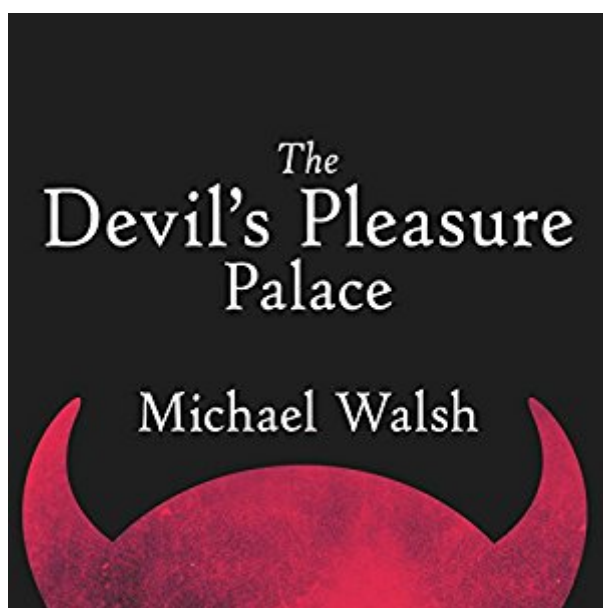


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The Devil's Pleasure Palace: The Cult Of Critical Theory And The Subversion Of The West



Synopsis

In the aftermath of World War II, America stood alone as the world's premier military power. Yet its martial confidence contrasted vividly with its sense of cultural inferiority. Still looking to a defeated and dispirited Europe for intellectual and artistic guidance, burgeoning transnational elite in New York and Washington embraced not only the war's refugees but many of their ideas as well, and nothing has proven more pernicious than those of the Frankfurt School and its reactionary philosophy of "critical theory". At once overly intellectualized and emotionally juvenile, critical theory - like Pandora's box - released a horde of demons into the American psyche. When everything could be questioned, nothing could be real, and the muscular, confident empiricism that had just won the war gave way, in less than a generation, to a Central European nihilism celebrated on college campuses across the United States. In *The Devil's Pleasure Palace*, Michael Walsh looks at how critical theory took root in America and came to affect nearly every aspect of American life and society - and what can be done to stop it.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours 15 and 25 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 29, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B015TKAPAK

Best Sellers Rank: #124 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Criticism #203 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Education #420 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Philosophy

Customer Reviews

I read this book because it seemed like it would be an interesting companion to James Burnham's "Suicide of the West." Burnham's book explains and analyzes the ideology of American liberalism, circa 1960. "The Devil's Pleasure Palace" in a sense continues that story; it explains how that liberalism discovered the Critical Theory leftism of the Frankfurt School, and like Gollum discovering the One Ring, did not benefit from the discovery.

“The Devil’s Pleasure Palace” is, indeed, somewhat interesting. But it generally fails at explanation and analysis, instead being mostly a rambling diatribe preaching to the converted. The core of Walsh’s book is an attack upon the Frankfurt School and its “Critical Theory.” The Frankfurt School was a group of Marxist German scholars, many from Goethe University’s Institute For Social Research in Frankfurt, who fled to the US before and after World War II, and then proceeded to repay this country’s generosity by deliberately destroying its culture. These men included Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. They also include, in Walsh’s telling, indirectly, men like the Communist Antonio Gramsci (famous for calling for a “long march through the institutions,” though he did not use those exact words, to combat bourgeois “cultural hegemony”) and Georg Lukács, the Hungarian Communist (not to be confused with the writer John Lukács). The key principal of the Frankfurt School was that the existing culture of the West must be destroyed and replaced, because it is irrational and oppressive, originating in and containing nothing good. Walsh’s premise is that the philosophy collectively promulgated by these men, Critical Theory, was a departure from earlier American liberalism, and a pernicious departure, that has since infected all America with its poison. This infection was accomplished through the adoption and application of the Frankfurt School’s social theories by legions of American-born radicals embedded throughout the key institutions of the West. To Walsh, Critical Theory is merely “cultural Marxism.” And, like economic Marxism, its goal is the destruction of the current society and its replacement by something new, better, and totally different. But instead of the workers being the driving engine, the educated classes would be.

“They had been let down by the grubby, unwashed workers of the world, who largely rejected the great gift they had been offered; now they would approach their equals in the intelligentsia, a far more receptive and persuadable audience.” Among other core ideas of the Frankfurt School much in evidence today, for example in the frenzied demands for political correctness on campus and in the workplace, and in reactions to Donald Trump, is Marcuse’s “repressive tolerance”—the idea that real tolerance consists of intolerance of incorrect views. Or, as Wikipedia summarizes the idea, “Revolutionary minorities hold the truth and the majority has to be liberated from error by being re-educated in the truth by this minority. The revolutionary minority are entitled to suppress rival and harmful

opinions. But Marcuse's idea is only one of many dubious gifts bestowed on modern America by the Frankfurt School—nearly any organized modern attack on American traditions is at least in part a result of the machinations of the Frankfurt School and its acolytes. While the degree and emphasis of Critical Theory was new in America, and its impact heightened by other cultural changes, the idea that the existing culture must continuously justify itself to reason and be replaced if rationally determined to be deficient, is as old as America, as seen in the debates between Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke. Attempts to undermine and destroy a society's culture are nothing new in the post-Enlightenment world, though the Frankfurt School has been uniquely successful in having their corrosive ideas adopted through internal corruption rather than imposed by external force or actual revolution. True, what distinguishes adherents of the Frankfurt School is their nihilism, in that they are less interested in what the new society will be than in destroying the old. This is well covered by Walsh, but he does not tie his discussion to longer-term currents of American political thought, which would have made his analysis stronger. But linear discussion about the Frankfurt School is actually a small part of the book, and not particularly well developed. My summary above is pieced together. The rest of the book is a rambling series of asides relating political points to classical music, H.P. Lovecraft, Milton, movies from Chinatown to "The Wild One," and numerous operas (the name of the book is from a Schubert opera). Many of these asides are mildly interesting, and what Walsh is trying to do is, through an artistic lens, tie the evils of Critical Theory to its opposition to the traditional "heroic narrative" of the West. However, the net result feels like a fairly confused mishmash—neither political analysis nor clear social commentary. There is certainly no clear exposition and refutation of the Frankfurt School, which is why I read the book to begin with. And, while most of the book is heavily pessimistic, oddly, Walsh concludes his book on an optimistic note. "No political victory is ever permanent," and Walsh apparently believes that by returning to the heroic narrative and the explication of virtues, American conservatives can ultimately defeat the poison of Critical Theory. He doesn't really say how, or develop this throwaway optimism, though. It's just a jarring conclusion to an ambitious, but ultimately largely incoherent, book.

How the Frankfurt School ruined everything and how it must be resisted is the basic thesis of the book. I would have preferred a more overtly political critique but this is well worth the read for the underpinnings of what is wrong with the 21st century Atlantic World. Warning: this is a polemic with a definite POV which is traditional Christian in a cultural and sociological sense. If your personal

beliefs differ strongly from this you may find the book upsetting as it takes no prisoners.

I really enjoyed every bit. Even things I disagree on. The pace is nice, but the book deals with the entirety of 20th century culture. The culture that was dominated by war in heaven and earth. Revelation 12:7-12 King James Version (KJV) 7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. 12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. ¶ He is deceiving the whole world, but the short time is getting ever shorter. Mr. Walsh details many of these deceptions, and some delightful side trips along the way.

Very astute and erudite treatment of the Progressive disease afflicting the body politic of the West. It provides chapter and verse to many of the feelings I have had myself over the years about what is going so wrongly in our culture, the progressive rot undermining the foundations of reason and civility. Not every chapter works as successfully as others for me but it is always riveting, and Mr. Walsh nails very many topics with great perception. Highly recommended.

Michael Walsh traces the origins of the Frankfurt School through Wilsonian progressivism up to the aging Alinskyites of today juxtaposed against the heroic narrative themes of good triumphing over evil, the sacred over the profane, and God over the devil, as manifested throughout history in opera, literature, music, and film. Walsh writes that we are all heroes and like it or not, we are currently in a war against those who want to destroy anything that might challenge their secular crusade to obliterate morality, virtue, and religion as we (innately) know it. The time for sportsmanship and bipartisanship is over - indeed they are but a slow surrender. The left will never stop and the fight must be fought as long as there remains the tiniest spark of light against the darkness.

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