Foreword

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I first started reading my father's books when I was 16 years old. It was 1971, Richard Nixon was president of the United States, and the war in Vietnam was raging. My mother Ruth, Wright's second wife, and I were spending Christmas vacation in a seaside town on the west coast of Mexico. On the beach under the Mexican sun it was very hot, and it was difficult to read there partly because of the distraction of donkeys roaming freely along the beach. The donkeys were tame and I liked them, but I watched them carefully when they were nearby.

In the afternoons I left the beach to go read in the courtyard of our inn. It was wonderfully cool in the shade and quiet within those stone walls where I first read *The Power Elite*. I was fortunate to have my father's books; all my memories of my father are a child's memories, starting when I was 3 years old and ending when I was 6, when he died. Ten years later, when I was 16, it was good to finally begin reading his books.

The Power Elite was my mother's favorite among my father's books, so I had decided to read it first. In the acknowledgment pages of *The Power Elite* I found my father's credit for my mother: "My wife, Ruth Harper Mills, as chief researcher and editorial advisor, has shaped much of the book" (Mills, 1956, p. 364). Ruth had majored in math, with minors in political science and economics, at Mount Holyoke College. She told me that she and Wright argued about something on every page of *The Power Elite*. That means she enjoyed the process of working on it with him; Ruth always liked a good argument.

Sitting with my elbows on the stone table in a Mexican courtyard, absorbed in reading *The Power Elite*, I learned about the importance of maintaining a healthy respect for complexity and nuance and, at the same time, a great capacity for outrage at injustice. I was impressed by my father's ability to be energetically analytical and skeptical – and simultaneously – deeply engaged. I think Ruthie's mathematical mind helped him quite a bit as he developed the yin and yang of his approach.

After Ruth and I returned from our Christmas vacation in Mexico I continued reading Wright's books at our home in Maryland outside

Washington DC, where Ruth worked as a statistician for the US Census Bureau and I attended a public high school.

In my biased opinion, one reason for the continuing appeal of Wright's books is the combined results of mind, heart, and courage – speaking truth to power, urging people to develop and honor their human potential and to engage in the world's pressing issues, while navigating away from the dangerous undertow of conformity and apathy. To me these are universal themes, and I think Wright's books express them with force and fire as well as patient, methodical analysis and logic.

The Power Elite, *White Collar*, and the books my father called his 'pamphlets', *Listen, Yankee* and *The Causes of World War Three*, are my four favorites. I read *The Causes of World War Three*, which was his protest against the nuclear arms race, with special interest not only because of the necessity of peace, but because he dedicated that book to me.

I don't think it was a coincidence that Wright wrote *Listen, Yankee* using a dramatic and creative device, writing in the voice of a Cuban revolutionary, in 1960 when he was married to a very creative person – my stepmother, Yaroslava, who was an artist. Wright dedicated *Listen, Yankee* to Nikolas, his son with Yaroslava.

As Yaroslava used to say, 'All three women who married Wright helped him.' Freya, the mother of my half-sister, Pamela, met and married Wright while they were students at the University of Texas. Freya helped Wright by doing copyediting and manuscript-production work on his PhD thesis and many of his early writings. Her employment at a variety of jobs provided critical income to the couple, especially while Wright was a full-time student.

Hans Gerth, Wright's friend from the University of Wisconsin and his collaborator on two books, also helped Wright in the early years of his career, and Wright helped Hans with his writing career as well. Ruth told me that Hans probably did more than half the work on the new English translations and the introduction for *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, and Wright repaid that debt by doing more than half the work on his subsequent collaboration with Hans, their co-authored volume entitled *Character and Social Structure*. Wright and Hans had their share of disagreements, but they maintained their friendship long after their collaborations were over. Hans continued to live and work in Wisconsin after Wright moved to the East Coast, and they remained correspondents and friends for the rest of Wright's life.

When Wright wanted to develop his ability to write for general readers, in addition to having Ruth's help he reached out and received help from his friends, especially Harvey Swados – a novelist, short-story writer, and

essayist – and William Miller, a US historian. Harvey and William gave my father extensive comments and suggestions on drafts of *White Collar* and *The Power Elite*, for which he was very grateful.

Harvey and his wife, Bette, were long-time close friends to Wright and Ruth – so much so that in some ways Harvey and Bette were like a brother and sister to Wright and Ruth, and an aunt and uncle to me. If you've looked at the dedication page of *The Sociological Imagination*, you know that Wright dedicated that book to Harvey and Bette. *Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn* and *On the Line* are examples of beautiful books by Harvey.

William and his wife, Virginia, were also good friends who met Wright in the 1940s. William is best known for his enduring book, *A New History of the United States*.

Recently someone asked me if my studies and work had been influenced by my father. The answer is yes, but I also wanted to do something a bit different, to find my own path. I have to confess that in college I took no sociology classes. Instead I studied political science, economics, and history. I graduated from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, with a bachelor's degree in political economics.

After college I worked as a full-time community organizer and advocate for four years, mainly in a low- and moderate-income, ethnically diverse, and politically active neighborhood of Boston, MA, called Mission Hill. The community leaders in that neighborhood were experienced and politically sophisticated advocates, and I learned a lot from them. I left community organizing and started my career in trade book publishing when I was in my late 20s. I like to think that Wright would have approved of my work in both community organizing and book publishing.

Twenty-four years after I started reading my father's books, I began to read his old mail – letters to his friends, parents, colleagues, and others. I spent four years collecting, selecting, and annotating Wright's letters and autobiographical writings – visiting and corresponding with archives, working on weekends, evenings, and other time off from my job. I was surprised to find that Wright had put what seemed to be a huge amount of energy into his letter writing.

In 2000, our collection of Wright's letters and writings, which I edited with my half-sister, Pamela, was published by the University of California Press. The collection includes an introduction by Dan Wakefield, the novelist and non-fiction writer who met Wright at Columbia University when Dan was a student of Wright's. After graduating from college, Dan worked for Wright, doing research for a while; Wright was a mentor and they were good friends. In addition to writing the introduction for the

book of Wright's letters, Dan wrote about Wright in a chapter of *New York in the Fifties*, a book that was the basis of a documentary film.

Wright spent a good amount of time in Europe during the last several years of his life and described his travels, in letters to his friends. On his first trip, in January 1956, he traveled in Germany as part of a group organized by an American BMW dealer, visiting the German factories that made BMW motorcycles – spending his days studying motorcycle mechanics and his evenings drinking and talking with German engineers and technicians. He enjoyed that trip greatly, but it was only for two weeks.

Wright's first extended stay in Europe lasted more than a year, thanks to a Fulbright grant and a position as visiting professor at the University of Copenhagen. Wright, Ruth, and I departed from New York and flew to Copenhagen in May of 1956, the month after *The Power Elite* was first published. At the time Wright was 39 years old, my mother was 33, and I was ten months old. Wright completed much of his work on the manuscript for *The Sociological Imagination* while in Copenhagen and he presented parts of the manuscript at seminars there.

Soon after arriving in Copenhagen, Wright took his new BMW motorcycle to Norway for one week of touring. When he returned he raved about the beauty of the country to my mother, Ruth, whose own mother had actually been born in Oslo. And in this passage of a letter to Harvey and Bette Swados and Bill and Virginia Miller in the summer of 1956, Wright wrote:

It's been my mood all summer: Buddha on a motorcycle. My God, what a peninsula. A private race course and a thousand faces I'll never forget. And way up in the Norwegian hills a village with only two big stores: a flower shop and a bookstore. (Mills and Mills, 2000, p. 212)

In England, Wright met and became friends with Ralph Miliband, who introduced him to scholars at the London School of Economics and activists on the left in London. That environment of contemporary European social thought was highly stimulating and inspiring to Wright. Later Wright and Ralph traveled together for a couple of weeks in Poland, where Wright interviewed political intellectuals. Ralph and Wright remained close friends after Wright returned to the United States.

Over the past 12 years we've seen a Mills revival in the United States. It involves an interdisciplinary array of 12 American authors and a variety of new books and reissued, reintroduced editions. The revival began in 2000 with three publications: the book of Wright's letters and autobiographical writings and new softcover editions of *The Power Elite*

and *The Sociological Imagination*, reissued by Oxford University Press, which has kept those books in print continuously since their first publication in the 1950s. Todd Gitlin, a sociologist now at Columbia University, wrote an essay for the new edition of *The Sociological Imagination*, and Alan Wolfe, a political scientist at Boston University, wrote an essay for the new edition of *The Power Elite*.

The publication of Wright's previously unpublished letters and autobiographical writings helped generate publicity for the new editions in 2000 and increased awareness of Wright's whole body of work. The book of letters was widely reviewed by writers who mentioned or discussed Wright's major works. The *Los Angeles Times Book Review* and *The Nation* gave especially in-depth, favorable attention to Wright's oeuvre.

New softcover editions of *The New Men of Power* and *White Collar* followed in 2001 and 2002. Nelson Lichtenstein, a historian at the University of California Santa Barbara, wrote the new introduction for *The New Men of Power*, which was reprinted by the University of Illinois Press; and Russell Jacoby, a historian at the University of California Los Angeles, wrote an essay for the new edition of *White Collar*, published by the Oxford University Press.

A few years later Tom Hayden, a politician and activist, published his book entitled *Radical Nomad: C. Wright Mills and His Times* (Paradigm Publishers, 2006), which includes essays by Richard Flacks, Stanley Aronowitz (both sociologists), and Charles Lemert, a professor emeritus in social theory.

Next, in 2008, Oxford University Press published *The Politics of Truth: Selected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, edited by John H. Summers. That collection focuses on the role of ideas in politics and culture.

The following year a very well-written, carefully researched, and solid intellectual biography by Dan Geary was published by the University of California Press. Geary is an American historian who teaches at Trinity College, Dublin. His book is entitled *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought*.

In early 2012, A. Javier Treviño marked the publication of his book, *The Social Thought of C. Wright Mills*, published by Pine Forge Press as part of the Sage Social Thinkers Series. And the Mills revival isn't over. Aronowitz has written a book entitled *Taking It Big: C. Wright Mills and the Making of Political Intellectuals*, which Columbia University Press published in 2012. As a sociologist at the City University of New York with many decades of experience writing, teaching, and engaging in political and intellectual debates, Aronowitz is able to offer great breath, depth, and insight. I've been reading an early copy of his book, and I think it's a very significant achievement – a rich tapestry of political,

cultural, and intellectual history. It discusses the work of many of Wright's contemporaries as part of Aronowitz's broad historical context for analyzing Wright's ideas and emphasizing their continuing importance.

In conclusion I'd like to quote Wright's friend, Ralph Miliband. I think he clarified many aspects of Wright's legacy when he wrote:

C. Wright Mills cannot be neatly labeled and cataloged. He never belonged to any party or faction; he did not think of himself as a 'Marxist'; he had the most profound contempt for orthodox Social Democrats and for closed minds in the Communist world. He detested smug liberals and the kind of radical whose response to urgent and uncomfortable choices is hand wringing. He was a man on his own, with both the strength and the weakness which go with that solitude. He was on the Left, but not of the Left, a deliberately lone guerrilla, not a regular soldier. He was highly organized, but unwilling to be organized, with self-discipline the only discipline he could tolerate. He had friends rather than comrades. Despite all this, perhaps because of it, he occupied a unique position in American radicalism [...] In a trapped and inhumane world, he taught what it means to be a free and humane intellect. 'Get on with it,' he used to say. 'Work.' So, in his spirit, let us. (Miliband 1962, p. 11)

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