It has become axiomatic across political spectrums to claim that ‘everything has changed’ since 11 September 2001, and to assume that the events of that day inaugurated a new world-historical era. And, indeed, the Bush administration has turned what could have been an empty rhetorical flourish into a stark historical reality. If the so-called ‘War on Terror’ started out as a propagandistic shibboleth to beat the American public into fearful submission to domestic surveillance and foreign invasion, those very policies have now effectively altered the political landscape of both the United States and the rest of the world and, in the process, changed the course of history.

It is therefore convenient and timely that Jefferson Clymer’s *America’s Culture of Terrorism: Violence, Capitalism, and the Written Word* reminds us that ‘terror’ has a history, and that much of that history is home-grown. Focusing on the volatile period of capitalist expansion and consolidation between the 1886 Haymarket bombing and the 1920 bombing of J.P. Morgan’s offices on Wall Street, *America’s Culture of Terrorism* aims ‘to uncover a genealogy of modern terrorism’ (p. 5). Ranging widely across genres and events, and deploying a sometimes dizzying variety of theories and methodologies, Clymer’s text is an impressive example of the intellectual dexterity of contemporary cultural studies. His central claim – that industrial capitalism and terrorism emerged simultaneously in the United States – is both critically convincing and politically crucial. Clymer reveals the conditions of possibility of this linkage in the invention of dynamite – which enabled anonymous acts of violence – and the rise of a mass press – which relied on the sensational representation of these acts. In leveraging his discussion around these twin developments, Clymer is able to explore how ‘terrorism’, that ambiguous interpenetration of word and deed, can provide something of an analytical testing ground for the loose combination of materialist and literary analysis which constitutes what we have come to call cultural studies.

*America’s Culture of Terrorism* is part of a series issued by the University of North Carolina Press called ‘Cultural Studies of the United States’, and I would like to use this review to evaluate the degree to which contemporary cultural studies can provide an institutional and discursive location for a Marxist critique of and intervention in the post-9/11 world. A key instance of the more general ‘cultural turn’ in Western Marxism – originally emerging out of the energy and activism of the New Left – cultural studies is commonly celebrated as one...
of the central locations of leftist political critique in the contemporary university system. On the other hand, cultural studies has frequently been accused of abandoning political economy for more epiphenomenal concerns with consumer products and practices; some would even see it as an academic symptom, rather than a critique, of global capitalism. Thus, Simon During frames cultural studies as an academic instance of ‘enterprise culture’, which he defines in terms of the ‘rapid increase in the social presence of culture, economically, governmentally, and conceptually’. In these terms, cultural studies, whatever its original objectives, has simply become one way in which academic study has adapted to globalisation.

Others argue that the moment of cultural studies has passed. Thus Michael Denning, in his important *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, traces the emergence of cultural studies, and the cultural turn more generally, to the New-Left concern with the postwar expansion of the culture industries up through its tentative replacement of the humanities in the postmodern university. In the process, Denning seeks to establish that ‘the moment of cultural studies is a moment which has in some sense passed’. Indeed, academic efforts at cultural politics, which could seem at least potentially revolutionary in the age of three worlds (essentially Denning’s more geopolitically expansive term for the Cold-War era), can seem petty and ineffectual in the face of the United States’ post-9/11 militarisation of neoliberal capitalism. Nevertheless, many of the left-leaning scholars who have responded to these developments fall under what Denning calls ‘the slogan of cultural studies’ and reports of its death may be premature. This review chronicles some of these responses, and evaluates the degree to which contemporary cultural studies, broadly conceived, is working to keep Marxism relevant for the twenty-first century.

Clymer’s first chapter on the Haymarket bombing opens with a claim that substantiates the methodological mandate of cultural studies: ‘as an event whose outcome is known, but whose orchestration remains obscure, terrorism summons forth narratives to reconstruct and explain it’ (p. 37). Terrorism, in other words, condenses the process whereby discrete historical events solicit, and indeed require, narrative explanations. And these explanations unfold in the new mass press which, as Clymer shows, was able to construct the men put on trial as foreign conspirators who posed a threat to the social order. The anarchists, on the other hand, fought to portray themselves as home-grown revolutionaries in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson. The discrete violent event, then, generates a war of words; a war of words which, Clymer’s study affirms, seems particularly susceptible to the interpretive insights of poststructuralist theory. Thus, in this single chapter, he invokes Mark Seltzer’s Foucault-inflected formulation of America’s ‘wound culture’ (p. 38), Michael Warner’s Habermasian idea of the mass public, and Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive theory of citationality. *America’s Culture of Terrorism*, like cultural studies more generally, is methodologically omnivorous and theoretically opportunistic, deploying whatever approach seems useful for the substance at hand.

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2. Denning 2004, p. 3.