

# Cafe liberals out to lunch; Rudy's right



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**I**n the 1960s, radical Harvard graduate students sat in cafes debating whether society can have freedom without authority. The battle still rages, pitting elegant, anti-authoritarian French thinkers, from Rousseau to Foucault, against material, authority-respecting Anglo-Saxons from Burke to . . . Giuliani.

In the '60s, the French always won. They insisted that Western freedoms are mirages concealing an ingrained, authoritarian violence that erupts into war making by elites and crime by the exploited. The left called this violence by its "true" name — capitalism — and turned it against the oppressor through revolution, explained the Communist apologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, even as Soviet-style regimes strangled Eastern Europe. As the brutal violence of those revolutionary "people's" republics mounted, the French dodged: "Leave behind this Europe, where they are never done talking of man and murder him everywhere they find him," urged Albert Camus. True freedom would now come in Third World revolutions. The baton was passed to the French-trained African psychologist Frantz Fanon, who exalted the liberating, purifying violence of the colonized. "Have the courage to read this book," urged Jean-Paul Sartre, with typical Grandiloquence, introducing Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth."

Of course, it took no courage at all. Fanon was entirely congenial to the alienation and rage that lay thick as cigarette smoke across the little cafe tables in Cambridge. There, far from the atrocities and austerities of our fellow revolutionaries and their supporters in Phnom Penh and East Berlin, we remained snugly certain that nothing is more hypocritical or violent than Western democracy. We smiled disdainfully at such nonviolent revolutionaries as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Westernized toadies who couldn't see that authority is inimical to freedom.

Radical cafe society feeds New York's chattering classes sufficiently so that when Mayor Giuliani, at a crime forum last week, said, "Freedom is about the willingness of every single human being to cede to lawfull authority a great deal of discretion about what you do," tongues stopped cold and knees jerked in unison. "I was floored," said the NYCLU's

Norman Siegel, recovering his voice. "Maybe this is the real Rudy Giuliani." Let's hope so, for Giuliani represents the side of the debate that lost in Cambridge but has resonance here. The day before the forum, Giuliani had given his "authority" message in Washington, but with this addition: "Civil rights and the ability to make our own choices flow from order that prevents anarchy." How striking

Maybe Norman Siegel wouldn't have used federal authority to integrate Little Rock, but I'm glad it was done and that whites there ceded some discretion to lawful authority. As James Madison and other constitutional framers knew, we're better off preserving a creative tension between authority and freedom, curbing impassioned factions with law. After all, passions do class: As St. Thomas More warned, if, to catch the Devil, you cut down all the laws that shield him, then, once you've cornered him and he turns 'round to lunge at you, there'll be no laws to protect you from him.

**G**UILIANI AND his mentors aren't oblivious to the economic violence that Western democracies hypocritically condone. I seem to recall his prosecuting white guys in suits who perpetrated economic violence in the 1980s, plus the Teamsters, the one big union backing his boss, Ronald Reagan. He knows that when a system is so clogged that it blocks justice, the oppressed must resort to "the power to disrupt."

But Giuliani and others on this side of the debate about authority and freedom also grasp what this bloody century should have taught all of us: Violent disruption, whether by the state, revolutionaries or criminals, tends not to purify but to purify. A politics that glorifies "freedom" at the expense of authority (as in the slogan, "By any means necessary") is poison because it undercuts checks and balances against self-righteousness.

Giuliani is self-righteous, but he accepts the system of checks and balances that may be the Anglo-Saxons' only contribution to human progress. He thinks New York's civic culture and political economy are draining that system, not nourishing it, and that his job is to renew a healthy tension between authority and freedom. Tell me, now: In your New York heart of hearts, how wrong do you think he is?