorized as psychoneurotic, neurotic, or as otherwise suffering from mental deficiencies, causing great alarm inside the administration and War Department, as well as among the public and mental health professionals (Perrott, 1941, 1944; Ginzberg, 1946; Herman, 1995, pp. 88–89). Sullivan and other psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, chief among them the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute–trained William Menninger, were at the center of this political maelstrom. Beyond his work as a consultant, Sullivan made the war a priority for *Psychiatry*. Of the 350 pieces published in its first ten years of existence, 71 items pertained directly to the war.

No one who followed the journal over the course of that decade could have possibly doubted its persuasion, for it was plainly, indeed dogmatically, interventionist (Sullivan, 1947, p. 433). The same went for the AAP's *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*. After noting with gratitude that the Western world was still "relatively uncontaminated with the virus of the European and Asiatic disease,” one fiery *Psychiatry* editorial warned that only through unswervingly dogged effort could the “fortunately placed peoples of the Western Hemisphere . . . ward off the encroaching evils and insure humanity a continuing forward path.” It stated that although psychiatrists had hoped to progress slowly but steadily toward a psychiatry of politics, “the course of events forbids this quiet progress. A psychiatry of the state is demanded,” and it was demanded without delay (Sullivan, 1938, pp. 419–420). The journal announced that Lasswell would immediately lead the charge as its new editor of political psychiatry. Through the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, the AAP's War Effort Committee issued a series of informational bulletins on such war-related topics, based on the AAP's seminar and lecture series, such as the group factors of civilian morale, the dynamics of group panic. “[I]n our long term planning for emotional stability, we must foster and facilitate the whole idea of inter-relationship in home life, school life, social life, community,” one bulletin reads. “Our interdependence, our need for each other must be recognized as a fundamental basis for human welfare. It must be developed by planned cooperation and exploration of mutual interests. The primary reason for getting together should be social integration. Activity should not depend upon selfish interests but upon a desire to be mutually helpful” (Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis, 1942, p. 35).

In this Allied effort, social integration propaganda worked hand in glove with social science culturalism. The goal of CNM's "national character studies," Mead's *And Keep Your
Powder Dry, Benedict’s The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture (1946), and Gorer’s The People of Great Russia (with John Rickman) (1949) and The American People: A Study in National Character (1948), was to provide policymakers, government officials, military personnel, bureaucrats, and the general reading public snapshot studies of Allied and Axis nations as “cultural wholes.” “In anthropological national-character studies,” Mead explained, “the research worker aims at establishing regularities to be found in the character of all those who have been reared within, or have immigrated into and been re-educated within, a given nation state. The emphasis is upon nationwide institutions and the systematic ways in which these institutions are embodied in the individuals of that society” (Mead, 1961, p. 20). Responding as best they could to this “emergency situation,” Mead, Benedict, and their colleagues temporarily tabled the tedious, more conservative research methods of peacetime knowledge production—recall Sapir’s council to Frank in their SSRC-APA debate—in favor of procedures that were more nimble and would yield faster, more accessible and applicable results. Not only would these “stripped-down predictions” help those wishing to understand the behavior of a “national group as a national group.” They could be used to help “influence” behaviors and thus hasten victory, at home and abroad (Mead, 1961, p. 20).

Psychoculturalists working in haste found themselves leaning heavily on neo-Freudian psychoanalysis. In her reflections after the fact, Mead highlighted the “research design inaugurated by [Lawrence] Frank in the 1920’s”—“exemplified particularly by the Yale Seminar under Sapir and Dollard in the 1930’s”—as well as the work of Sullivan, Erikson, and Plant (Mead, 1961, p. 17) in the development of national character studies. The war had necessitated the more ambitious program that Frank had pushed for during his debate with Sapir at the second colloquium. Mead admitted herself that corners were cut. “Some controversies had developed, in the course of which the psychoanalysts questioned the adequacy of such speedy analyses compared with the hundreds of hours they would spend studying one patient,” she assented (Mead, 1961, p. 14; cf. Inkeles & Levinson, 1997, pp. 18ff). She and Bateson and the others were well aware that nuances of research and assessment suffered. These were “rapid diagnostic” studies, culled from “fragmentary materials,” Mead further acknowledged. They “systematically ignore regional and class variety in favor of nationwide relevance.” Moreover, the “overelevated position” of individuals who had been accustomed to thinking of themselves as, Mead wrote, “lineal spiritual descendant[s] of Sophocles or Goethe or Voltaire” had to be “assign[ed] positions stripped to the shared elements” (Mead, 1961, p. 16). She conceded in And Keep Your Powder Dry that talk of character was merely “an abstraction” (Mead, 1965 [1942], p. 21). In Mead’s and Bateson’s way of thinking, though, the “emergency operation” warranted these applied-science exceptions. Something much larger was at stake—democracy and the fate of the world.

By stripping individuals to their shared cultural elements, in the end it would matter far less if one said they were a revisionist or orthodox Freudian psychoculturalist, for the distinctions were necessarily blurred in the abstracting process. Serialized by Life magazine after the war, Geoffrey Gorer’s widely read book, The American Character—a “combination of ‘psychoanalysis’ and ‘field work’” (Gorer, 1947, p. 95)—well illustrates the point. A British citizen, Gorer in 1935 came to the U.S. to study anthropology with Mead, Benedict, and Dollard. Afterward, he worked for a short period with the Rockefeller Foundation, studying the impact of film and radio on American audiences, which took him across the U.S. Afterward, Yale’s Mark May invited him to join the staff of the Institute of Human Relations (IHR), the epicenter of cultural and personality studies, where he would work under the psychoanalyst Earl Zinn. As Zinn’s assistant, Gorer prepared the copious life history of a young schizophrenic
man whose sessions with Zinn had been recorded verbatim. This experience, said Gorer, was the background for the writing of his book. “To discover what was peculiar in the early life and behaviour of this young schizophrenic I had to study fairly consistently the early lives of Americans who did not develop such symptoms. Much of the material in [The American People], particularly that on childhood and youth, is derived from these researches,” he explained (Gorer, 1948, p. 2). From the IHR, he would go on to work for the government in the war effort as a liaison between Washington, D.C., and London.

The American Character’s thesis is rather straightforward. Gorer sought to write the oedipal complex across the whole of America’s national character. Europe in his reconfiguration is the hounding father, which turns the anti-authoritarian Americans into “rebellious” children. With every new wave of immigration, each new generation has had to reenact this same drama of patricide, thereby, Gorer asserted, creating a perpetual authority vacuum—one that could not be left unfulfilled. Father absent, Mother must then become “the conscience of all Americans,” he wrote (Gorer, 1947, p. 100). Thus enters the modern, sentimental mother and bête noir of Philip Wylie’s “Momism” (Plant, 2010). Underlying the book’s psychoanalytic thesis is a theoretical-cum-methodological slight of hand, one which the emergency situation had initially condoned and encouraged. On the one hand, Gorer wrote as an anti-revisionist, complaining that although psychoanalysis had gone through diffusion and dilution and been employed in a number of “novel situations,” “no major consistent theoretical innovations” had been made in a decade. Furthermore, he charged, “in the process of becoming a naturalized American, as it were, one important aspect of Freud’s original theory has been sloughed off, treated as almost non-existent: all postulates about the inborn wickedness of the child—its aggressive and sadistic ‘instincts’—have been abandoned, sometimes by rationalization, sometimes merely by default” (Gorer, 1948, p. 50). Attacking this psychoanalytic pelagianism, Gorer did not mention Fromm’s name; however, this was exactly the drift of the neo-Freudians, Fromm in particular. In making his own leap from schizophrenic patient to national oedipal drama, Gorer nevertheless abstracted and generalized as well. He too sloughed off individuating biology and biography. In 1950 Gorer could no longer rely on the expediency of war to justify his methods. The accuser became the accused. “[A] monistic approach to history in terms of psychological determinants rests upon a very weak empirical and theoretical structure and is, therefore, inevitably misleading. . . . No key to history . . . can be furnished by a method that is, in its essence, anti-historical,” the anthropologist Irving Goldman wrote in an acerbic review of Gorer’s national character study of Russia. “Inference of causality through analogy is always a hazardous logical device” (Goldman, 1950, pp. 161, 159).

Ultimately, for men and women like Mead, Gorer, Bateson, and Fromm, geopolitical machinations mingled with a sense of moral obligation, civic responsibility, and personal ambition, trumping the Goldmanesque commitment to disinterested science. It was a sloughing off the public certainly encouraged. As Americans were exposed to the incalculable atrocities of war, older individuated ways of thinking about sin or psychosis seemed quite incapable of explaining how such ordinary-looking men and women could commit or allow such base criminality. The paradox of culpability haunted the imagination. The public wanted answers. And neo-Freudians replied, asserting that Germany was itself, as a nation, sick. “No one will deny that a person who, in the current sense of the word, is well adjusted in Nazi Germany is and must be a neurotic, because the Nazi social-cultural environment is an extremely clearcut example of a social neurosis, if not psychosis,” George Devereux asserted in 1939, voicing a neo-Freudian diagnosis that many Allied citizens would come to accept as rather obvious (Devereux, 1939, p. 849). Fromm’s Escape from Freedom did more than merely apply psychoanalytic theory to contemporary geopolitical events. He did more than simply popularize
psychoanalytic thinking. His genius was in framing the economic, political, and ideological issues at the heart of the conflict as a question that could only be convincingly answered by way of a thick (psychoanalytic) social psychology. “In our opinion none of these explanations which emphasize political and economic factors to the exclusion of psychological ones—or vice versa—is correct,” he asserted. “Nazism is a psychological problem, but the psychological factors themselves have to be understood as being molded by socio-economic factors; Nazism is an economic and political problem, but the hold it has over a whole people has to be understood on psychological grounds” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], p. 206).

Toward this end, Escape from Freedom was spun into a theodicy of secular modernity, incorporating not only the Germans but all moderns—Americans included. The centuries-long attempt to escape all external authority—church, God—in the name of freedom will never free humanity, Fromm maintained. It will fail, as it must. Humans by nature long for authority, for its assurances and security. “Individuals” simply cannot bear the costs of their liberty, its anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and fear, which is why they seek out other alternative forms of authority. The insecurities of the working-class German who supported Hitler were not, he asserted, the consequences of wanton avarice. The true fount was the Protestant Reformation, which unleashed this unending search for authority. In this his theodicy recurs to Weber’s Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1930). Denizens of medieval Europe may have been “chained” to their role in the social order, and lacked freedom in the modern sense of the word. Yet, that immobility rooted them, gave them a sense of security and belonging in the world, the psychoanalyst asserted. Luther’s patricide broke those bonds. He is the one who razed this Eden. Like Adam and Eve, from the biblical story of humanity’s fall from grace and ouster from Eden, all eyes were opened—“The individual was left alone; everything depended on his own effort, not on the security of his traditional status” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], pp. 58–59). The modern had been made “a spiritual individual” and thus a psychologically material individual. “What Protestantism had begun in freeing man spiritually, capitalism continued to do mentally, socially, and politically,” Fromm wrote (Fromm, 1994 [1941], p. 106). Wandering out in the wilderness, henceforth all humans would be cursed by the “fierce life-and-death struggle for the maintenance of power and wealth” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], p. 47). This was the source of the insecurities that lay at the heart of Great Depression and had engendered the war.

In the elegant arch of Fromm’s historical narrative–theodicy, the evidence of widespread insecurity perfectly mirrored revisionist social psychoanalysis, the data and theory conjointly illumining each other. Germany’s escape from freedom—it’s longing to reclaim Eden and its psychic security—produced within the “personality structure” of German society what Fromm characterized as three “mechanisms of escape.” The first he identified as authoritarianism, which manifests itself in either the striving for masochistic submission (think of the acquiescent German citizen) or alternatively in the quest for sadistic domination (i.e., Hitler’s), both growing out of the same desire to overcome spiritual separateness. The second mechanism was conformity. This, he maintained, had the greatest social significance in Germany, appearing not only in neurotics but also in well-adjusted citizens. “The discrepancy between ‘I’ and the world disappears and with it the conscious fear of aloneness and powerlessness,” although in this case the people seeking to escape their freedom still believe in their individualism and liberty. In most instances this belief is merely, he asserted, an “illusion,” a kind of false “rationalization” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], p. 184). “A great number of our decisions are not really our own but are suggested to us from the outside,” he wrote of the well-adjusted automaton; “we have succeeded in persuading ourselves that it is we who have made the decision, whereas we have actually conformed with expectations of others, driven by the fear of isolation and by more direct threats to our life, freedom, and comfort”
The death of the self through literal destruction, i.e., suicide, was the final, least prevalent escapist mechanism. Each of these three in their own way led, though, to a kind of death of the self—to the narcissistic merging of the “I” with the “We”—which consequentially and necessarily spawned the destruction of civil society.

Fromm’s argument, affirmed by the spread of war, doubled back upon its American readership. He warned that “although foreign and internal threats of Fascism must be taken seriously, there is no greater mistake and no graver danger than not to see that in our own society we are faced with the same phenomenon that is fertile soil for the rise of Fascism anywhere: the insignificance and powerlessness of the individual” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], pp. 239–240). As Warren Susman observed, the 1930s had been a decade of “participation” and “belonging.” “The need to feel one’s self a part of some larger body, some larger sense of purpose,” was, he maintained, the basic truth of the decade. This need could express itself and find fulfillment in cooperative, creative ventures. “Harold Clurman’s excellent memoir of the Group Theater and the thirties, The Fervent Years (1945), makes clear,” he wrote, “that it was not only the excitement of new plays and new theater ideas, or even a new sense of social purpose that made the venture memorable. It was the sense of working together, sharing ideas and beliefs, the sense in fact of being a ‘group’” (Susman, 1984, p. 172). As the decade unfolded, this collective hope ran headlong into rather forlorn geopolitical realities, however. While explaining Germany’s “social neuroses,” Fromm confirmed the growing suspicion of readers such as Clurman that the longing to belong was in America, as in Europe, brittlely masking politically rife social-psychological insecurities. If any nation suffered from the paradoxical “illusion” of conformity masquerading as self-willed autonomy, surely, Fromm charged, it was the U.S., the land of plastic “personality.”

Escape from Freedom was reckoned by many an instant classic. This was especially the case among Fromm’s colleagues, friends, and fellow revisionists. Lewis Hill, writing in a 1942 Psychiatry symposium dedicated to the book, declared, “Of all the studies of Nazism, this analysis probably gives the most devastating picture” (Escape from freedom: A synoptic series of reviews, 1942, p. 121). Ruth Benedict was equally effusive. “Modern man’s feelings of loneliness and insignificance has never been put more frankly in its social context than in Dr. Fromm’s book,” she wrote. “All who read Escape from Freedom must admit the impeachment” (Escape from freedom: A synoptic series of reviews, 1942, p. 111). Her fellow anthropologist M. F. Ashley Montagu regarded it “one of the most important books published in our time” (Escape from freedom: A synoptic series of reviews, 1942, p. 122). In a private missive, Lewis Coser wrote politics editor, Dwight Macdonald, “Fromm’s book has seemed to many the sole contribution to political insight in book form in recent years. It is a very serious job and merits at least a serious answer” (Coser, 1945?). Not everyone assented to Fromm’s thesis, of course. In his Psychiatry contribution, Louis Wirth complained that it was “so cosmic in scope and so full of ambiguous terms that even if its meaning were clear one would scarcely know, after reading the book, whether it had been proved or not” (Escape from freedom: A synoptic series of reviews, 1942, p. 129). Still, Fromm’s book was read, and read widely.

In land of his adoption—on May 25, 1940, citizenship was conferred—Fromm established himself as a one-man “institution” (Friedenberg, 1962, p. 305), lecturing on campus after campus, churning out one popular title after another, writing essays and columns for mass magazines, even appearing on national television. A University of California student in the late 1950s, the historian Lawrence Friedman remembered him then as a “leading figure in American life and thought.” His leftist parents and most of their friends owned first editions of his work, although he was considered required reading well outside Marxist and
socialist circles. Fromm was indeed “a staple” of his undergraduate education, read in sociology and psychology, as well as in history, philosophy, and political science (Friedman, 2006, p. 12). Paul Roazen, a historian of psychoanalysis and a political theorist recalled, too, encountering Fromm in an array of subjects while at Harvard in the mid-1950s. “Yet by now it is easy for beginning students to be unaware of how momentous an impact that one book [Escape from Freedom] was capable of having had throughout the social sciences,” he notes (Roazen, 2000, pp. 239–240). Henry Kariel was teaching in Harvard’s political science department at this time and may well have assigned the book himself. “Some fifteen years in circulation,” he observed in 1957, “the book has gained such wide and spontaneous acceptance by political scientists, sociologists, and social psychologists that explicit acknowledgment of its rhetoric and argument has become increasingly dispensable” (Kariel, 1957, p. 640). This is how a generation was taught how to think of modern cultures as integrated wholes best illuminated through interdisciplinarity: by reading neo-Freudian psychocultural analysis.

ASSIMILATED

National character studies, such as Fromm’s, inspired an intellectual tradition and steady stream of titles that in the postwar years flooded the marketplace of ideas, especially in the U.S. but also abroad. Escape from Freedom was followed after the war by Gorer’s The American People (1948), Mead’s Male and Female (1949), Fromm’s The Sane Society (1955), A. C. Spector’s The Exurbanites (1955), Robert Lindner’s Rebel Without a Cause (1944) and Must You Conform? (1956), William H. Whyte’s The Organization Man (1956), Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963), Paul Goodman’s Growing Up Absurd (1960), Daniel Boorstin’s The Image (1961), Phillip Rieff’s The Triumph of the Therapeutic (1966), Christopher Lasch’s The Culture of Narcissism (1978), and a bookshop full of other titles that took to psychologizing and psychoanalyzing American culture and the inner life of its denizens. One of the most popular and influential of these, The Lonely Crowd, was written by another of Fromm’s analysands, David Riesman Jr.—whose father had met Franz Alexander in Berlin in the 1920s and whose mother was Karen Horney’s analysand. No social scientist, save Fromm, did more to carry the banner of neo-Freudian psychoculturalism forward by popularizing its message for the masses. The three “character types” at the center of The Lonely Crowd—“inner directed,” “outer directed,” and “other directed”—inserted themselves into the English lexicon, where they remain as stock symbols of conformist midcentury American culture. At 95¢, the book’s 1953 edition led the nonfiction paperback revolution, landing Riesman on the cover of Time magazine, a first for a social scientist. By 1970, twenty years after publication, the book passed the million copies sold mark, and by 1997, it topped 1.4 million (Gans, 1997, pp. 131–135). It is still in print. It still shows up on undergraduate course syllabi.

Nevertheless, for all its import, the U.S.’s interdisciplinary psychoculturalist tradition left the country and its intellectual history a most ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, the popularization of psychocultural analysis brought academic social and cultural theory to everyday Americans everywhere. “David Riesman has become, in turn, the name for a phenomenon. The appearance of The Lonely Crowd coincided with an onset of national self-analysis,” Eric Larrabee said of his friend, the book’s author, who had become by the mid-1950s the “patron saint” of the national character studies movement. “Manners and morals, patterns of behavior, the cliché of speech and character—in short, part of sociology’s subject matter—[has attracted] nonprofessional writers and readers, amateur anthropologists who looked upon their fellow Americans as though we were a newly discovered tribe of aborigines” (Larrabee,
Max Ways, the principal author of *Time* magazine’s cover story on Riesman, used what might be a more apt analogy. “Riesman seems to be leading thousands of Americans on his quest,” wrote Ways. “*The Lonely Crowd* contains a typological menagerie. The occupants of the cages are not real people, who are almost always a blend of a blend of types. But real people and real politics can be understood better by walking through Riesman’s zoo, reading the signs on the cages, and looking at the occupants” (Freedom—new style, 1954, para. 8).

(In a lecture at Harvard, the artist Ben Shahn referred to the other-directed American by its patron saint’s name: the “Ries-man”; Larrabee, 1961, p. 60.)

For countless Americans the book was less a cultural product, much more an existential testament. “To one who came of age, as I did, in the middle-class America of the ‘50s, *The Lonely Crowd* was an intensely personal document, in which one sought to find oneself. . . . I came to it in the throes of a garden-variety case of teen-aged angst, and the book appeared to be an unexpected deliverance,” Jonathan Yardley recalled of its import (Yardley, 1972, p. 27). Jane Mayer, a zealous reader, went out and bought a dozen copies of the book to hand out even before she had finished it herself, because, she wrote Riesman, “it stated so much I’d been pondering so long plus more I’d not thought of, and I felt that it would be a waste of time to discuss the contemporary scene (as my friends and I so often do) without their having read it” (Mayer, 1955). As blue collars were exchanged for white collars, as suburbs sprawled, department stores proliferated, and babies multiplied, Americans turned to psychoculturalists like Fromm, Riesman, Mead, and Gorer no longer to understand their adversaries but the conformist lurking next door—as well as perhaps within. Robert Brunn in 1961 pondered, “Has a society ever been so often taken apart and put together again by the writing breed as the American? Probably not. This is because it is a new type of society, and recently social criticism has become a profession in and of itself” (Brunn, 1961, p. 9).

For all that it did to make midcentury Americans “society conscious,” once popularized, psychoculturalism never redressed its imbalances and shortcomings, never heeded Sapir’s warning about losing the individuated person in the suffocating thicket of culture. The war behind them, it never took stock of having stripped the “lineal spiritual descendant[s] of Sophocles or Goethe or Voltaire” to their shared and abstracted elements in the name of war. In 1941 Fromm asserted, “We have become automatons who live under the illusion of being self-willing individuals” (Fromm, 1994 [1941], p. 252; cf. Fromm, 1949). Riesman followed, asserting in 1950 that the individual is inculcated with the very values that lead him to “want to do what, under the given social and economic conditions, he has to do” (Riesman, 1950, p. 174). The die of society and culture had been cast.

Long ago, Kariel had himself recognized the quandary. “When the basic perspective is Fromm’s, there can be no warrant for respecting . . . the individual’s indefinable, imponderable, incommensurable qualities,” he wrote in his 1957 review. “To adhere to a general outlook which reduces truth to measurable feeling, justice to traceable attitude, and conflict to pathological, life-denying symptom, is to strip the individual of his peculiarities and to depreciate his unclassifiable, unique characteristics—all explicit protestations and assurances to the contrary.” The problem was not that Fromm had “fail[ed] to affirm his belief in the value of the individual person.” Rather, Kariel realized, “Fromm’s basic position cannot rationally justify his good feelings” (Kariel, 1957, p. 653). Fromm surely would have protested Kariel’s unsympathetic characterization. Still, he himself recognized his own shortcomings. In response, he dedicated the latter two-thirds of his long career resuscitating the overly acculturated and adjusted Self, throwing himself back on the romantic humanist tradition. Not until the “now generation” yelled in protestation, “I am a human being!” notwithstanding, would the imbalance find its (over)correction.
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