



The Frankfurt School in Exile

By Thomas Wheatland

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Thomas Wheatland examines the influence of the Frankfurt School, or Horkheimer Circle, and how they influenced American social thought and postwar German sociology. He argues that, contrary to accepted belief, the members of the group, who fled oppression in Nazi Germany in 1934, had a major influence on postwar intellectual life.

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Editorial Review

Review

From The Atlantic

Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm—the gang’s all here, just transposed to a new setting and sphere of influence. The famed Institute for Social Research, Wheatland contends, was not merely a pre- and postwar European phenomenon; it was also a direct and profound player in the intellectual life of Depression-era America. After fleeing the Third Reich in 1933, the fathers of Critical Theory—dissident Jewish neo-Marxists whose core philosophical, sociological, and psychoanalytical tenets were born of the doomed Weimar Republic—found a haven at Columbia University. There they warily circled counterparts like the New York Intellectuals and gained the patronage of the American Jewish Committee (which led to the landmark *Studies in Prejudice* and redounded to the benefit of both parties); later they played a prominent role in postwar sociology and engaged in a thorny relationship with the American New Left. Cleverly applying a modified Marxism of his own to his analysis—explaining how the Frankfurt School’s ideology was informed by its own economy, for instance, and why Columbia initially welcomed the eminent émigrés for curiously pragmatic reasons—Wheatland has produced a worthy successor to Martin Jay’s *The Dialectical Imagination* and Rolf Wiggershaus’s *The Frankfurt School*.

About the Author

Thomas Wheatland is an assistant professor of German history at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts.

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