
The Historian as a Social Critic: Christopher Lasch and the Uses of History

Author(s): Kevin Mattson

Source: *The History Teacher*, May, 2003, Vol. 36, No. 3 (May, 2003), pp. 375-396

Published by: Society for History Education

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1555694>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1555694?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The History Teacher*

JSTOR

The Historian As a Social Critic: Christopher Lasch and the Uses of History

Kevin Mattson
Ohio University

I see the past as a political and psychological treasury from which we draw the reserves...that we need to cope with the future.

—*Christopher Lasch*¹

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE of writing history for a wide audience? Most academic historians evade the question by simply publishing for their peers in academic journals. These journals at times contain rich insights about the social history of the collective affairs of ordinary citizens and the roots of political conflict that define our present age. However, this work rarely reaches a wider audience. Instead, popular history tends towards the biography of great individuals (presidents especially) and the history of war. Anyone who watches the “History Channel” or follows the career of Stephen Ambrose can witness to this. Though it can happen at times, it seems rare for a work of history written for a wide public to hold critical insights about American culture or politics. Certainly, the “entertainment” ethic that has invaded the publication of books, as Andre Shiffrin has pointed out, accounts for much of this. But whatever the cause, it is important to ask some broader questions: What really is the purpose of writing history for a wider public? What role should history play in contemporary discussions about current problems in our society and culture?²

History need not just be about entertainment. If pursued carefully and thoughtfully, history can pose serious questions that help prompt critical self-examination on the part of readers as active citizens rather than just passive recipients of information. It can encourage people to think about broader moral and political questions and to think more critically about the present by better understanding lessons from the past. Through illustrating how present day arrangements are contingent on past events, historians show that the present itself is contingent. This vision of history as social criticism has a rich tradition in America throughout the twentieth century, one that duly needs remembering as we debate the purposes of public historical writing today. At the top of the list of historians who practiced social criticism stands the best-selling author Christopher Lasch. Re-evaluating his work can help us better understand the promises and challenges of connecting history and social criticism.

For Lasch, the connection was obvious. He observed, “Historians tend to become social critics almost in spite of themselves, in the ordinary business of going about their work.” After all, historical inquiry requires moving outside the limited perspectives of the present. By taking the past seriously as an object of study, historical research opens a conversation that can lead to self-examination. Lasch saw history as a *two-way* conversation that challenged the hubris of modern Americans who thought of their society as the best of all possible worlds. He wrote, “The most important risk we run by treating the men and women who lived in the past as...continuous with ourselves is that they might force us, in the course of an argument, to change our own minds. But that kind of risk ought to be welcomed, especially if the alternative is the vast indifference that seems to be reflected in so much recent writing about history, which turns the past into a foreign country.” History and social criticism, for Lasch, were one.³

Lasch knew that this idea possessed its own history. The earliest Puritans penned histories in order to condemn the fallen ways of their contemporaries. The jeremiad—“a term with an honorable tradition behind it,” as Lasch put it—was only a beginning; the idea extended to Richard Hofstadter’s writing as another example. There was obviously a world of difference between these two, but there was also something they had in common: the idea that critics needed a strong command over the past but also the capacity to explain its relevance to a wider public. The “concept of a public,” as Lasch called it, was crucial to the pursuit of social criticism. Historians, from his perspective, had to address fellow citizens in order to encourage the examination of current problems as well as self-examination. Though Lasch’s career went through many twists, turns, and shifts, the one constant that remained was his marriage

of social criticism and historical inquiry. Understanding this can help us understand not just Lasch but the broader project he was intent on pursuing.⁴

Early Biography: Journalism or History or Both?

To understand Lasch's ambitious project of merging historical inquiry and social criticism, it is necessary to understand some rudimentary aspects of his biography. Perhaps most important of all is the fact that as a young adult Lasch was uncertain about pursuing a career in history. Like many young people, he faced something of a vocational crisis, heightened when he attended Harvard University in the early 1950s. Like so many young men, he first convinced himself that he should follow in his father's footsteps and become a journalist. At the time, Lasch's father Robert was a writer and editor at the *St. Louis Dispatch*, having moved there from the *Chicago Sun* where he had worked during the 1940s. Possessing a similar talent for writing, Lasch thought he might be able to do what his father had done, and he often wrote home to tell his parents about going to panels on topics like the "responsibility of the press" and hearing the famous journalist and popular historian Bernard DeVoto speak. DeVoto's model was a prime example of what Lasch might have been aiming for as a young man. Here was a popular historian and writer denied tenure at Harvard who went on to pen pieces of political and social criticism for popular publications like the *Saturday Review* and *Harper's*. Lasch was clearly enamored with the idea that the press could play a central role in helping citizens think more critically. Nonetheless, in one of his letters about hearing DeVoto, he expressed concern since so many journalists presented a "gloomy" scenario about the prospects of careers in journalism. As he explained it later in an interview, it was journalists who scared him away from journalism. Nonetheless, he never abandoned the idea of writing for a public about pressing political and social matters. He simply carried this ambition into his career as an academically trained historian.⁵

In 1954 Lasch graduated from Harvard and inaugurated his new career by entering graduate school at Columbia University. Towards the end of his life, Lasch looked back on his graduate studies as a time when he came face to face with the idea of history as a profession that emphasized objectivity and studied the past as the past and not as something that necessarily informed the present. He explained, "The department at Columbia was very professionalized and all we as graduate students ever really talked about was history, without much sense of its application to the present." This must have reflected a split between faculty and gradu-

ate students, for after all, Columbia at this time was headed by historians deeply engaged in current political debates. Lasch's future father-in-law, Henry Steele Commager, was there, someone known for writing journalism as much as history (sometimes at the expense of his historical work as his recent biographer has shown) and for activism on behalf of civil rights during the Cold War. Richard Hofstadter, who Lasch called the "dominant figure on my intellectual horizon," was also there, having already published two major works of history—*The American Political Tradition* and *The Age of Reform*—that informed contemporary political criticism, albeit in a more ironic fashion than Commager's work. And there was Lasch's own advisor, William Leuchtenburg, who worked just as much on organizing liberal organizations like Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) as he did writing political histories. All of these figures offered glimpses into how history could inform current debate.⁶

Though an activist Leuchtenburg pressed Lasch to pursue a very traditional approach to historical scholarship. He steered him away from writing his dissertation on Theodore Roosevelt's work as a historian (thinking it too early for a young man who had not yet written history to write about the writing of history) and pushed him to do intense archival research. Lasch felt hemmed in by this advice but took it anyway, writing his dissertation and then turning it into a book, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, published originally by Columbia University Press. The book did try to shed light on the naiveté of contemporary American liberalism by showing how misinformed liberals were about the origins of the Russian Revolution. But this argument was sunk (if not lost) in a work that was dense with archival references. Lasch admitted as much in an interview later in his life.⁷

The book served as only something of a detour, however, for soon after publishing it, Lasch decided to write less academic and more popular history. He would write for trade presses and for literary and popular magazines from then on. Here was where Richard Hofstadter helped out. Hofstadter pressed Lasch to improve his writing skills by giving him a job as a research assistant responsible for prefatory remarks to the documents that made up *Great Issues in American History* (a book still used by many history teachers). But the relation did not stop there. In 1962 Hofstadter was hired by Knopf, a leading trade press with a reputation for publishing writers with academic backgrounds. He let Lasch know this, hinting that Knopf might have interest in publishing some of his work. Lasch kept Hofstadter up to date about research he was doing in 1963, and only one year later, he was able to write Hofstadter thanking him for getting a contract with Knopf for the publication of *The New Radicalism in America*, a book that represented a new development in

Lasch's career. A few months later, he made clear to Hofstadter his further indebtedness to him by explaining how books like *The American Political Tradition* and *The Age of Reform* had had an enormous influence on him. Lasch was now ready to take the first step in wedding history and social criticism. He had found his forum, and he had a mentor to follow. The book he was to write in this new mode displayed some of the key principles of intellectual life that would help guide his life in the future.⁸

The Responsibility of the Critic and the Tumultuous 1960s

Lasch's *The New Radicalism in America* was published by Knopf in 1965, but the thesis of the book had already begun to develop in a series of articles Lasch wrote about the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. two years earlier for the *Iowa Defender*. Why he focused on Schlesinger was fairly obvious. Here was a historian who had written popular books about history that helped justify the politics of the New Deal. Here too was a historian, much like Leuchtenburg, who embraced political activism (both were active in Americans for Democratic Action). By the time Lasch wrote about him, Schlesinger was serving as an advisor to President John F. Kennedy. In Schlesinger, Lasch saw both the possibilities and limitations of what it meant to be an "engaged intellectual"—precisely the central theme of *The New Radicalism in America*.

The limitations he saw in Schlesinger were first and foremost political. By this time, Lasch had drifted out of the Cold War liberal framework that dominated his thinking while at Columbia. He had grown dissatisfied with the stalemate of America's "containment" foreign policy, and when Eisenhower admitted to flying U-2 spy planes into Soviet air space, Lasch became fully disenchanted. Khrushchev had seemed to promise some lessening of the tensions of the Cold War, and now it appeared to Lasch that the United States was doing all it could to heat it up. Unfortunately, as far as Lasch was concerned, liberals like Schlesinger had pledged themselves to anti-communism and the Cold War so steadfastly that they couldn't do what intellectuals should do—pose serious questions about their own country's foreign policy. Schlesinger had become too "hard boiled" to think outside of the parameters of American foreign policy and, even though Schlesinger had disagreed with the Bay of Pigs invasion, Lasch believed that his role as an advisor compromised his ability to pursue criticism.⁹

As this last point makes clear, however, Lasch's disagreement with Schlesinger was not just political, it came down to a much broader disagreement over the appropriate role of an intellectual and engaged

historian. For Lasch, Schlesinger's pledge to the Kennedy administration reflected a crude sort of "pragmatism." It illustrated a general desire among certain intellectuals "to demonstrate their toughness and practicality" and "to attach themselves to men of action." It also displayed a misconception of an historian's role. Lasch did not oppose Schlesinger's "useful" history. After all, his own interest in social criticism made that impossible. Lasch explained, "Mr. Schlesinger is right, of course, to insist that if historians lose interest in the present they are likely to lose interest in the past as well." What was *wrong* was Schlesinger's limited horizon, due in large part to his role as advisor. "The question for intellectuals," Lasch explained, "is not whether they ought to assume political commitments but what form the commitments ought to take—under what circumstances it is better to work within the framework of existing alternatives and under what circumstances it is better to hold out for alternatives which existing institutions appear to preclude." Lasch was upset that Schlesinger was unwilling to move beyond the Cold War consensus of the late 1950s and early 1960s that was leading America into Vietnam. For Lasch, Schlesinger's pursuit of history ignored the more radical possibilities that examinations of the past could inspire. He explained, "Like all intellectual pursuits, history is an effort to transcend the petty parochial concerns with which men in their almost unlimited self absorption surround themselves." What Lasch wanted from the engaged intellectual and historian was to "imagine other alternatives besides the ones whose timeless truth they take for granted." It was to this ideal, as opposed to Schlesinger's pragmatism, that Lasch pledged himself.¹⁰

Unfortunately, as Lasch's own historical work made clear, this was no easy road to travel. *The New Radicalism in America* showed over and over how intellectuals had tried to attach themselves to institutions of power in a vain attempt to shape them. The story of the 20th century intellectual, as it appeared in his book, was one of rejecting "detachment" for a narrow definition of usefulness. For instance, Lasch examined how the editors of *The New Republic* supported World War I in hopes of using the war for liberal aims. Why did they engage in a gamble that would eventually fail? Lasch pointed to their "thirst for action, the craving for involvement, the longing to commit themselves to the onward march of events." This pattern was not limited to war-time but could be seen in the muckraker Lincoln Steffens who came to admire "the big men behind the scenes" who shaped politics to their liking. This impulse to shed detachment led numerous intellectuals to remake themselves as reformers (i.e., Jane Addams), desperately trying to replace critical intellect with fervid action. It is also why so many of Lasch's contemporaries had pledged

themselves to the Cold War, only to find themselves limited by the purview of organizations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom, by private foundations, and by their own government, none of which seemed ready to accept criticism. By the time Lasch wrote *The New Radicalism*, he saw the “rise of the intellectuals to the status of a privileged class, fully integrated into the social organism.” To be detached from institutions of power while also offering alternatives to the status quo was no easy matter, as Lasch’s historical explorations made quite evident.¹¹

As the cliché goes, the 1960s changed everything. At the least, these years opened up new possibilities for Lasch to practice his ethic of detachment and engaged criticism. As political movements got off the ground, intellectuals faced new possibilities. First and foremost were the teach-ins that spread on college campuses in the same year that *The New Radicalism in America* appeared. At these gatherings, students and teachers would listen to presentations and debates about what was happening as America became more deeply mired in Vietnam. They put into practice rational, open-ended, and democratic deliberations that contested the secrecy of President Johnson’s interventions in Vietnam. At the University of Iowa, Lasch organized and participated in one of the first teach-ins. He explained the event’s significance by citing its “combination of argument and orderly demonstration.” He believed teach-ins provided a forum by which intellectuals could engage in a process of democratic deliberation. As he explained in a letter to William Leuchtenburg, “One reason why the teach-ins were so promising was that it [sic] showed students that it was possible to use a scholarly career for something besides professional self-advancement.” A teach-in allowed a scholar to be detached from institutions of power while waging an effective critique aimed at mobilizing for political change.¹²

Beyond participating in teach-ins, Lasch also made sure that the prerequisite for intellectual engagement—namely academic and intellectual freedom—was maintained in the face of political power. Lasch rushed to defend those who suffered the consequences of their political beliefs, even when he himself disagreed with them. This is clear in his support of Staughton Lynd, an historian who had been active in the New Left for some time and one with whom Lasch had corresponded for a number of years. By 1967, however, Lasch believed Lynd had grown too enamored with the Vietcong when he traveled to Vietnam with Tom Hayden. Nonetheless, when Lynd faced threats to his academic freedom, Lasch lent his support. Lynd had been offered a contract to teach at Chicago State College in 1967-8, but the offer was cancelled by those higher up in the administration. Jim O’Brien explains what followed: “A total of five Chicago-area history departments, both private and public,

recruited Lynd as a teacher only to have the appointments vetoed at higher levels.” To defend Lynd, Lasch became a part-time activist (writing letters, organizing petitions, etc.). At the same time, he helped find a job at Northwestern University for Jesse Lemisch, another victim of academic backlash against leftist professors. Lasch was now teaching at Northwestern University, having left Iowa. Lemisch had been offered a three-year position at the University of Chicago, only to find his contract revoked when he supported student protestors. Once again, Lasch was not in full sympathy with all of Lemisch’s ideas, but he ensured him a job beginning in 1968-9. Looking back, though he disagreed with Lasch’s political outlook, Lemisch never forgot that “in some sense he saved my life.” Lemisch also remembers that Lasch played a small but helpful role in the Committee on Academic Freedom, an ad-hoc organization that tried to defend the activities of left-wing professors.¹³

Besides this activism, Lasch continued to pursue his own historical inquiry, hoping that it could inform the activities of the New Left. But he was different from those left wing historians like Sidney Lens who simply wanted to build up a treasure trove of radical success stories from the past. About Lens he wrote: “In committing himself to the proposition that American radicalism has a continuing history, from Roger Williams to the ‘new radicalism’ of the 1960s, Mr. Lens has not only mutilated history, ruthlessly overriding the vast differences between the radicalism of Tom Paine, say, and that of Martin Luther King, but he has had to define radicalism so broadly as to render the term meaningless.” By contrast, Lasch used history to criticize some of the contemporary shortcomings of the New Left, making explicit the historical discontinuities that Lens ignored. For instance, drawing upon the work of fellow historian James Weinstein, Lasch showed how the Socialist Party of the United States had held out a promise for American radicalism at the turn of the century, one now forgotten by the New Left’s penchant for confrontation and the theatrical protests of the late 1960s. Lasch believed the Socialist Party had balanced a vision of “thoroughgoing social transformation with ‘constructive,’” that is, short-term, “political action.” It had worked with and yet criticized the limitations of labor unions. It had drawn upon the work of activists but also had drawn sustenance from the long-range view of intellectuals. All in all, it had built an inclusive and broad spectrum of members that was easily juxtaposed to the “sectarianism, marginality, and alienation from American life” that marked American radicalism from the 1920s onwards and also the confrontational politics of the New Left of the present. Lasch hoped this sort of history lesson could help push movement leaders to think more strategically and critically.¹⁴

In all of these ways—by taking part in teach-ins, by defending academic freedom for left historians and social critics, by writing for a wide audience, and by pursuing scholarship informed by current questions—Lasch embraced the promise of a detached but critically engaged historian and critic. Essentially, he put into practice his counter-model to Arthur Schlesinger. As Lasch explained in 1971, intellectuals had to recognize the importance of the “struggles” among “students, black people, and other disfranchised groups;” but he made it clear that attachment to these new movements should not entail diminution of one’s intellectual role. He explained, “As intellectuals, we can no longer hold ourselves aloof from these forces; but neither can we join them except on our own terms—that is, as intellectuals.” There was no doubt in his mind that the “movement needs activists and organizers,” but it also needed “people who can interpret the meaning and purpose of confrontations, formulate strategies, analyze the strengths and vulnerabilities of the existing system, and more generally, give coherent expression to an otherwise incoherent sense of pain and outrage.” Lasch came nowhere close to doing all or even most of these things. In some ways, he tended towards detachment rather than the diffuse activism he outlined here. Nonetheless, he had certainly moved out of the academic model of scholarship he learned while at Columbia. And he was starting to understand the different permutations of historically informed social criticism—both how it led to concrete activism but also how it informed scholarly pursuits.¹⁵

That is what made the self-destruction of the New Left during the late 1960s so devastating for Lasch. He felt deeply disillusioned about the Weathermen and the irrational escapades of Yippies like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin (that is, the broader attempt to merge the New Left and the counterculture during the late 1960s). Having invested a fair amount of hope in the New Left, he found himself, in the late 1960s, at a crossroads. In 1970, he wrote William Appleman Williams, another historian whose work informed the New Left and who also had turned increasingly cynical about the movement’s prospects: “I seem to have come to some sort of dead end in my own work and am uncertain about what direction to take.” In fact, Lasch was about to move into a new phase of seeing the connections between history and social criticism—one that would bring him a fame and recognition he could never have imagined. Already by the early 1970s, he had hit upon one of the major sources for the next turn in his intellectual development. This was his critique of the counterculture that had put far too much emphasis, Lasch thought, on changing lifestyles rather than politics. The cultural libertarianism and pseudo-radicalism of the counterculture bothered Lasch

immensely, as it did many other left and liberal critics at the time. Out of this criticism emerged a new direction in Lasch's long-term marriage of historical inquiry and social criticism.¹⁶

The Art of Social Criticism Perfected

It was in *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977) and more so in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), that Lasch found his voice, so to speak, and learned how to reach an even wider audience than that of the 1960s. Essentially, he had perfected the art of writing accessible social criticism. As he explained his writing of the 1970s in an interview, "I had liberated myself from the professionalism I had learned at Columbia." He also became a best-selling author whose name became associated with the term "narcissism." To a certain extent, Lasch had written a perfectly timed book when he wrote *The Culture of Narcissism*, one that fit the "mood" of the 1970s better than he might have expected. During this decade America faced an oil embargo and broader energy crisis, neoconservatives bemoaned "ungovernability" and a crisis of legitimacy, and President Carter spoke of "malaise." Lasch's dissection of narcissism struck a deep chord, a feeling of decline that marked the culture of the 1970s. *The Culture of Narcissism* became a work that seemed to describe what the pop social critic and "new journalist" Tom Wolfe, who also wrote during the 1970s, termed the "me decade."¹⁷

Wolfe is a good foil for understanding Lasch better. While the former wrote superficial journalistic accounts of EST and new age philosophies to describe the "me decade," Lasch plumbed history to explain long-term changes in peoples' self-hood. In developing his ideas Lasch was quite familiar with a well-developed tradition of "character studies" in American social thought, captured best in David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, a book that provided, in Lasch's own words, "one of the models for the kind of investigation that I was trying to conduct." What Riesman and others had shown was that certain patterns of self-hood reflected broader sociological and historical changes. So, for instance, as capitalist institutions became more centralized and bureaucratic, the older inner-directed skills of entrepreneurs and small shop owners no longer served their central function. Instead, corporate managers wanted "team players" who could work well with others (rather than on their own), and "schmoozing" and image management became important skills to learn if one wanted to climb the corporate ladder. As Lasch himself put it, sounding very much like Riesman, "The dense interpersonal environment of modern bureaucracy, in which work assumes an abstract quality almost wholly divorced from performance, by its very nature elicits and often rewards a narcissis-

tic response.” In other words character types did not just manifest themselves due to recent trends like EST or new age, the sorts of things Wolfe described, but rather grew out of deeper historical changes related to patterns of work and the economy.¹⁸

Lasch now wrote of big processes when writing history. Archival research and writing about well-defined events (the liberal reaction to the Russian Revolution, for instance) were now completely dropped in order to craft grand narratives. Lasch was not afraid to characterize historical change as defined by a singular but broad process. As he explained in *Haven in a Heartless World*:

The history of modern society...is the assertion of social control over activities once left to individuals or their families. During the first stage of the industrial revolution, capitalists took production out of the household and collectivized it, under their own supervision, in the factory. Then they proceeded to appropriate the workers' skills and technical knowledge, by means of "scientific management," and to bring these skills together under managerial direction. Finally they extended their control over the worker's private life as well, as doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, child guidance experts, officers of the juvenile courts, and other specialists began to supervise child-rearing, formerly the business of the family.

For Lasch, modernity was about deskilling or proletarianization, that is, essentially stripping people of control over their work and family lives. Because of a heavier reliance on experts in all realms of life, ordinary people were left with no other option than to question their own skills. This problem pervaded every level of American society. For instance, at the national and political level, citizens had become passive since they were told to leave solutions to better qualified politicians and experts. At the personal level, the "proletarianization of parenthood" had helped to undermine "parental confidence" and had promoted a "vastly inflated idea of the importance of child-rearing techniques." So no matter where people turned, they were faced with expertise and deskilling.¹⁹

Added to this was a pernicious and invasive advertising industry. Drawing upon Stuart Ewen's historical analysis of mass consumption, Lasch believed America's consumer culture was tied directly to the deskilling of labor. As workers lost control over the process of labor due to the rise of scientific management in the early 20th century, they were offered the rewards of consumption. They were urged to consume precisely the products manufactured on sped-up assembly lines that provided cheaper products available to all. But it was a bad deal. The culture of consumption did not really promote pleasurable rewards, as Lasch saw it, but a further deskilling of everyday life. Advertisers promoted prod-

ucts not for enjoyment's sake but because they solved problems invented by the advertisers themselves—bad breath, unattractiveness, a lack of sex appeal, etc. Lasch explained, “Modern advertising seeks to promote not so much self-indulgence as self-doubt.” Advertising thus represented “therapeutic control,” the sort that conjured up anxieties and psychological insecurities. This was the central feature of what Lasch called the culture of narcissism.²⁰

No wonder that modern self-hood was marked by helplessness and passivity. Everyday life, for Lasch, was characterized by “wary avoidance” and emotional detachment. In making these points, Lasch did his best to distinguish narcissism from selfishness. He argued that modern life—precisely because of deskilling and advertising—was characterized more by insecurity than hedonism. In fact, he wrote an entire book trying to make this point clearer; the title of the book, *The Minimal Self* (1984), carried the message on its own. Again, here was the crucial distinction between Lasch's work and the pop social criticism of Tom Wolfe. While Wolfe focused on contemporary trends and “me-ism,” Lasch looked to historical changes rather than personal choices made in the present. Certainly Lasch examined contemporary culture, criticizing recent fiction and discussing the implications of movies, but he never stopped here, the way Wolfe did. Rather, he went further back in time to show how the minimal self of modernity stood at the end of a long historical development.²¹

There was a certain irony in the fact that *The Culture of Narcissism* became a best-seller. After all, it was nowhere near as accessible to the reader as Tom Wolfe's writing. Nevertheless, Lasch had struck a chord, and stardom resulted. *People* magazine visited his home, took pictures of his family playing games in their yard, and misrepresented the entire premise of his work by publishing an article entitled “Gratification Now is the Slogan of the 70s, Laments a Historian.” The White House called Lasch and asked him to attend a meeting that would result in President Carter's famous “malaise” speech. He even received the American Book Award in 1980 for *The Culture of Narcissism*. In short, Lasch's life was turned upside down by instant fame, an irony, considering that he had done so much to criticize the culture of consumption that now promoted him as a marketable commodity. As he explained it in an interview conducted towards the end of his life, “I was...very troubled” after *The Culture of Narcissism* became a best-seller. “It was a difficult period in my life because I didn't like this celebrity status that I had inherited somehow.”²²

Considering this, Lasch did an inordinately good job at remaining a critic under the pressures of changed circumstances. He offered advice to

the White House at a meeting but never abdicated his role as a critic. When Patrick Caddell, the advisor to President Carter who got Lasch invited to the White House, asked him what he thought of the malaise speech, Lasch did not hold back. He told Caddell that he liked the President's call for civic responsibility on the part of ordinary citizens. But he also thought this message cut in different and potentially dangerous directions. He explained, "Appeals for hard work, discipline, and sacrifice are likely to fall on deaf ears when addressed, not to those who most need to hear them, but to people who already work hard and undergo sacrifices every day through no choice of their own. Such appeals will only reinforce the prevailing cynicism unless coupled with an attack—more than a rhetorical attack—on the power and privileges of elites." Lasch was willing, as this letter makes clear, to both counsel and argue with power at the same time, showing that perhaps his earlier concern over the absorption of critical intellect into the citadels of power might have been slightly overblown.²³

Just as Lasch did not hold back from criticizing the president, he did not hold back from criticizing the American Book Award (ABA) system. He refused to accept the award, and then constructively used the occasion to pen a biting criticism of the ABA in the *New York Times Book Review*. He wrote, "The formation of the American Book Awards, which replace the judgment of an author by his peers with a new selection process that gives priority to commercial success, sanctions the worst tendencies in publishing today." He slammed the "corporate capitalism" that stood behind the book industry and how it turned authors into marketable commodities. In both his relations with the White House and the ABA system, Lasch made clear that popularity would not diminish his primary responsibility as a social critic.²⁴

No matter how good a job he did at this, he still tired of the fame and the pressures. To a certain extent, he also seemed to tire of social criticism, or at least the naysaying dimension of the work he had done to date. After all, *The Culture of Narcissism* addressed Americans' shortcomings. Lasch was well aware that social criticism could be dismissed as elitist, wholly negative, or just screaming at a wall. During the late 1980s, he became more interested in the distinction that Michael Walzer had made between "disconnected" and "connected" social criticism. Those practicing the former would berate listeners, while those pursuing the latter would speak to fellow citizens in tones that grew out of native traditions and deeply engrained values. Lasch wanted to find an American tradition that he could draw sustenance from, traditions that could inspire hope in the face of deskilling and the culture of consumption that seemed all powerful. He set out to write a book that some see as his

magnum opus (this became even more evident in his death only three years after the book was published, making it his last full-length book). As he described it, *The True and Only Heaven* (1991) was “the most American book” that he had written. In it tried to “locate [him]self in certain native traditions.” That is, he took the next step in his long-range project to merge historical inquiry and social criticism. No longer just a critic, he started to search for alternatives to the present that resided in the past.²⁵

Building a Counter-Tradition

Intent on writing social criticism that drew some hope from the past, Lasch had to make clear the difference between historically informed social criticism and nostalgia. After all, going to the past for hope could border on pining for things as they once were. But for Lasch, nostalgia had nothing to do with the aims of his own work. Nostalgia depicted the past as brimming with “childlike innocence,” but never as something that really had anything to teach people in the present. Nostalgia fawned over the past but treated it like a bygone age. Lasch explained that nostalgia “idealizes the past, but not in order to understand the way in which it unavoidably influences the present and the future.” Social criticism informed by historical inquiry, unlike nostalgia, saw the past as capable of teaching those living within the present some very important lessons about the ways they presently lived.²⁶

Specifically, the past could teach Americans how the problems of the present—deskilling, proletarianization, rampant consumerism, and the culture of narcissism—need not have come to be. To a large extent, *The True and Only Heaven* came out of Lasch’s wide reading in both republican political theory and labor history. He saw the ideal of petty proprietorship as bringing these two strains together. As political theorists from antiquity to early modern times had stressed, citizens in a republic required a rudimentary form of economic freedom that could guarantee that their decisions were made for the the common good instead of for their own self-interest. That is, unless citizens owned enough property, their decisions could be manipulated by those with more economic power. This constituted the basic teaching of republican political theories. In the same vein, labor historians showed how the artisanal system of the 19th century in America (which derived from medieval guild systems) envisioned a robust citizenship requiring the full ownership of a shop (what Marxists would label as capital). Both republican political theory and the artisan system of labor revolved around the concept of “economic independence” stemming from petty proprietorship. In other

words, owning property was *more* than owning property. It resulted in an egalitarian system (one where no one could own too much more than another) and in a certain set of virtues. Lasch explained, "Proprietorship, as Americans understood it, tended to elicit qualities essential to democratic citizenship—initiative, self-reliance, foresight, independence of mind."²⁷

If these virtues were associated with republicanism—a tradition of political thought that many historians believed had petered out by at least the late 19th century if not sooner—and with the artisan labor system that existed prior to the rise of urban, industrial capitalism, then there seemed little reason for hope. But for Lasch, these traditions lived on. Populism, the struggle of poorer farmers against the tyranny of banks and railroads at the turn of the century, captured the spirit of petty proprietorship and the older virtues of independent ownership. Lasch explained, "Nineteenth-century populism meant something quite specific: producerism; a defense of endangered crafts (including the craft of farming); opposition to the new class of public creditors and to the whole machinery of modern finance; opposition to wage labor." This populist spirit lived on beyond the failed struggles of American farmers at the turn of the century, specifically within the syndicalist movement that called for "workers' control of production" as "the only cure for apathy and the only solid basis for democratic citizenship." Lasch kept stretching to find this populist strain in all periods of American history. Indeed, it would seem that any time a connection was drawn between property ownership, independence, participation in economic planning, and citizenship, there was Lasch's republican, artisanal, populist, and syndicalist spirit—one that provided an alternative to the deskilled and minimal selfhood of modernity. Though the practices of craft production and self-management of labor might have died out, Lasch saw their *spirit* living on.²⁸

Lasch was not satisfied drawing out this distinct economic tradition. He sought out an intellectual tradition as well. He found it in a line of thought that was critical of capitalism and its mythology of progress and unlimited growth. His was a polyglot tradition indeed. Lasch discussed the Calvinist minister and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, arguing that he understood how original sin tempered mankind's hubristic desires to control the natural world. Lasch explained how Edwards's "acknowledgment of God's sovereignty transformed his terror into gratitude and wonderment," of the sort that modern citizens needed to learn from. Lasch believed this teaching wound up in the social criticism of Thomas Carlyle and then one of Carlyle's American compatriots, Ralph Waldo Emerson. This was certainly odd; for after all, Emerson was known as a steadfast opponent of Edwards's Calvinism (transcendentalism in many

ways radicalized Unitarianism, itself a major critique of Calvinism). Emerson's arguments for individualism and "self-reliance" seemed to justify capitalism rather than to question it. Nonetheless, Lasch teased out certain populist strains in Emerson's thought, including his "populist...disdain for the fashionable life of cities" and his belief in the "moral value of manual labor." What Emerson and Edwards seemed to share was a belief in awe and wonder at the natural world, plus a belief in limits and a disdain for perpetual growth and progress.²⁹

In sum, Lasch argued that republican political theory, an artisan labor system, populism, and an intellectual search for virtues that lay outside the purview of capitalism constituted a counter-tradition in American history. What they showed was how Americans have not always believed in capitalism, progress, and a consumer culture. Rather, key virtues—most of them revolving around petty proprietorship—existed in the past and could be used to formulate a robust sense of participatory citizenship in the future. Rooted in an egalitarian distribution of property, real equality and independence (as distinguished from mere rhetoric) once constituted the basis of a healthy form of politics. At the same time, intellectuals had understood the need to set limits on progress and believed the values of citizenship and democratic participation offered more than the abundance and prosperity of consumer capitalism. By tracing out this counter-tradition, Lasch showed how the historian could help recuperate a strain in history that had much to teach contemporary citizens struggling with the limitations of their own society, especially the superficial nature of consumer capitalism and their sense of minimal self-hood.

Conclusion: The Problems and Promises of Historically Informed Social Criticism

Lasch had made clear, over the course of a career cut short by an early death in 1994, that history could and should inform social criticism. This long-term vision took many different forms during his life. In the early to mid 1960s, he showed how intellectuals should think of themselves as critics detached from institutions of power yet engaged in public debates, and he dissected the historical failure of intellectuals who tried to become counselors to power. During the 1970s, Lasch plumbed the problems of American culture, explaining how minimal self-hood was deeply intertwined with broader cultural problems stemming from historical changes. When politicians, including the President, and the public looked to him for answers and elevated him to stardom, he never forgot the primary responsibility of speaking as a critic. During the 1980s and 1990s, he

explained to Americans how they could think differently about the present by paying attention to their own critical and native traditions.

The last phase of Lasch's intellectual life highlighted some problems that haunted his long-range project of merging historical inquiry and social criticism. First there was a tendency in building a counter-tradition to force certain thinkers into the author's own paradigm. Take for instance, Lasch's treatment of Ralph Waldo Emerson as a populist. There can be no doubt that Emerson's writings offered Lasch a great deal of intellectual ammunition. In his essay, "American Scholar" (a work Lasch cited), Emerson encouraged the listeners to engage in "frank intercourse with many men and women," suggesting a populist conception of intellectual work. But this democratic tendency in Emerson's thought conflicted with an explicit elitism. Emerson wrote, "Men in history, men in the world of today are bugs, are spawn, and are called 'the mass' and 'the herd.'" Emerson's desire to find an individualistic spirit, one that resisted the herd mentality and put into practice the ethic of "self-reliance," seemed to have some proprietary undertones but also a rabidly modernistic urge to free the self from the fetters of the past. This is not to say that Lasch completely misread Emerson but that he seemed to stress the side that he liked, while ignoring contradictions. Treating Emerson as a populist crammed this complicated thinker into a tradition he himself would very likely have cringed at. After all, this was the same man who condemned the "foolish consistency" that papered over internal contradictions within his own thinking. To a large extent, Emerson's influence can be heard more in Nietzsche's aristocratic philosophy (the German philosopher actually cited Emerson) than in the voices of syndicalists or populists.³⁰

Even if we allow the existence of Lasch's quirky counter-tradition, what promise did it really hold out? More broadly, how could the past really speak to the present? Many of Lasch's critics have portrayed him as nostalgic, as pining for the past. For instance, feminists chastised his work on the family as nostalgic for the paterfamilias of the past. This accusation seems unfair to me. After all, Lasch argued that his discussion of the family should not "be misunderstood as a lament for old-fashioned individualism, a plea for the restoration of old-fashioned authority, or a demand for the revival of some earlier form of the family." Lasch believed that a historian could discuss the past without having to defend everything that happened in the past. Nonetheless, this was a much more difficult challenge than Lasch made it seem. How could the good (in this specific case the individualism and self-control nurtured in older families) be distinguished from the bad (paternalism)? Though Lasch was not nostalgic, his call for critical memory did not make clear how to sift

through the past, taking from it what was healthy or good and leaving behind what was rotten.³¹

Even if the critic could perform such a process of sifting, how could the result really speak to people living in the present? It seems hard to imagine that the recovered history presented by the social critic could help envision a different life under changed circumstances. How could the minimal self of modernity really embrace the robust sense of citizenship found in the world of 19th century petty proprietors? Lasch admitted to this problem towards the end of *The True and Only Heaven*. He explained that populists “call for small-scale production and political decentralization but they do not explain how those objectives can be achieved in a modern economy.” Some readers might respond by asking: Why revive the tradition at all then? Ian Shapiro, a political theorist who corresponded with Lasch quite a bit about *The True and Only Heaven*, constantly pointed out that it was difficult to resuscitate republican principles of petty proprietorship under changed economic circumstances. This criticism seems especially fair considering that Lasch condemned John Dewey’s political theory for the very same problem. When discussing Dewey’s call to revive local communities as the basis of democratic self-governance (found in the classic work, *The Public and its Problems*), Lasch had quickly pointed out that America’s great philosopher never explained “how loyalty and responsibility would thrive in a world dominated by large-scale production and mass communication.” The critique could easily be turned back on the author himself. It would appear that historically informed social criticism suffered from an inherent paralysis, an inability to make its discoveries really affect current debates about the present.³²

The concern about paralysis seems appropriate, especially if we remind ourselves of Lasch’s view of the social critic. If the social critic was to be detached from institutions of power, how could he or she really ensure that memory be put to constructive use? Perhaps this was best highlighted in Lasch’s visit to the White House. The social theorist Daniel Bell was also present at the meeting with President Carter. Afterwards, Bell and Lasch discussed the ramifications of the meeting in a series of letters. Lasch explained that he was uncomfortable with the role of advisor. Bell had no such discomfort, although he hastened to point out that he sympathized with Lasch’s concerns. Bell wrote, “I have never seen anything wrong with intellectuals becoming advisors to men in power, so long (dammed [sic] difficult as it is) that they are not seduced by it.” But as Bell saw it, criticism required engagement, that is, seeing through the consequences of one’s arguments in the realm of political power (here Bell followed Max Weber’s famous “ethic of responsibil-

ity”). Bell wrote, “I have never accepted the idea that the ‘function’ of the intellectual is to be a critic, if only for the fact that he cannot...be a good critic without having had some practical experience or immersion in the activities of power.” This was a significant challenge to Lasch. If he was to try to make memory speak to contemporary situations, how could he remain detached? The voice of the critic threatened to be silenced by self-imposed marginality.³³

With these criticisms in mind, we need to remember what Lasch’s project has to teach us today about the current problems of writing social criticism informed by history. Though his criticism failed to provide solutions to current problems, it certainly encouraged people to think critically about the past and its relation to the present, even if this act of thought remained within the realm of imagination. To a large extent, Lasch’s view of the social critic was akin to his view of the teacher who helped in the general “training of judgment or practical reason” on the part of students. Learning was to be a very open ended process, one that did not necessarily result in any specific outcome. The educator had to recognize this. The same could be said for the critic. All social criticism could really do was encourage self-examination on the part of fellow citizens. What citizens *did with* that self-examination—where they went, how they thought about recreating their present circumstances by reflecting on historical lessons—was open and indeterminate. The project of historically informed social criticism might not promise concrete reforms or road maps, but it did promise critical self-insight, that is, if citizens in the present took up the challenge.³⁴

In a day and age when popular history tends towards biography or military history, it could serve us well to remember Lasch’s vision. Lasch committed himself for more than thirty productive years as a historian to showing how his vocation could actually help citizens think more critically about the present. He showed how important it was to write history for a wider public within a democracy. Lasch’s work reminds us of how historical work can and should lead directly to social criticism. He might not have offered answers to all of the questions his work prompted, but he certainly led by example, making clear how historians need to play a role in contemporary debates. His work offers us lessons that are well worth remembering today.

Notes

1. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), p. 25.

2. On changes in book publishing, see Andre Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (New York: Verso, 2000); on changes in historical inquiry and public debate, see Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: Continuing the Conversation," *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 120-36. For an interesting article about contemporary historical writing, see Elliot Gorn, "History For Sale," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 11, 2002, B10-B11.

3. Christopher Lasch, "History as Social Criticism," pp. 1, 20-21. This is an unpublished paper presented at the Organization of American Historians Convention, April 9, 1989, found in the Christopher Lasch Papers, University of Rochester, Rush Rhees Library (from now on abbreviated as the Lasch Papers).

4. "History as Social Criticism," p. 8; "A Typology of Intellectuals: II. The Example of C. Wright Mills," *Salmagundi*, Spring-Summer, 1986: p. 106. For another example of where Lasch cited the tradition of the jeremiad, see his commentary on Claude Fischer's "Finding the 'Lost' Community": "A Response to Fischer," *Tikkun* 3 (1988): p. 73.

5. Lasch in two letters to his parents: February 11, 1951 and March 3, 1951, in Box O, Folder 5, Lasch Papers; for the comment in the interview, see Richard Wightman Fox, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 16 (1994): p. 6. On DeVoto, see John L. Thomas, *A Country in the Mind: Wallace Stegner, Bernard DeVoto, History, and the American Land* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

6. "History as Social Criticism: Conversations with Christopher Lasch," *Journal of American History* 80 (1994): p. 1315, 1317. On Henry Steele Commager, see Neil Jumonville, *Henry Steele Commager: Midcentury Liberalism and the History of the Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Lasch explained to Jumonville that Commager never had a big impact on his own work and that he was instead attracted to Hofstadter's more ironic approach to history (p. 131). For insight into Leuchtenburg, see his letter to Lasch on January 21, 1958 where he explained that he was as busy writing his book on the New Deal as he was "ADA politicking." Box 1, Folder 5, Lasch Papers. On July 26, 1961, Leuchtenburg wrote that it had been "exciting to have a student and a friend who was genuinely excited by ideas and dedicated to his craft." Box 1, Folder 5, Lasch Papers.

7. See Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962). For his commentary about the book, see Richard Wightman Fox, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," p. 8. See also a letter Lasch wrote to Staughton Lynd on December 29, 1962 in which he claimed readiness to move beyond the muddle of his dissertation and write in his own voice: Box 1, Folder 10, Lasch Papers.

8. See the correspondence with Hofstadter in Box 1, Folder 10, Lasch Papers and Christopher Lasch to Richard Hofstadter, July 24, 1963, Box 1, Folder 13; Christopher Lasch to Richard Hofstadter, January 10, 1964, Box 1, Folder 14; Christopher Lasch to Richard Hofstadter, July 6, 1964, Box 1, Folder 14. Lasch criticized the limitations of professionalism in 1962: see his "A Profession Views Itself," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 15, 1962, 2B. For Lasch's appreciation of small magazines, see his "The Magazines of Dissent Thrive on Unpopularity," *New York Times Magazine*, July 18, 1965, 10-11, 33-35.

9. "Arthur Schlesinger and 'Pragmatic Liberalism.' Part 2: The Uses of Realism," *Iowa Defender*, May 6, 1963, 1. On the U-2 Incident, see Christopher Lasch, "The Historian as Diplomat," *The Nation*, November 24, 1962, p. 351 and "What About the Intellectuals?" *New York Times Book Review*, October 16, 1966, 58. On Schlesinger's disagreement with Kennedy on the Bay of Pigs, see Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 82-3.

10. "Arthur Schlesinger and 'Pragmatic' Liberalism. Part III: The Historian as Politician," *Iowa Defender*, May 13, 1963, p. 1; "Arthur Schlesinger and 'Pragmatic Liberalism.' Part I: The Cult of the Hard Boiled," *Iowa Defender*, April 29, 1963, p. 8; Part III, p. 4.

11. *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: Norton, 1965), pp. 223, 263, 316. See also "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Vintage, 1968).

12. "New Curriculum for the Teach-Ins" (1965), reprinted in *Teach-Ins: U.S.A.: Reports, Opinions, Documents*, ed. Louis Menashe and Ronald Radosh (New York: Praeger, 1967), pp. 306, 308; Lasch to Leuchtenburg, letter dated July 17, 1965, Lasch Papers, Box 1, Folder 18. For more on the teach-in movement, see Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism, 1945-1970* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2002), Chapter Five.

13. Jim O'Brien, "'Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible': Staughton Lynd, Jesse Lemisch, and a Committed History," *Radical History Review* 82 (2002): p. 69; Jesse Lemisch to author, email message, April 23, 2002. For Lasch's criticism of Lynd's politics see Lasch, "Journey to Hanoi," *New York Times Book Review*, April 23, 1967, 16, 18. For more on the Lynd case, see Christopher Lasch and Al Young, "The Lynd Case," *The Nation*, October 16, 1967: p. 354 as well as the various letters in the Lasch Papers, including Lasch to Richard Hofstadter October 13, 1967 in Box 2, Folder 7 and to Arthur Schlesinger, January 7, 1968, Box 2, Folder 8.

14. "Radical Movements in the U.S.A.—A Survey," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 4, 1966, 4B; *The Agony of the American Left*, pp. 36, 40. The book Lasch relied upon here was James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967). It should be noted that Lasch had accused Staughton Lynd of writing celebratory histories of left struggles in the past. For more on this point, see Robert Westbrook, "Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism*, and the Vocation of Intellectuals," *Reviews in American History* 23 (1995): p. 185.

15. Christopher Lasch, "From Culture to Politics," in *The Revival of American Socialism*, ed. George Fischer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 224.

16. Lasch to William Appleman Williams, April 30, 1970, Box 3, Folder 1, Lasch Papers. For Lasch's critique of the counterculture, see "The 'Counter-Culture,'" in *The World of Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1973) and "Epilogue," in *The New American Revolution*, ed. Roderick Aya and Norman Miller (New York: Free Press, 1971), p. 330. What Lasch was reacting against can be found in the classic statement on the counterculture: Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture* (1968; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 49-50 where Roszak endorses the embrace of irrationalism and the dissolution of the Freudian ego.

17. Richard Wightman Fox, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," p. 12; I rely here on Tom Wolfe, "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening," in *The Purple Decades* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982).

18. Christopher Lasch, "The Culture of Narcissism Revisited," *World & I*, May 1990, p. 513; *The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 96.

19. *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. xx-xxi; *The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 288; *Haven*, p. 172. See also on the degradation of labor as it was connected to family life, "The Family as a Haven in a Heartless World," *Salmagundi*, No. 35, 1976: p. 44. For more on politics, see *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: Norton, 1984), p. 51.

20. *The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 309. See also Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Conscience: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976).

21. *The Culture of Narcissism*, p. 328.

22. "Gratification Now Is the Slogan of the 70s, Laments a Historian," *People*, July 9, 1979, 34-6. Richard Wightman Fox, "Interview with Christopher Lasch," p. 13. Lasch's visit to the White House is well documented in Box 20, Folder 6 of the Lasch Papers. See also "Reshaping of Carter's Presidency," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1979, 1, 30; Elizabeth Drew, "A Reporter at Large: Phase: In Search of a Definition," *New Yorker*, August 27, 1979, 45-73.

23. Lasch to Patrick Caddell, June 10, 1979, Box 20, Folder 6 of the Lasch Papers. Lasch made his disappointment in Carter explicit in his essay, "Democracy and the 'Crisis of Confidence,'" *democracy*, January 1981, esp. p. 26.

24. "TABA Winners," *New York Times Book Review*, May 25, 1980, p. 3.

25. "History as Social Criticism," p. 1329. For Lasch's comments on the dangers of social criticism becoming elitist and disconnected, see *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991), pp. 422-4. See also Robert Westbrook, "Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism*, and the Vocation of Intellectuals," p. 188. Lasch published *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* in 1995, but this book was really a string of essays, most of them previously published. *The True and Only Heaven* still stands as Lasch's last full-length book because of this.

26. *True and Only Heaven*, pp. 92, 118.

27. *True and Only Heaven*, p. 193; "'Good Enough'—The American Way," *Providence: Studies in Western Civilization* 1 (1992): p. 14.

28. *True and Only Heaven*, pp. 223, 320.

29. *True and Only Heaven*, p. 249, 271.

30. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance" in *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by William Gilman (New York: Signet, 1965), pp. 232, 236, 263.

31. "The Waning of Private Life," *Salmagundi*, Winter, 1977, p. 13.

32. *True and Only Heaven*, pp. 532, 368. See the correspondence between Lasch and Shapiro in Box 7D, Folder 2, Lasch Papers. See also, Christopher Lasch, "Conservatism Against Itself," *First Things*, April, 1990, p. 23. On this point, see also Steven Watts, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry Critic: Christopher Lasch's Struggle with Progressive America," *American Studies* 33 (1992): p. 119.

33. Daniel Bell to Christopher Lasch, November 13, 1979, Box 20, Folder 6, Christopher Lasch Papers.

34. "An Interview with Christopher Lasch on the Social Role of the Educator," in *Voices in American Education*, ed. Bernard Murchland (Ann Arbor: Prakken Publications, 1990), p. 131.