

Singularity of Capitalism: An Enquiry into the Cold War as a US Project and a Reading of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)

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Abstract

This paper elaborates on the intricate relationship between the Cold War and capitalism to show the Cold War is not a geopolitical confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union after World War II, but US-backed antitotalitarian warfare that represents capitalism as democratic and castigates its enemies as totalitarian by utilizing the apolitical nature of capitalism. The integration of capitalism into discussions on the Cold War clarifies antitotalitarianism, which had remained opaque due to the fact that previous studies like Leerom Medovoi's and Reiichi Miura's have conducted the investigation into antitotalitarianism only in light of liberalism. A close reading of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) helps to substantiate the argument that the Cold War politics of antitotalitarianism is the capitalist class struggle. While many critics have valorized *Fahrenheit* for its depiction of anti-conformism, this paper argues that *Fahrenheit* inadvertently criticizes antitotalitarianism by alluding to its totalitarian nature and bifurcating impact, which are byproducts of capitalism.

Keywords: Cold War, Totalitarianism, Liberalism, Capitalism, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

INTRODUCTION: THE COLD WAR AS A US PROJECT

The Cold War is generally remembered as “the global struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union from the late 1940s to the late 1980s.”¹⁾ According to this understanding, the Cold War refers to military confrontations manifested in such warfare as the Korean War and the Vietnam War; the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 signaled the end of the Cold War. However, the problem of this understanding is that it cannot explain the relevance of and the unceasing interest in the Cold War well into the early twenty first century. George W. Bush's castigation of religious fundamentalism for “follow[ing] in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism,” the representation of Donald Trump's administration as totalitarian, and Joe Biden's public denunciation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resonate with the Cold War discourse of democracy vs. totalitarianism²⁾; prominent university presses keep publishing books on the Cold War, e.g., *Uncertain Empire* (2012), *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War* (2012), and *Neocolonial Fictions of the Global Cold War* (2019).³⁾ It seems that the Cold War “has metamorphosed from a punctual event into an existential state.”⁴⁾

This paper contends that the Cold War is more than armed conflicts between the two superpowers after World War II. As Louis Menand argues, the Cold War is “about ideas, and ideas in the broadest sense—about economic and political doctrines, civic and personal values, modes of expression, philosophies of history, theories of human nature, the meaning of truth.”⁵⁾ Put it differently, the Cold War is a struggle over what Harry S. Truman called “alternative ways of life” in a speech said to declare the Cold War.⁶⁾ Ultimately, it takes the form of what Leerom Medovoi terms as “antitotalitarianism.”⁷⁾ It suffices to say that antitotalitarianism produces the dichotomy between freedom of democracy and oppression of

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totalitarianism, and it goes without saying that the American way of life signifies the former, whereas the non-American ways of life, such as fascism and socialism, portend the latter. Since antitotalitarianism refers to “struggles between systems, ideologies, or ways of life,” armed conflicts figure not as principal means for the Cold War but as the last resort, the use of which is always justified as defending freedom and democracy.⁸⁾

The Cold War is not only anti-communist conservatism and militarism exemplified by McCarthyism and containment either. As prominent scholars of contemporary American literary and cultural studies, such as Medovoi, Andrew Hoberek, and Steven Belletto, have agreed on,⁹⁾ the Cold War also participates in liberationist politics on a global scale involving the Third World in which the US “presented itself as the only reliable model for achieving national self-determination” and condemned newly independent nations that followed the Soviet Union as taking “the road to a second serfdom.”¹⁰⁾ The outreach to newly independent nations through anti-colonial rhetoric caused a domestic ramification that materialized in “the figure of the young rebel.”¹¹⁾ Young rebels who ascertain self-determination by defying the social norm are praised during the Cold War with a view to resolving the postwar discrepancy between “a Cold War political imaginary that envisioned the United States as democratic, self-determining, and agential, and a Fordist economic order whose system of mass consumer standardization posed a threatening contrary national appearance.”¹²⁾ Anti-conformism is, therefore, Cold War liberationist discourse applied to the domestic sphere. In summary, the Cold War refers to US struggles to establish itself as “leader of the free world” by utilizing the liberationist discourse both at home and abroad, and therefore, I adopt Anders Stephanson’s definition of the Cold War as “a US project” for the title.¹³⁾

What follows in this article elaborates on what constitutes the American way of life and what enables the US to present itself as a guardian of freedom and democracy. Section I deals with the meaning of Americanness, defines it as a nation of liberalism and capitalism, and explicates the association between these features and antitotalitarianism. Here, this paper focuses more on capitalism than on liberalism in clarifying this association, and this investigation is necessary because previous studies have analyzed antitotalitarianism only from the perspective of liberalism. Medovoi’s “Global Society Must be Defended” (2007), “Dogma-Line Racism” (2012), and “The Race War within” (2012) as well as Reichi Miura’s “Empire of Liberalism” (2013) scrutinized antitotalitarianism¹⁴⁾; however, as this paper shows by reviewing Miura’s argument, founding their investigations on Michel Foucault’s biopolitics unwittingly downplays the significant role played by capitalism in the Cold War and reduces the Cold War to a cultural phenomenon due to Foucault’s reliance on liberalism for theorizing biopolitics. If biopolitics refers to politics of liberalism that is “not so much the imperative of freedom as the management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free,”¹⁵⁾ capitalism must be taken into account, since liberalism’s call for freedom manifests itself on capitalist social relations. The main contention in this paper is that the singularity of capitalism as a mode of production, i.e., the dominant role of economy over politics in social management, activates antitotalitarianism, which naturalizes the American way of life and totalitarianizes its enemies. In a word, the Cold War is the capitalist class struggle that represents capitalism as democratic and denounces any other politics as totalitarian by exploiting its seemingly apolitical character. Only with this interpretation can people understand the persistence and ubiquity of the Cold War rhetoric even after the disappearance of its material underpinnings.

Section II closely reads Ray Bradbury’s novel, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and examines the ambiguities of antitotalitarianism.¹⁶⁾ Since the Cold War engages with ideas, cultural products including literature are “an important battleground.”¹⁷⁾ As Belletto argues, the Cold War involves “a war of words, a rhetorical game during which ideological systems claimed not only moral supremacy but indeed the better purchase on ‘objective reality.’”¹⁸⁾ This in turn means “language itself became politicized in unusual ways, since ideologies—articulated through language and image—shaped what could count as reality.”¹⁹⁾ One has only to recall the fact that CIA funded the Congress for Cultural Freedom to propagate a specific kind of literature and literary practice—modernism and the new criticism respectively—that prioritize individual achievement over collective welfare.²⁰⁾ Being attentive to the unusually politicized language helps to clarify the ways in which antitotalitarianism unfolds. Furthermore, the close reading of *Fahrenheit* reveals the negative implications of antitotalitarianism: while presenting capitalism as free and democratic, the Cold Warriors adopt a different kind of population control, and while capitalism eradicates political unfreedom, it establishes economic oppression instead.

The investigation into the Cold War in relation to capitalism is relevant to the early twenty first century, since we are

still living under the shadow of antitotalitarianism. Neoliberalism, a project to achieve “the restoration or reconstruction of the power of economic elites,” shares with antitotalitarianism the faith in market fundamentalism.²¹⁾ Postmodernism questions “the universal and totalizing in the name of the local and particular,” just as antitotalitarianism views anything political as totalitarian.²²⁾ Consequently, postmodernism has transformed the class-based left politics into “an anti-authoritarian Left whose micropolitics embraced Difference as a slogan.”²³⁾ Combined together, neoliberalism and postmodernism culminate in a situation where the oppressed, while suffering from massive inequality, do not resort to politics but retreat from politics and ascertain their cultural identities as revolutionary acts. If this situation resembles our present predicament, it is critical to understand the antitotalitarianism of the Cold War that induces the disappearance of politics by labelling any political act as totalitarian and making capitalism the only mode of production in society.

1. ANTITOTALITARIANISM AND SINGULARITY OF CAPITALISM

The Cold War is a US project of antitotalitarianism through which the US presents the American way of life as the only path to freedom and others as a road to slavery. Our next task is to delve into what part of the US makes antitotalitarianism possible. In order to do so, we begin with an analysis of what constitutes the American identity.

Given the predominance of Americanness in Cold War discourse, it is understandable that the postwar era saw studies of the American character become “a leading growth sector of the knowledge industry, and almost the reason for being of the new discipline (or disciplinary holding company) of American Studies.”²⁴⁾ Various answers were presented, although they all, more or less, pointed to a nation charged with capitalism and liberalism, the combination of which the Cold War designates as “liberal democracy.”²⁵⁾ Cindy Aron writes:

During the 1950s consensus historians . . . maintained that what distinguished the history of the United States was the absence of feudalism, the strength of a liberal tradition, the weakness of aristocracy, the limits of working-class discontent, and the failure of socialism. Implicit in such an explanation was the belief that conflict in America did not stem from disagreements between economic classes and that, in some unexamined but fundamental way, Americans were all middle class.²⁶⁾

America imagines itself as a specific kind of capitalist society, one interpreted through the lens of liberalism, and no one would deny that America has been influenced by capitalism since its foundation. However, as the century-long persistence of progressivism—a liberalism-infused political philosophy that views big business as an obstacle to liberal democracy and demands anti-trust enforcement persistently—indicates, America has never condoned the capitalist tendency toward concentration and plutocracy.²⁷⁾ Liberalism supposes that capitalism is a decentralized mode of production in which people are all middle class. Middle-class status is defined by “the ownership of small property” and each being entitled to small property realizes free competition in level playing fields.²⁸⁾ Ideal Americans are “the isolated individual” fighting alone in the wilderness.²⁹⁾ Their asocial trait explains why the concept of innocence and the imagery of frontier foregrounded by R. W. B. Lewis’s *The American Adam* and Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*, respectively, were prominent in formulating the American identity during the 1950s.³⁰⁾

People’s vicissitudes depend solely on their creative ingenuity and business acumen, and this culminates in the ideal of self-made man and the rags-to-riches mythology. This meritocratic free competition is thought to bring about two kinds of benefit: it enacts the best distribution of resources and contributes to character development. It is worth emphasizing that liberalism’s call for free-market economic policy stems not only from economic considerations but also from moral reasoning that dictates “for men in the era of classic liberalism, competition was never merely an impersonal mechanism regulating the economy of capitalism, or only a guarantee of political freedom. Competition was a means of producing free individuals, a testing field for heroes; in its terms men lived the legend of the self-reliant individual.”³¹⁾ In this sense, liberalism comes closer to religion than to economic policies, whose conviction is that “economic life, quite as much as religious life, ought to provide a machinery for the disciplining of character.”³²⁾ One might attribute this strong work ethic to Protestantism; however, it must be acknowledged that liberalism contains religious quality within itself. In essence, American tradition is liberal democracy, and it refers to capitalism imagined by liberalism, where the decentralized environment makes all the population the middle class of small-property owners, and the equality of opportunity enables

people to enjoy the American Dream of upward mobility. This is the best society imaginable because competition in level playing fields contributes not only to efficient redistribution of resources but also to character development. Only in free-market society can prosperity and morality be secured.

The US is a nation of capitalism imagined by liberalism; however, the question remains why the US can fashion itself as the guarantor of freedom and democracy in the Cold War politics of antitotalitarianism. In order to understand the mechanism of antitotalitarianism, it is important to define totalitarianism. Although Mussolini was the first one to use the concept of totalitarianism to describe his regime's practices, it was not until 1951 that the publication of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* made the concept an integral part of Cold War politics.³³⁾ According to Arendt, totalitarian regimes epitomized by Nazism and Stalinism seek "total domination of the total population of the earth" by "eliminating . . . spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior" and "transforming the human personality into a mere thing."³⁴⁾ The eradication of the right to self-determination stems from the fact that totalitarian regimes concentrate political power in the hands of "the Leader," who strictly regiments people's lives.³⁵⁾

As Menand points out, this interpretation of totalitarianism may well make people wonder "whether totalitarianism is just another form of dictatorship, which is an ancient and recurrent type of political regime, or a phenomenon unique to the twentieth century."³⁶⁾ This paper considers totalitarianism a unique phenomenon since the mid twentieth century, not in that totalitarianism represents a special kind of despotism, but in that its conception revolves around the notion of ideology. Arendt defines "[i]deologies" as "isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence [*sic*] by deducing it from a single premise."³⁷⁾ Ideologies are the real culprit for totalitarianism because this universally explaining device "destroys man's capacity for experience and thought just as certainly as his capacity for action."³⁸⁾ In other words, "the Leader" of a totalitarian regime demands of its population complete obedience to their ideology, since it is flawless. Arendt views totalitarianism as atrocious not for violence against corporeal bodies but for psychological damage.

Miura's "Empire of Liberalism" investigates the relation between ideologies and the Cold War, and clarifies why the US was able to wage the antitotalitarian war. His dissertation is focalized through the concept of what he states as "Cold-War liberalism," upon which antitotalitarianism—"biopolitical containment" in Miura's term—is based.³⁹⁾ Miura argues that the most characteristic feature of Cold-War liberalism is its paradoxical quality: "liberalism, being a principle of the government of a nation, should never be seen as a form of ideology."⁴⁰⁾ Liberalism is a special kind of ideology that signifies freedom from any political thought:

It is in this Cold-War dichotomy between liberalism and communist totalitarianism that the essence of liberalism is defined as the primacy of freedom and, furthermore, that liberalism is regarded not as a form of ideology or even an idea that informs how to govern a society but as simply lacking in such matters. In the Cold-War criticism of the communist regime, liberalism does not look like a type of political idea, but rather freedom from political ideas: whatever political idea a nation may choose, a nation-state that is governed thoroughly by one political ideal is going to be totalitarian.⁴¹⁾

What is at stake in the Cold War is not the kind of ideology that a certain society internalizes, but whether it is political or not. If politics refers to "the concrete mode of distribution involving a power struggle between organized groups to determine the allocation of privilege," any political idea interferes with individual freedom to some degree, and this means that Cold War politics considers any politics to be totalitarian.⁴²⁾ Communism is totalitarian not because it actively intervenes in economy to the detriment of the capitalist class, but because it is governed by a political idea that explains everything through logical deduction. The US is exempted from this accusation because Cold-War liberalism that governs the American society is interpreted "not as a form of ideology, but as freedom from ideology."⁴³⁾ Paradoxical as it may sound, Cold-War liberalism is an ideology that signifies the absence of politics.

Miura's argument on Cold-War liberalism and its relation to the conception of totalitarianism provides a critical insight into the Cold War with which we proceed: antitotalitarianism refers to depoliticization of the American way of life and hyper-politicization of others. However, Miura does not answer why Cold-War liberalism can perform depoliticization, but describes the historical situation in which Cold-War liberalism presents itself as a lack of ideology. Therefore, it is our task

to probe what is behind the depoliticization. Since Miura analyzes the Cold War in terms of liberalism, we are going to approach it from the other side of Americanness—capitalism. Since the liberal utopia of meritocracy is predicated on free-market capitalism, one must discuss capitalism when they talk about liberalism.

While there are various analyses on capitalism, the most relevant part of capitalism in relation to Cold War politics is its ostensibly apolitical character. Rosa Luxemburg writes:

Here [In capitalist society], it is no despotic interference with the economic plan that is responsible for the difficulties in the process of production. Quite apart from all technical conditions, reproduction here depends on purely social considerations: only those goods are produced which can with certainty be expected to sell, and not merely to sell, but to sell at the customary profit. Thus, profit becomes an end in itself, the decisive factor which determines not only production but also reproduction. Not only does it decide in each case what work is to be undertaken, how it is to be carried out, and how the products are to be distributed; what is more, profit decides, also, at the end of every working period, whether the labour process is to be resumed, and, if so, to what extent and in what direction it should be made to operate.⁴⁴⁾

Luxemburg argues that, theoretically speaking, capitalist reproduction is governed solely by the profit motive as opposed to the political ideal, which makes capitalism differ “from all other known forms of production.”⁴⁵⁾ In other words, capitalism is distinguished by “the fact that class domination does not rest on ‘acquired rights’ but on real economic relations—the fact that wage labor is not a juridical relation, but purely an economic relation.”⁴⁶⁾ This singularity of capitalism provides political freedom and guarantees the right to self-determination and formal equality among its citizens. Here, we can observe the crux of antitotalitarianism: the dominant role of economy that capitalism adopts for social management helps capitalism to depoliticize itself and present itself as the provider of freedom and democracy while totalitarianizing any other mode of production, irrespective of their political goals.

The Cold War politics of antitotalitarianism makes the concept of politics all but disappear, and now that any political act is totalitarian, it is difficult to wage political struggles against capitalism. No sooner does one challenge capitalism than the Cold Warriors respond to the accuser with a slander *totalitarianism*. As a result, the sense of ending looms large over a capitalist society. This sense is not apocalyptic, but it refers to “the end of ideology” in which “the total transformation of society” has lost its appeal.⁴⁷⁾ At this point, capitalism is part of nature, and this naturalized status of capitalism makes even uttering the word *capitalism* an anti-capitalist act for betraying the political dimension of capitalism.

Still, no matter how hard capitalism tries to represent itself as apolitical, it is nothing but politics. Karl Polanyi highlights “the institutional nature of a market economy” as follows:

The crucial point is this: labor, land, and money are elements of industry; they also must be organized in markets; in fact, these markets form an absolutely vital part of the economic system. But labor, land, and money are obviously *not* commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them. In other words, according to the empirical definition of a commodity they are not commodities. Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man; actual money, finally, is merely a token of purchasing power which, as a rule, is not produced at all, but comes into being through the mechanism of banking or state finance. None of them is produced for sale. The commodity description of labor, land, and money is entirely fictitious.⁴⁸⁾

Although capitalism seems apolitical due to the dominant role played by economic relations over political ones, enacting capitalism requires a political buttress to make labor, land, and money function in capitalist ways. Additionally, episodes of the state quashing labor disputes in favor of capitalists in the late 19th century and bailing out big corporations in the early 21st century have testified to the fact that capitalism is politics.

Nor is capitalism democratic or free because the upshot of capitalism is plutocracy: “It [capitalism] has agglomerated population, centralised means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation.”⁴⁹⁾ In such a polarized society between haves and have-nots, the latter are forced to toil as

wage slaves while the dominant class promotes military buildup and establishes a police state to suppress the revolution by the desperate working class.⁵⁰⁾ One cannot help but notice a discrepancy in capitalist society between the reality of centralized plutocracy and liberal utopia of decentralized meritocracy. The power balance is too obvious: capitalist society subjugates liberalism to capitalism. Capitalism is able to adopt liberalism's call for individualism because the singularity of capitalism eradicates political oppression; however, capitalism does so not to diffuse power among the population but to concentrate it in the hands of the capitalist class.

The Cold War politics of antitotalitarianism belies the actual conditions of capitalism: plutocratic, unfree, and, most importantly, political. If any politics is totalitarian within Cold War discourse, capitalism should not be exempted. So long as the word *totalitarianism* is used to valorize seemingly apolitical nature of capitalism, this word is not an objective description of government but a political rhetoric that the capitalist class deploys against its enemies to secure “a proprietary relation to the discourse of freedom.”⁵¹⁾ This political nature of the word explains why totalitarianism “became a phenomenon that floated free of specific ideologies or political leaders or historical and geopolitical circumstances.”⁵²⁾ For example, “Nazi racial doctrine and the Soviet goal of the classless society” were treated as interchangeable, and managerialism in postwar America was viewed as a segue into totalitarianism.⁵³⁾ Of course, the Soviet Gulag, Nazi concentration camps, and a series of horrific events after the fall of Saigon have demonstrated what harm totalitarian regimes in Arendt's sense can do to humankind. However, one must remember that antitotalitarianism has long been functioning as capitalist blackmail that convinces people that, with all its defects, capitalism is the best system possible.

2. ANTITOTALITARIANISM IN BRADBURY'S *FAHRENHEIT 451* (1953)

Utilizing liberal discourse to ensure that capitalism means freedom and democracy, the Cold War politics of antitotalitarianism concerns the representation of capitalism as superior to other modes of production. It is in this sense that Belletto argues that the Cold War requires “rhetorical brinkmanship.”⁵⁴⁾ Literary studies are important in investigations into the Cold War because they explore how this war of words unfolds. While many have argued that Bradbury's *Fahrenheit* is of positive educational value for its juxtaposing “the dangers of a mass culture” against the virtue of critical thinking, this paper contends that *Fahrenheit* rather provides an object lesson of liberatory language proffered by antitotalitarianism.⁵⁵⁾ In line with the interpretation of antitotalitarianism as the capitalist class struggle, the close reading of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit* helps us to see that the liberatory language, although empowering, results in free-market capitalism where the working class sacrifices economic security for individual freedom.

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit* is set in a futuristic, dystopian society where almost all books are banned, and when people are found hiding books in their premises, the firemen are called to destroy the books together with other properties lest the act of reading books should “incite people to think or to question the status quo.”⁵⁶⁾ “[T]he State” imposes conformism and people are deindividuated through state-controlled mass entertainment, and it is against this totalitarian mass society that the protagonist Guy Montag rebels with the help of books.⁵⁷⁾ *Fahrenheit* dramatizes the opposition between individuating books and deindividuating mass media and produces the central schema of the novel: individuals vs. the masses. The book people—an inquisitive seventeen-year-old girl Clarisse McClellan, a former English professor Faber, and the leader of book memorizers living outside the city Granger—epitomize individuated critical thinkers, while Montag's wife, Mildred, and Montag's boss, Beatty, exemplify the masses that value sameness. *Fahrenheit* revolves around this opposition, and its crux is “Montag's transformation from a dedicated fireman to a participant in an underground library movement.”⁵⁸⁾ Montag, who began as a fireman working for the State, transforms himself into a critical thinker through encounters with Clarisse and Faber before escaping from the city to the countryside and meeting the intellectuals in exile. Breaking away from the totalitarian mass society, Montag “no longer needs any outside authority to give his life meaning” and reclaims his own destiny.⁵⁹⁾ The denouement of *Fahrenheit* depicts Montag and the intellectuals heading back to the city for reclamation now that an atomic bomb has detonated above the city and completely decimated the totalitarian mass society.

The novel focuses on the transformation of Montag from the mass to an individual. This trajectory entails the ideological struggle between the politics of the book people and that of the masses, reflecting the domestic Cold War wherein what Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. terms “Cold War liberals” challenges the post-New Deal welfare state.⁶⁰⁾ It suffices to say that

Fordism and Keynesianism that underpin the New Deal contradict the American political tradition of capitalism imagined by liberalism due to governmental regulation of the US economy. As Medovoi succinctly summarizes, “[t]he proto-Fordist wartime model demonstrated that, by providing big business with a secure market that would allow it to safely increase its output, a Keynesian state could provide much of the institutional structure necessary for capital accumulation.”⁶¹⁾ For one thing, the preferential treatment of monopoly enterprises offered by the government in the mid twentieth century facilitated the concentration of property, which undermined “the ideal of small-business ownership [that] constituted a popular symbol of freedom in the United States.”⁶²⁾ Big corporations and the government became so intertwined as to regiment people’s lives, and this contributed to the mass production of suburban and organizational life, and conformity became a politically charged word in the postwar decades. The traditional middle class of small property owners, an ideal liberal subject, was replaced with the new middle class of white-collar organization men whose status is defined not by property ownership but “by the sale of (mental) labor to large corporations” or the government.⁶³⁾

While the post-New Deal welfare state retained economic relations as the main tool for social management, its interventionist character made the post-New Deal conditions suspected of “promot[ing] the mass—and incipiently totalitarian—values of adjustment and conformity, presumably at the direct expense of the American individual’s sovereignty.”⁶⁴⁾ In other words, as Sean McCorry argues, the “social forces of standardization and conformism” that are ascribed to Soviet socialism “are also present, if only incipiently, in Eisenhower-era American domesticity.”⁶⁵⁾ Although some praise the postwar welfare capitalism for shaping “Middle class America,” where people enjoyed “a society of broadly shared prosperity,”⁶⁶⁾ Cold War liberals interpret this postwar egalitarian arrangement as a society that induces “a slow death by conformity.”⁶⁷⁾ The domestic Cold War unfolds as a liberal attempt to replace welfare capitalism that engenders the masses with free-market capitalism that fosters individuality.

Fahrenheit shows that individuals such as Clarisse, Faber, and Granger embody liberalism, and the masses like Mildred and Beatty the New Deal, with the former accusing the latter of spreading “the terrible tyranny of the majority.”⁶⁸⁾ The domestic Cold War sets up colonial relations of domination and submission between the two camps by “Othering” the masses, owing to which the masses are “reduced to a sub-human or childlike species, incapable of organising themselves.”⁶⁹⁾ Montag views Mildred as “a silly empty woman” who cares only about easy gratification provided by Seashell radios and TV parlor walls.⁷⁰⁾ Her fixation with mass media deprives her of critical thinking, and she just repeats what the media says.⁷¹⁾ The inability to think and the penchant for conformity fostered by mass media resonate with totalitarianism in Arendt’s sense of total control, and this issue is most apparent when the State asks people on the Elm Terrace area to open doors, or to look from the windows to catch the sight of now fugitive Montag. Here depicted is a situation where the masses follow the command of the authority without contemplating if they are “sleepwalking.”⁷²⁾ Overall, the masses are portrayed as stupid in Cold War discourse, which functions as a subtle critique of equality of outcome provided by the post-New Deal welfare state and an implicit appreciation of the disciplinary effect that equality of opportunity in the free-market society produces.⁷³⁾

The book people retain the capacity of thinking by distancing themselves from mass media. Fearing of mass media denying viewers “time to think,” Faber dispenses with parlor walls and Seashells.⁷⁴⁾ Instead, his parlor contains “nothing but four plaster walls,” and his Seashells are “small rubber plugs” to shield him from noisy advertisements on a subway jet.⁷⁵⁾ Clarisse also confesses that her not indulging in mass entertainment allows for deep reflection.⁷⁶⁾ It is meeting such solemn outsiders that “arous[es] Montag’s own capacity of questioning.”⁷⁷⁾ By depicting the masses as stupid conformists and the book people as rebellious critical thinkers, *Fahrenheit* underscores the Cold War politics of antitotalitarianism, which argues that the traditional American way of life represented by the book people is the only genuine path to freedom and democracy.

While Mildred fits the description of the colonized, Beatty’s conformity results from deep reasoning. Thus, *Fahrenheit* challenges the colonial discourse set up by the book people, highlighting Beatty’s ability to think by having him say, “Shut the ‘relatives’ up,” upon entering Montag’s house.⁷⁸⁾ His command to turn off a TV parlor foregrounds the difference from Mildred and the similarity to the book people. Although some critics interpret Beatty as an “active antagonist,”⁷⁹⁾ Beatty understands the quagmire Montag is in and tries to console Montag. Beatty tells Montag the true history of the firemen and

admits that truth is different from what the “rule-book” claims.⁸⁰⁾ Furthermore, Beatty allows Montag to read a few books to quench Montag’s thirst for knowledge and encourage Montag to come to conclusion that people are better off without books.⁸¹⁾

Beatty’s advocacy of mass society is as follows: to secure the happiness for all, things need to be sanitized. Books whose “conflicting theory and thought” produce unnecessary complexities must be burnt.⁸²⁾ Beatty does not care if the destruction of original thought leads to deindividuation. Since Beatty acknowledges that “[n]ot everyone [is] born free and equal,” his strategy to establish an egalitarian society demands that “everyone [be] *made* equal.”⁸³⁾ Beatty’s assertion imposes a tremendous ramification on the Cold War by censuring equality of opportunity provided by free-market capitalism and upholding equality of outcome realized by the state intervention. Individuating society is a risk society, and according to Beatty, it is no wise decision to “quit a certainty for an uncertainty.”⁸⁴⁾ In other words, anticipating the upshot of the book people’s politics to be “dreary chaos,”⁸⁵⁾ Beatty exposes a falsity of equality of opportunity as a basis for democratic society.

In addition to Beatty’s substantiation of the mass’s politics through reasoning, *Fahrenheit* challenges the Cold War premise by implying that the book people are also governed by ideology. While Rafeeq O. McGiveron argues that “Faber has no plans but at least wants Montag to think,”⁸⁶⁾ Faber’s relation to Montag leaves behind many traces of totalitarianism in Arendt’s sense. Although Faber encourages Montag to make his own decision, Faber’s statement contradicts the democratic premise when Faber explains what a Seashell-like green earbud can do for Montag:

It *listens*! If you put it in your ear, Montag, I can sit comfortably home, warming my frightened bones, and hear and analyse the firemen’s world, find its weaknesses, without danger. I’m the Queen Bee, safe in the hive. You will be the drone, the travelling ear. Eventually, I could put out ears into all parts of the city, with various men, listening and evaluating. If the drones die, I’m still safe at home, tending my fright with a maximum of comfort and a minimum of chance.⁸⁷⁾

The power dynamics between Faber as the Queen Bee and Montag as the drone indicates anything but self-determination. Therefore, all Montag has done is just to “change sides”⁸⁸⁾: previously Montag obeyed the State, but now he abides by Faber. Montag himself notices this inconvenient truth: “I’m not thinking. I’m just doing like I’m told, like always. You said get the money and I got it. I didn’t really think of it myself. When do I start working things out on my own?”⁸⁹⁾ Ultimately, textual evidence from *Fahrenheit* confirms Montag’s perception that he is a mere puppet for Faber. Montag sets up a book club by reading poetry in front of Mildred and her friends and plants books in a fireman’s house and turns in an alarm.⁹⁰⁾ Both acts are things that Faber hinted at in the first meeting at Faber’s house.⁹¹⁾ It is untenable to argue that Faber advocates freedom and democracy now that his control over Montag has come to light.

Faber’s totalitarianism points us to another seedy aspect of the book people: the status of Clarisse. While critics argue that she is an innocent figure who functions as “catalyst” for Montag’s awakening,⁹²⁾ she looks like a secret agent for the book people, who is deployed to recruit Montag to the book people’s cause. Before the encounter with Clarisse, Montag felt that someone was stalking him.⁹³⁾ Clarisse makes the first contact with Montag as late as 1 a.m., and the abnormality of this meeting makes Montag think, “she almost seemed to be waiting for me there, in the street.”⁹⁴⁾ Once the first contact is made, Clarisse is everywhere Montag goes:

One two three four five six seven days. And as many times he came out of the house and Clarisse was there somewhere in the world. Once he saw her shaking a walnut tree, once he saw her sitting on the lawn knitting a blue sweater, three or four times he found a bouquet of late flowers on his porch, or a handful of chestnuts in a little sack, or some autumn leaves neatly pinned to a sheet of white paper and thumb-tacked to his door. Every day Clarisse walked him to the corner. One day it was raining, the next it was clear, the day after that the wind blew strong, and the day after that it was mild and calm, and the day after that calm day was a day like a furnace of summer and Clarisse with her face all sunburnt by late afternoon.⁹⁵⁾

With her mysterious but attractive looks, numerous exposures to her succeed in sowing a seed of familiarity in Montag’s heart.⁹⁶⁾

This reading might sound like a conspiracy, but Montag senses that Clarisse is connected to the book people somehow. When Montag is fleeing the city to the countryside, he realizes that “Once, long ago, Clarisse had walked here, where he

was walking now.”⁹⁷) The two film adaptations of *Fahrenheit* justify this interpretation as well. While the representations of Clarisse in Francois Truffaut’s *Fahrenheit* (1966) and in the HBO version of *Fahrenheit* (2018) have some differences, both movies merge Clarisse and Faber into a figure of Clarisse and openly depict the connection between Clarisse and the book people.⁹⁸) Clarisse is not as innocent as one might think.

The ending of *Fahrenheit* also hints at the ambiguity of the book people’s politics. After a successful escape from the totalitarian mass society, Montag encounters a group of book-memorizing intellectuals. When the book people explain to Montag who they are, an atomic bomb detonated in the air decimates the city. Some critics consider *Fahrenheit*’s ending “optimistic”⁹⁹) by arguing that Montag is “in the presence of a new order of society in which there is no fear of using unofficial language.”¹⁰⁰) The atomic bomb is believed to have destroyed the totalitarian mass society, which signals the book people’s “utopian hope” of rebuilding democracy from the ashes.¹⁰¹) However, other critics gainsay these positive interpretations and view the ending as gloomy.

John Huntington points out the equivocality of the book people’s politics by highlighting their pessimistic take on the efficacy of books and the passivity of their politics.¹⁰²) Huntington’s analysis is justifiable, given that Granger reminds Montag that “You’re not important”¹⁰³) while emphasizing the original thought. While the book is tied to the truth in *Fahrenheit*, Granger proposes to “remember so much that we’ll build the biggest goddam steam-shovel in history and dig the biggest grave of all time and shove war in and cover it up.”¹⁰⁴) Once the liberating discourse of the book people captivates Montag, they suddenly turn the tables on him.

Jack Zipes doubts the positive take on the ending as well by arguing that “it is debatable whether one can call his ending utopian since it is regressive.”¹⁰⁵) Zipes’s interpretation is important for this paper since it highlights the limitation of liberalism in relation to capitalism. As delineated in the previous section, liberalism imagines capitalism as decentralizing and meritocratic; however, as Karl Marx and other intellectuals have pointed out, capitalism gradually concentrates property and breeds plutocracy. There emerges a discrepancy between capitalism and liberalism, and the frustration of liberalism manifests itself as progressivism. While the nascent stage of capitalist development might embody liberalism’s imagination of decentered society, the developed stage of capitalism where concentrated wealth controls society is no longer compatible with liberalism. As a result, liberalism becomes a regressive force that demands a start from scratch. It is no wonder the book people are infused with an apocalyptic image of the war,¹⁰⁶) and Granger anticipates “another Dark Age, when we might have to do the whole damn thing over again.”¹⁰⁷) Although Granger equates the regressive nature of liberalism with “Phoenix,” it is just a euphemism for counterrevolution.¹⁰⁸)

The remainder of the section focuses on the fact that the book people never overtly mention capitalism but their politics is undoubtedly connected with capitalism. This connection is most clearly demonstrated in a scene where, once antitotalitarianism is realized, Montag must face the consequence of free-market capitalism, i.e., the proletarianization of the postwar middle class of organization men.

Previously, as a fireman working for the State, Montag enjoyed the new middle-class status of the post-New Deal era, which is corroborated by his foremost concern about his financial situation resulting not from daily necessities but leisure activities.¹⁰⁹) Free-market capitalism, however, has no such thing as the middle class. Building on Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto*, Hoberek argues that “class is a social relationship rather than an identity, and so in a very real sense classes do not exist within capital outside the two major contending ones of the bourgeoisie (who own capital and live off its proceeds) and the proletariat (who possess only their own labor power, and thus must serve capital)” and interprets “the nature of the middle class as not an eternal formation but a temporary standpoint, supported at times by more or less effective institutional scaffolding, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.”¹¹⁰) Applied to *Fahrenheit*, Hoberek’s assertion means that the State secures Montag’s middle-class status by attenuating the power of economic relations even though this act could entail deindividualization.¹¹¹) Thus, the rebellion against the State helps individualize Montag, but costs him everything that his middle-class status afforded him so far:

‘My God, how did this happen?’ said Montag. ‘It was only the other night everything was fine and the next thing I know I’m drowning. How many times can a man go down and still be alive? I can’t breathe. There’s Beatty dead, and he was my friend once, and there’s Millie gone, I thought she was my wife, but now I don’t know.

And the house all burnt. And my job gone and myself on the run, and I planted a book in a fireman's house on the way. Good Christ, the things I've done in a single week!"¹¹²⁾

Ironically, Montag fails to notice that what he revolts against is what secures his privileges. It is difficult to deny that the rebellion against the State makes Montag distinct from the masses, but we had better be wary of his fortune, for this individualization stems from losing the middle-class status. The book people disparage the masses and praise individuals, but the mass could be a result of the state intervention on the behalf of the working class. In this sense, a call for individualism could be the capitalist class's strategy to bifurcate society.

CONCLUSION

By interpreting the Cold War as antitotalitarianism, which paints capitalism as democratic and other modes of production as totalitarian, this paper ascribes depoliticization to capitalism's singularity of the dominant role played by economic relations over political ones in its reproduction. While formal equality of capitalism could signal freedom and democracy, hierarchy persists between capitalists and proletariats thanks to its political nature. *Fahrenheit* demonstrates by various means that political emancipation realized by antitotalitarianism is far from human emancipation. Of course, this paper is not a plea for a society of total control. However, stressing freedom and democracy via antitotalitarianism could lead to free-market capitalism, in which people still suffer from oppression without any political recourse.

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