

# Folly on the Left

**I've been there. I'm not much there now, except sometimes by default. My civic-republican compass points rightward sometimes, but at bottom I believe that neither "left" nor "right" as we know them in America is a vessel of hope. See "Looking for America," the introduction to this site.**

Many blunders by Marxist ideologues have left us with a taboo against criticizing capitalism, whose twilight they announced rather too often. But aren't we now in a relationship to capitalism analogous to that of American colonials to the British monarchy and mercantilism of the 1760s? Most colonists then still professed affection for and reliance on the crown and empire, even as they began to sense that British interests couldn't be reconciled with their own. Eventually they decided to risk their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to rearrange matters.

So now, too, perhaps, something basic has to change in how we configure and charter the vast profit-making combines that are degrading the rhythms and security of our daily lives and incapacitating us as cultural actors and free citizens.

Like most Americans of the early 1760s, we would rather not face this daunting challenge. So we tolerate a growing burden of distractions and distempers, eroticizing our pain or projecting it violently and expending tremendous energy on false solutions.

Left and right alike need to rediscover the American civic-republican tradition and to sacrifice ideological as well as physical comfort to revive it. But some on the left, like some blacks who cling to the old, racist coordinates within which they have long endured, can't contemplate revising and re-grounding their critique of capitalism in a republican tradition that's better than the bourgeois mystification of oppressive social relations they think it is.

["Folly on the Left,"](#) This review-essay on Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims (Salmagundi, 1983)* touched on the tendency of activists, left as well as right, to turn distant lands into giant projection screens for their unexamined fantasies of tribal and ideological solidarity.

[Why Isn't the Left Able to Deliver?,](#) *New York Observer*, 1988

[The Left's Wrong Turns in the Politics of Race,](#) *Tikkun*, 1991

[The social failures of "money liberalism,"](#) *Newsday*, 1992, a review of Mickey Kaus' *The End of Equality*

[Forgetting Henry Wallace, the real third-party candidate of 1948,](#) History News Network, 2002