

The Libertarian 1990s and the Producerist 2000s: Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie* (1995), Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006), and the Political Struggle at the Turn of the 21st Century

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Introduction

The 2000s saw a surge of zombie literature called the “zombie renaissance” and this proliferation is often ascribed to a fear of terrorist acts carried out by religious fundamentalists.¹ Kyle Bishop, building upon the assertion that cultural products “address society’s most pressing fears,” contends that zombie literature is “among the most culturally revealing and resonant fictions of the recent decade of unrest” unleashed by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.²

However, limiting the locus of terror to religious fundamentalism forestalls a correct understanding of what was happening at the turn of the 21st century. For example, Philip Wegner, considering the 1990s as “one of those transitional phases,” argues that the decade was a period “of openness and instability, of experimentation and opportunity, of conflict and insecurity.”³ Due to its openness to multiple possibilities, the 1990s is said to contain the “radicality” which “ha[s] come under question, not only as we would expect from a ferocious chorus on the right but even from some on the left” after 9/11.⁴

This paper, while agreeing with this interpretation of the 1990s, attributes the radicality of the 1990s not to the transition but to the dominant influence of

1 Kyle Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 16.

2 *Ibid.*, 9–10.

3 Phillip E. Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989–2001: US Culture in the Long Nineties* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), chap. 1, Kindle.

4 *Ibid.*

libertarianism during this period. I will elaborate on the issue of libertarianism and its relationship with the 1990s later; for now, it suffices to say that the central claim of this philosophy relies on “[John] Locke’s idea of self-ownership”: one has “exclusive sovereignty over one’s own person.”⁵ In an extreme form, this sovereignty extends to one’s possessions as well, and the position becomes a call for a minimal state: “[a] fully-fledged ‘self-ownership’ doctrine frees the individual from any constraint which is not directly a product of his will.”⁶ But, at the same time, libertarianism can be considered a natural expression of capitalism, for, as Karl Marx says, in a capitalist society, “He was not freed from property—he received the freedom of property. He was not freed from the egoism of trade—he received the freedom to engage in trade.”⁷ However, it must be noted that this freedom is for the capitalist class, not for the working class. Those without capital cannot fully enjoy this freedom; all they can enjoy is the free disposal of their own labor-power, “the capacity for labour.”⁸ Since it is only when capitalists find the labor-power of proletariats useful that the working class can sell this labor-power, the working class must diligently develop their labor-power, hoping for salvation by the capitalist class. Therefore, the working class’s life is not characterized by freedom but by discipline, and this sense of discipline must be fostered by a recourse to morality. In other words, a capitalist society as a collective entity cannot tolerate a libertarian sentiment on the part of the working class; it must make sure the working class internalizes not libertarianism but producerism, a position that virtue resides in production and the contribution of one’s labor-power to society. For this reason, the capitalist class must quash the libertarian working class and transform them into producerists.

This paper argues that the turn of the 21st century represents this political struggle between libertarianism and producerism: the libertarianism of the 1990s was challenged by the producerism of the 2000s. In what follows, I

5 Norman P. Barry, *On Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 102; *Ibid.*, 170.

6 *Ibid.*, 171.

7 Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 233.

8 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin), 270.

will elaborate on this political struggle by showing why libertarianism was historically considered a deviation; how the working class began to internalize libertarianism and what kind of challenge was posed by the libertarian working class during the 1990s; how producerism superseded libertarianism during the 2000s; and what kind of danger would accompany this producerist counterrevolution. I begin this paper with an elucidation of the American political tradition in terms of classic liberalism and its transformation. This paper explains why classic liberalism is the dominant discourse in capitalism, and how this philosophy branches out into liberal humanism and neoconservatism in the face of the concentration of capital. Contrasting libertarianism with these philosophies, this paper then shows why libertarianism, despite being one of the logical conclusions of capitalism, is a marginalized philosophy.

This introduction sets the stage for the main argument of this paper: that the turn of the 21st century saw the clash between the libertarian 1990s and the producerist 2000s. In addition, I utilize a comparative analysis of zombie literature from these periods. This analysis will help to illuminate the political struggle in that, in addition to the fact that the zombie is a product of the political struggle over peoplehood (who is defined as human and who is relegated to the status of the inhuman, i.e. those unworthy of living), the zombie literature of the 1990s partook of libertarianism, whereas the “zombie renaissance” during the 2000s reflected the producerist counterrevolution against libertarianism. The second section explicates the climate of the 1990s and highlights the dominant influence of libertarianism. By analyzing Joyce Carol Oates’s *Zombie* (1995), this paper elaborates on the libertarian working class—what the libertarian working class looked like and what the social implications of the popular internalization of libertarianism were.⁹ The next section explains the climate of the 2000s and foregrounds the producerist counterrevolution. The analysis of Max Brooks’s *World War Z* (2006, hereafter *WWZ*) will facilitate the understanding of this counterrevolution.¹⁰ Foregrounding the conservative nature of liberal humanism, this paper ends with the suggestion that the politics of the left, which this paper defines as a

9 Joyce Carol Oates, *Zombie* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

10 Max Brooks, *World War Z* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006).

political segment representing the interest of the oppressed class, must disidentify with this political philosophy.

I The American Political Tradition

In *The American Political Tradition*, Richard Hofstadter writes of American politics in this way: “However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man.”¹¹ In his view, American politics has been dominated since the Founding Fathers by capitalism and classic liberalism. Of course, this does not mean that American society has retained the same policies throughout its history; it has experienced modifications. To explain the dominant power of classic liberalism and its transformation in American politics, it is important first to understand what classic liberalism is.

I use the term “classic liberalism” instead of simply “liberalism.” This is because, in American politics, the word “liberalism” has come to mean a political stance which “favors active state intervention in the economy aimed at benefiting the average person.”¹² In contrast to this American version of “liberalism,” “classic liberalism” refers to politics that “calls for a free-market economic policy.”¹³ Classic liberalism justifies market fundamentalism on the following two grounds: the improvement of material wellbeing; and the maximization of human wellbeing. For the first ground, classic liberals utilize the notion of “invisible hand.” As Adam Smith writes, “the private interests and passions of individuals naturally dispose them to turn their stock towards the employments which in ordinary cases, are most advantageous to the society.”¹⁴ In this view, the free market is the best redistributive device. The

11 Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948; reprint, New York: Random House, 1989), introduction, Kindle.

12 David Kotz, *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.

13 Ibid.

14 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* (1776; reprint, Petersfield: Harriman House, 2007), 407.

second ground pertains to human wellbeing. Deducing “the order of freedom from certain metaphysical features of man,” classic liberalists argue that the market economy is the most conducive to the maximization of human wellbeing.¹⁵ A free-market society is “the spontaneous outcome of the interactions of many individuals,” so it conforms to the nature of human beings.¹⁶

Producerism exemplifies the soul of classic liberalism. For example, Thomas Jefferson’s agrarian virtue dictates that “Agriculture ... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness.”¹⁷ Pointing out the moral virtue of production and the increased material wellbeing created through production, producerism reinforces the validity of capitalism. Moreover, as we will see below, its emphasis on the moral aspect of work lends itself to a justification of capitalism for the working class.

The concentration of capital since the late 19th century testifies to the fact that capitalism is plutocracy: having a large amount of wealth is the decisive factor in determining one’s fortune and the course of a society. Since the working class is defined by its lack of wealth, it is impossible to use the material implication of capitalism, advanced by classic liberalism, to justify its application to the working class. Market fundamentalism has led to the concentration of capital and the financial control by big corporations since the beginning of capitalism.¹⁸ In other words, market fundamentalism has increased the wealth of the capitalist class but not of the working class. Fundamentally, capitalist society is characterized, not by competition, but by monopoly; not by meritocracy, but by plutocracy. Here, classic liberalism must transform itself to remain persuasive for the working class. As a result, it has been forced to branch out into two philosophies: liberal humanism and neoconservatism.

In American history, progressivists embody the philosophy of liberal

15 Barry, 133.

16 Ibid., 25

17 Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington,” August 14, 1787. Accessed August 15, 2020. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0040>.

18 For the concentration of capital, see Alan Trachtenberg’s *The Incorporation of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); for the financial control thesis, see David Kotz, *Bank Control of Large Corporations in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980).

humanism. This managerial class seeks to retain the support of capitalism on material grounds in the face of the concentration of capital. To revitalize an image of competitive capitalism, they encourage the state to intervene in the economy, seeking to dismantle monopoly by lawsuits (e.g. the Northern Securities Company and Standard Oil in the early 20th century) and by anti-trust laws (e.g. the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914). They also try to create an image of competing individuals by supporting good education and affordable public health care so that the working class has a better chance to succeed. However, they are not anti-capitalists; they do not attempt to change the power balance between capitalists and proletariats called the wage-labor relation. What they try to do is resurrect an image of competitive capitalism and competing individuals through optimistic discourses and the certain government policies.

With these provisions for the working class, liberal humanism sacralizes meritocracy, an argument for the liberating potential of work. Liberal humanism obstinately considers capitalism as democratic, on the assumption that it gives each person an equal opportunity to succeed. All the state needs to do is help people to help themselves. Unfortunately, this assumption is wrong: history shows that capitalism is fundamentally plutocratic and that stories of individuals achieving success through labor are few and far between. In the end, liberal humanism has to rely more on philosophical argument than on material wellbeing, emphasizing the virtue of self-development and risk-taking instead of monetary success. In this sense, meritocracy is a liberal humanist version of producerism in that this principle asserts the value of work itself.

Another way to transform classic liberalism is to abandon the material ground and to focus exclusively on the philosophical ground. This philosophical stance is called neoconservatism. In *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Barry Goldwater argues that man is “a spiritual creature with spiritual needs and spiritual desires,” so politicians, rather than simply looking “only at the material side of man’s nature,” must “take account of the whole man.”¹⁹ Asserting that “these needs and desires reflect the superior side of man’s nature, and thus

19 Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, KY: Victor Publishing, 1960; reprint, Toledo, OH: Bottom of the Hill, 2010), 11.

take precedence over his economic wants,” he criticizes the New Deal for “regard[ing] the satisfaction of economic wants as the dominant mission of society” and “subordinat[ing] all other considerations to man’s material well-being.”²⁰ Additionally, the critique of the concept of “common man” is utilized to downplay the importance of material wellbeing and to emphasize the diversity of man’s spiritual desires.²¹

The end of neoconservatism is “the enhancement of man’s spiritual nature.”²² Charles Murray, another neoconservative, argues that this nature rests on “the middle-class values of hard work, honesty, and personal responsibility.”²³ And it is work that helps foster these middle-class values. For neoconservatism, working in any form is virtuous in that work provides opportunities for discipline and social contribution. On the other hand, a person without a job is “a bum and a no-good, consigned to the lowest circle of status.”²⁴ Here, we sense the neoconservative version of producerism. Devoid of entrepreneurial success stories, neoconservatism emphasizes the dignity of work: “there is an intrinsic good in working.”²⁵ In neoconservative imaginings, capitalism is the best society since its wage-labor relation helps people to become a better version of themselves.

However, in this elaboration on liberal humanism and neoconservatism, I want to emphasize that the American political landscape is not constituted by a simple equation of Democrats = liberal humanists and Republicans = neoconservatives. Historically, mainstream Democrats and Republicans have been characterized by both liberal humanism and neoconservatism, and are differentiated only by the degree to which they adhere to these two philosophies: Democrats are more liberal humanist and less neoconservative; and Republicans are more neoconservative and less liberal humanist. Bill Clinton resorted to the idea of the dignity of work when he pushed welfare reform, and George W. Bush was able to advance a tax cut for the rich through

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1994), xvii.

24 Ibid., 180

25 Ibid., 185.

resorting to the concept of economic development. What binds these two parties together is the concept of producerism: virtue resides in production and one's contribution to society.

Similarly, libertarianism exists in relation to capitalism but registers a radical difference through its lack of producerism. Norman Barry writes on libertarianism: "radical libertarians have argued that there must be a moral justification for personal freedom which is persuasive irrespective of the consequentialist advantages that accrue from the pursuit of 'natural liberty'."²⁶ Due to its emphasis on the moral aspect, libertarianism seems to come closer to neoconservatism than to liberal humanism. However, it does not resort to middle-class values but to the concept of freedom. Basing their philosophy on "Locke's idea of self-ownership," libertarians demand the freedom from "any constraint which is not directly a product of [one's] will."²⁷ While producerists view social contribution through work as the highest virtue, libertarians believe "man's purpose lies in his own self-realisation."²⁸ It is on the morality of freedom that libertarianism is founded.

Despite the emphasis on the moral aspect, this argument results in a slippery slope from morality toward material obsession. The emphasis on free disposal necessitates possessions, so people begin to think that "personal wealth and personal identity are one and the same thing."²⁹ The obsession with free disposal shifts the focus from morality to material wellbeing. This focus on material wellbeing is the one thing the capitalist class must avoid inculcating in the working class because the capitalist class cannot guarantee the material wellbeing of that class. The ontological status of the working class as oppressed must be countered by producerism, making the working class find meaning in its struggles. However, due to the absence of producerism in their philosophy, libertarians do not find any redemptive implication in them. The libertarian working class demands, not the spiritual reward of work, but immediate material gain. In this sense, the libertarian working class becomes an obstacle to the smooth operation of capitalism. This is why libertarianism, despite being

26 Barry, 40.

27 Ibid., 171.

28 Ibid., 106.

29 James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 14.

one of the possible reactions to capitalism, has had a history of marginalization.

The following two sections elaborate on the political tension between libertarianism and producerism by reading two zombie novels of the 1990s and 2000s. By highlighting the libertarian aspect of the 1990s and the ways in which the obsession with material wellbeing was challenged by the producerism of liberal humanism and neoconservatism during the following decade, this paper shows the incompatibility of capitalism with the working class's material wellbeing and the hypocrisy of liberal humanism.

II The 1990s and Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie*

1. The 1990s

Some writers claim that the 1990s was an era of "globalization working through transnational flows and conjuring the possibility of the postnational," which made people imagine one's nation state "in its interactions with the world beyond its borders."³⁰ Others focus on the advancement of racial, gender, and sexual equality during this decade. The movement toward racial equality was most prominent in the fortunes of African-American writers, with the Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to Toni Morrison in 1993 being a prime example. Gender equality was ascertained by more women entering the workforce. Sexual equality was best represented by queer activism, demonstrated by such organizations as ACT UP and Queer Nation, to the extent that their activism led "the media to dub the decade the Queer Nineties."³¹ Nonetheless, globalization and support for the oppressed in terms of race, gender, and sexuality remain general trends of capitalism. Globalization, though constantly criticized, is still with us; the Democratic party has chosen an African-American and a woman as presidential candidates; and gay marriage became legal in 2015. It is therefore hard to assert that these phenomena testify to the peculiarity of the 1990s.

From a different perspective, it can be argued that these optimistic

30 Jay Prosser, "Introduction," in *American Fiction of the 1990s: Reflections of History and Culture*, ed. Jay Prosser (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4; Alike Varbogli, "Borders and Mixed-Race Fictions," in *American Literature in Transition, 1990-2000*, ed. Stephen J. Burn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 219.

31 Prosser, 8.

representations of the 1990s are made possible by the neglect of class issues during this decade. In this, Bill Clinton played a critical role. From the beginning, he campaigned against the neoliberal policies of the 1980s by emphasizing the plutocratic theme: “1 percent of America’s people at the top of the totem pole now have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, the biggest imbalance in wealth in America since the 1920’s right before the Great Depression.”³² This plutocratic theme implied the dominant power of capital over the working class and revealed the falsity of meritocracy: “For more than two years now, the average middle-class family has worked harder for less money to pay more for health care, for housing, for education, for taxes. Poverty has exploded, especially among working people.”³³ This argument is provocative in that pointing out the plutocratic nature of capitalism implies that the working class exist fundamentally in state of oppression.

Despite his campaign rhetoric, Clinton continued to embrace neoliberal macroeconomic policies, such as the deregulation of the telecommunications and financial sectors. While large corporations enjoyed a high rate of profit through the mergers and acquisitions enabled by the deregulation, the lives of the working class became more and more dismal. For example, layoffs became “a national fact of life.”³⁴ Formerly confined to “blue-collar and clerical workers,” layoffs spread “into the upper reaches of the white-collar world, touching workers with the most elite educations.”³⁵ After a layoff, it was hard to find any job at all, still less one with a similar salary. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, this proletarianization of the white-collared worker epitomized the end of the American dream: “If anyone can testify credibly to the disappearance of the American dream, it is the white-collar unemployed—the people who ‘played by

32 Gwen Ifill, “THE 1992 CAMPAIGN; Clinton’s Standard Campaign Speech: A Call for Responsibility,” *New York Times*, April 26, 1992. Accessed November 20, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/26/us/the-1992-campaign-clinton-s-standard-campaign-speech-a-call-for-responsibility.html>.

33 Ibid.

34 Bob Baker, “‘Downsizing’ Strains AT&T Employees,” *LA Times*, April 19, 1990. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-04-19-fi-1954-story.html>.

35 Louis Uchitelle, *The Disposable American: Layoffs and their Consequences* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 146; For example, massive layoffs by IBM in 1993 and AT&T in 1996 were mainly targeted at white-collar jobs.

the rules', 'did everything right', and still ended up in ruin."³⁶

Clinton was reluctant to intervene in wage-labor relations. Instead, by saying "[t]he oil today is in your noggin, not in the ground. And everybody can strike oil today. But they have to have the means to do it," he advanced liberal humanist measures, such as the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, to help the working class to flourish in the free market.³⁷ These liberal humanist politics made the everyday life of the working class far worse than it would be if they had simply to endure their oppressed status. Such policies are utilized to defend neoliberal society from any accusation by the working class. When he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Clinton said "[w]e cannot blame the system for the jobs they don't have anymore. If it doesn't work now, it's everybody's fault: mine, yours, and everybody else. There is no longer a system in the way."³⁸ Clinton was naïvely arguing that American society is competitive and that a person's future depends on that person's own choice simply on the grounds that some liberal humanist measures had been put in place.

In such a situation, becoming a libertarian was attractive for the working class. First, deregulation and corporate cessation tacitly endorsed the free disposal of one's possessions. Second, the neoliberal state's decision to side with the capitalist class indicated that society existed for the capitalist class, not for the general public. Thus, there was no reason for the working class to sacrifice themselves for the perpetuation of their oppression. Finally, the right-wing shift in the Democratic party, which had been supposed to defend the working class interests against those of the capitalist class, fostered defeatism and encouraged the oppressed to become libertarians rather than Marxists.

The seeds of libertarianism were sown during the Reagan administration. The events of the 1980s, such as deregulation and privatization, the S&L crisis

36 Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream* (New York: Owl Books, 2005), Conclusion, Kindle.

37 James Bennet, "Clinton to Seek \$1 Billion for 'Skills Gap'," *New York Times*, January 29, 1999. Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/29/us/clinton-to-seek-1-billion-for-skills-gap.html>.

38 Bill Clinton, "Remarks on Signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and an Exchange With Reporters," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton, 1996*, Book II (National Archives and Records Administration, 1996), 1327.

and its bailout, and the leveraged buyouts best exemplified by the RJR Nabisco deal, made people begin to sense the encouragement of individual freedom and separation from the state. Yuppies (Young Urban Professionals) then emerged from the working class. With a laser-sharp focus on material wellbeing, they were “the first native American gourmet class since the robber barons ate themselves to death.”³⁹ Nonetheless, the image of a yuppie is discursive. According to Andrew Hoberek, the yuppie discourse “function[s] to obscure the actual decline of the postwar boom with anecdotes of well-off boomers.”⁴⁰ With neoliberal politics lowering the standard of living of the working class, actual representatives of libertarianism within the working class had, by the mid-1990s, become known as “slackers.” While yuppies focused on what to do with their possessions, slackers were more concerned with what not to do with what little they had—that is to say, if their jobs were low-paying and demeaning, it made sense for them to slack off on the job or to withhold their labor-power entirely. While producerism implied that labor-power belonged to society, libertarians considered workers as the owners of labor-power, making people wonder why they needed to work so hard for little reward. The proliferation of the slacker sentiment explains why *Seinfeld*, a sitcom “about nothing,” enjoyed “a cult following”, and *Friends*, another sitcom which “featured an array of layabouts and couch potatoes,” became the age-defining TV show.⁴¹

2. Analysis of Oates's *Zombie*

Published in 1995, Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie* is also an expression of the libertarian 1990s. This novel depicts the life of Q_ P_, a 30-something from a white middle-class family. After dropping out of college, he dabbled in real estate, engineering, and computer programming, but to no avail. Now aged 31,

39 Richard Leiby, “Yuppies: An Aging Trend,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 1994. Accessed July 19, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1994/09/02/yuppies-an-aging-trend/623bbfee-f579-425e-9ce0-1b21b0c8a22c/>.

40 Andrew Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 126.

41 Mary Corey, “The Cult of Seinfeld: Die-Hard Viewers Take Their Comedy Seriously,” *Baltimore Sun*, May 19, 1993. Accessed July 19, 2020. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1993-05-19-1993139177-story.html>; Tom Lutz, *Doing Nothing: a History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers and Bums in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 294.

Q_ P_ is working as a caretaker at a college boarding house owned by his father, his wages supplemented by occasional gifts of money from his grandmother. Despite this mediocrity and his obedient appearance, Q_ P_ is actually a serial killer. For this reason, critics have linked this novel to “the story of Jeffrey Dahmer,” an actual serial killer apprehended in 1991.⁴² However, Q_ P_ does not intend to be such a criminal. Ostracized from the society, he is in a desperate need for accommodating fellows. So he has to create “ZOMBIE,” subservient companions for Q_ P_ and during the process to create “ZOMBIE” through an icepick lobotomy, he inadvertently kills the person kidnapped.⁴³ Here, in this representation of zombies and the characterization of Q_ P_, is revealed the novel’s expression of libertarianism—the zombie as slave is an indication of self-ownership.

First, we must delve into the representation of zombies. As Kelli Shermeyer says, zombies, “come in many shapes and shambles, and each can represent a whole host of human behaviors and conditions.”⁴⁴ For example, earlier works in zombie literature, such as William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929) and Victor Halperin’s film *White Zombie* (1932), represent zombies as racialized slave workers. Another way to represent zombies is based on a “we-are-zombies” theme. As analyses of George A. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) often point out, this theme interprets zombies as “insatiable masses of mindless, soulless, destructive consumers.”⁴⁵ There also exists a “zombies-are-us” theme that registers “a shift from terror of the Other to pity for the Other” and suggests that zombies can be made human again with the help of human beings.⁴⁶ Alternatively, some see zombies as transgressive figures because of

42 Steven Marcus, “American Psycho,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1995. Accessed May 20, 2020. <http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/07/05/specials/oates-zombie.html>.

43 Oates, 49.

44 Kelli Shermeyer, “Systems Die Hard: Resistance and Reanimation in Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One*,” in *The Written Dead: Essays on the Literary Zombie*, eds. Kyle William Bishop and Angela Tenga (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), Kindle.

45 David R. Castillo and John Edgar Browning, “Introduction: Our Zombies, Our Remnants,” in *Zombie Talk: Culture, History, Politics*, eds. David R. Castillo and others (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

46 Gerry Canavan, “We Are the Walking Dead: Race, Time, and Survival in Zombie Narrative,” *Extrapolation* 51, no. 3 (2010): 449.

their “liminality.”⁴⁷ Postmodernist critics such as Sarah Juliet Lauro take this transgression positively and argue that the “negative dialectic” enacted by a zombie figure points to future subjectivity: “we can get posthuman only at the death of the subject.”⁴⁸

To streamline this complexity in analyses of zombie literature, this section focuses and expands on the argument provided by Christian Moraru’s “Zombie Pedagogy: Rigor Mortis and The U.S. Body Politic” (2012), which is concerned with the representation of zombies and is one of the few articles to include Oates’s *Zombie* in its analysis.⁴⁹ In essence, Moraru bases his argument upon the consideration of zombie as a pedagogic body, one that “enlighten[s] us, tell[s] us something about ourselves” through its variance from humans.⁵⁰ Therefore, Moraru asserts that zombie literature “marks the scene where the workings of human desire, power, and hegemony can be queried and made apparent.”⁵¹ Quoting Oates’s *Zombie*, Moraru argues that zombies are “the Other” of human beings, the embodiment of “dehumanization” and “incapacitation as functioning human subjects.”⁵² In this sense, Moraru reads zombies in Oates’s *Zombie* as a threat because of their critical differences from the norm. Then, he shifts the focus from Oates’s *Zombie* to Robert Kirkman’s *The Walking Dead* (2003–2019) and concludes that zombie literature is fundamentally a genre of “law enforcement,” one in which the survivors must eradicate the source of terror.⁵³

As the trajectory of Moraru’s article suggests, this perspective of the zombie as the threatening Other is appropriate for zombie fiction during the “zombie renaissance,” such as Max Brook’s *WWZ* and Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), where the registration of zombies as the Other against the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic landscape makes their

47 Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism,” *boundary 2* 35, no. 1 (2008): 91.

48 *Ibid.*, 87.

49 Christian Moraru, “Zombie Pedagogy: Rigor Mortis and The US Body Politic,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 34, no. 2 (2012).

50 *Ibid.*, 106–07.

51 *Ibid.*, 112.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, 118.

termination “a responsible, even hygienic gesture.”⁵⁴ This interpretation of zombies, however, does not apply to Oates’s *Zombie*. For, while registering differences with human beings, the zombies in the novel are not the Other but Q_ P_’s companions: “We would lie beneath the covers in my bed in the CARETAKER’s room listening to the March wind & the bells of the Music College tower chiming & WE WOULD COUNT THE CHIMES UNTIL WE FELL ASLEEP AT EXACTLY THE SAME MOMENT.”⁵⁵ As accommodating figures, zombies “would pass no judgment.”⁵⁶ Contrasted with them are those who are “ALWAYS & FOREVER PASSING JUDGMENT.”⁵⁷ Unlike survivalist zombie novels, in which the enemies are zombies, the enemy for Q_ P_ is the managerial class represented by such figures as R_ P_, his father, Junie, his big sister, an unnamed lawyer hired by Q_ P_’s father, Dr. B_, a group therapist, Dr. E_, a psychiatrist, and Mr. T_, a probation officer, all of whom supervise Q_ P_, pass judgment on him, and try to adjust him to society. Nonetheless, feeling marginalized and thus considering himself as “the invisible man,” Q_ P_ cannot understand why he should become a productive member of the society which accounts for his oppression.⁵⁸

Q_ P_’s distantiation from the liberal humanism embodied by the managerial class is reflected in his characterization. One of his characteristics is his take on the self: he considers himself not to be stable, but malleable. The day after Q_ P_ is assaulted by teenagers, “the revelation” that humans are free-floating comes to him.⁵⁹ When he sees his battered face, he realizes “I could habit a FACE NOT KNOWN. Not known ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. I could move in the world LIKE ANOTHER PERSON. I could arouse PITY, TRUST, SYMPATHY, WONDERMENT & AWE with such a face. I could EAT YOUR HEART & asshole you’d never know it.”⁶⁰

It must be noted that the dominant discourse of self is a stable one: the malleability of self comes to him as “revelation.” Realizing that one can flexibly

54 Roger Luckhurst, *Zombies: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 173.

55 Oates, 50.

56 Ibid., 49.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 113.

59 Ibid., 60.

60 Ibid.

change oneself to make the most of a given situation, Q_ P_ internalizes opportunism. This realization is inimical to the smooth operation of capitalism, since opportunism alludes to the neglect of the philosophical implication of action and thus functions as a challenge to producerism. A stable self can be translated into commitment and lead to professionalism, the prioritization of skill and character development over monetary success. On the other hand, malleable opportunists such as Q_ P_ are not concerned with character or skill development. Saying “Fuck the PAST, it’s NOT NOW. Nothing NOT NOW is real,” Q_ P_’s focus is on immediate material gain.⁶¹ The erosion of the stable self and the shift toward opportunism betray producerism, which explains why some critics of the novel do nothing but dismiss Q_ P_. Payel Pal considers his psychic fragmentation as “horrible” and Miho Morii thinks *Zombie* expresses “the impossibility of representing and understanding” Q_ P_.⁶² As long as people are captured within a web of the producerist discourse, Q_ P_ is forever an enigma.

Additionally, Q_ P_’s attempts to create zombies are also an expression of libertarianism, now updated to the late capitalist version. The original libertarianism specifies that people are granted freedom to dispose of their possessions as long as this freedom does not “invade the rights of others.”⁶³ With the advent of late capitalism, which brings about “intensified levels of commodification,” there are no “rights of others” because other people *qua* human beings do not exist: they are objects to be owned.⁶⁴ Given all these circumstances, it is understandable why Q_ P_ performs icepick lobotomies to create zombies.

At the end of this account, I have to mention the fact that Oates’s depiction of zombies as chattels is not new in itself. As I noted at the beginning of this literary analysis, this type of representation is also found in the zombie literature of the early 20th century. For example, William Seabrook’s *The*

61 Ibid., 18.

62 Payel Pal, “Being Violent: Critiquing Masculinity and Capitalism in Joyce Carol Oates’s *Zombie*,” *The Melow Journal of World Literature* 1, no. 1 (2016): 72; Miho Morii, “The Truth of the Representation of Jeffrey Dahmer: Joyce Carol Oates’s *Zombie*,” *Studies in English and American Literature*, no. 44 (2009): 96.

63 Barry, 181.

64 Annesley, 32.

Magic Island depicts zombies in Haiti who work for the Haitian–American Sugar Company (Hasco), “American-commercial-synthetic, like Nabisco, Delco, Socony.”⁶⁵ But this does not imply the 1990s are a mere repetition of the early 20th century. The peculiarity of the 1990s resides in the fact that it is Q_ P_, a member of the working class, who tries to own zombies, while zombies in *The Magic Island* work for Hasco, the big corporation. At the same time, by depicting Q_ P_ as marginalized and his attempts to create zombies as botched, Oates’s *Zombie* suggests the incompatibility between the working class and libertarianism.

III The 2000s and Max Brooks’s *WWZ*

1. The 2000s

In order to counter the libertarian sentiment of the 1990s, the dominant class of capitalism waged a producerist counterrevolution in the following decade. This phenomenon is understandable given the fact that the one thing capitalism cannot give the oppressed class is financial security. As we have seen, the dominant class of capitalism must shift the focus of the working class from material wellbeing to philosophical wellbeing. During the era of George W. Bush, the resurgence of producerism mainly took the form of an emphasis on morality. Later in this decade, Barack Obama stressed the ideal of meritocracy to advance its counterrevolution.

Bush fought against the tide of the 1990s, waging a neoconservative counterrevolution against libertarianism. In his campaign speech, he said “[t]he success of America has never been proven by cities of gold, but by our citizens of character.”⁶⁶ One theme he advanced was that of self-responsibility: “I believe our nation ought to usher in what I call the responsibility era, an era that will stand in stark contrast to the last few decades, which have clearly said, if it feels good, do it, and if you’ve got a problem, blame somebody else.”⁶⁷ Subtly

65 William Seabrook, “Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields,” in *The United States of the Undead—Short Stories of Zombies in the Americas* (Redditch: Read Books, 2011), Kindle.

66 George W. Bush, “Full Text of Speech by Gov. George W. Bush,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1999. Accessed March 7, 2020. <https://movies2.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/110199wh-gop-bush-text.html>.

67 Ibid.

critiquing the permissiveness of the 1990s, Bush tried to shift the population's focus from material wellbeing to morality.

Obama continued the producerist politics but from a liberal humanist perspective, incorporating the consideration of material wellbeing into the neoconservative emphasis on morality. In his view, success was no longer defined exclusively in terms of the abstract idea of character development; instead, "the success of our people" should be measured by such criteria as "the jobs they can find and the quality of life those jobs offer" and "the prospects of a small business owner who dreams of turning a good idea into a thriving enterprise."⁶⁸ In this argument, Obama relied on the ideal of meritocracy, arguing that the success was "not a function of fame or PR, but of hard work and discipline."⁶⁹ Here, the insistence on material wellbeing is merged with philosophical wellbeing. He does not propose an unconditional guarantee of material wellbeing for the working class; instead, he connects financial success with the virtue of the working class. By means of this rhetoric, liberal humanism makes it easy to blame the financial insecurity of the working class on their lack of virtue. Furthermore, meritocracy implies that financial success is attained only by making oneself useful to the capitalist class, attesting to the power balance in a capitalist society. In this sense, while Obama does express a concern for material wellbeing, his argument for this improvement is mediated by the logic of capitalism.

Understood in this way, there was no critical difference between Bush and Obama. Both embodied producerism and prioritized philosophical wellbeing over material wellbeing. What differentiates the liberal humanism of Obama from the neoconservatism of Bush is that the former attempted to help the working class be better prepared for the wage-labor relationship. In other words, Obama had no intention to change the power balance of capitalism and in this sense, is a conservative. It is no wonder Obama is quoted as saying: "Look. I am a pro-growth, free-market guy. I love the market."⁷⁰ It is only

68 Barack Obama, "Winning the Future," *Reuters*, January 26, 2011. Accessed October 16, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-obama-speech-text-idUSTRE70P09N20110126>.

69 Ibid.

70 Naomi Klein, "Beware of Obama's Chicago School of Economics Boys," *Guardian*, June 14, 2008. Accessed October 16, 2019. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/14/barackobama.uselections2008>.

through the juxtaposition with neoconservatism that liberal humanism can fashion itself as emancipatory. At the end of his presidency, nothing had changed. Neoliberalism was still a dominant force in politics and the producerism of liberal humanism/neoconservatism remained wary of the resurgence of libertarianism, now represented by the alt-right.

In order to elaborate further on the producerist counterrevolution during the 2000s and the conservative nature of liberal humanism, the following section analyzes Max Brooks's *WWZ*. The juxtaposition of the society before and after the zombie apocalypse and the way in which the state's intervention supports the survivors' struggles depicted in the novel will deepen the understanding of these issues.

2. Analysis of Brooks's *WWZ*

WWZ is part of the proliferation of zombie literature in the 2000s called the "zombie renaissance." Modeled on Stud Terkel's *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (1984), *WWZ* provides a series of personal accounts about lives before the zombie apocalypse—called "the Great Panic"—during and after *WWZ* from various perspectives including those of politicians, armed forces, and refugees. By contrasting the corruption before the apocalypse and the heroism during and after the war, the novel highlights the issue of "a reorganization of society."⁷¹

What is imagined as a better society is a producerist society. The novel depicts the world before "the Great Panic" as devoid of producerism; what was important for the living was money. For example, T. Sean Collins, a veteran, uses his military training not for the protection of the nation but for the protection of the rich. Breckinridge "Breck" Scott makes a great fortune by selling Phalanx, a vaccine against rabies, as if the medicine could protect against the zombie infection. The zombie apocalypse enacts a recalibration of this society, enabling producerism to overtake libertarianism. The biggest example of this counterrevolution is the wartime effort called the "Community Self-Sufficiency Program" (CSSP) operated by "DeStRes or Department of

71 Tim Lanzendörfer, *Books of the Dead: Reading the Zombie in Contemporary Literature* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2018), 30.

Strategic Resources.”⁷² At a time when “[n]o one needs a contract reviewed or a deal brokered” but wants “toilets fixed,” the main task of CSSP is to infuse “sedentary, overeducated, desk-bound, cubicle mice with the knowledge necessary to make it on their own.”⁷³ Considering white-collar jobs as “perfectly suited to the prewar world” but “totally inadequate for the present crisis,” CSSP tries to produce “carpenters, masons, machinists, gunsmiths.”⁷⁴ Against the backdrop of this strong producerist sentiment, zombies are no longer represented as a companion to but as the enemy of producerism. By depicting zombies as “bloodthirsty cannibals,” the novel uses consumerism to represent the lack of producerism.⁷⁵ At the same time, the zombies’ lack of producerism is utilized as a catalyst for human unification under the producerist flag. As Jesika Hendricks, one of the interviewees in *WWZ*, says, “The only time anyone ever came together was when one of the dead showed up.”⁷⁶

Tim Lanzendörfer in his analysis of the novel also pays attention to the contrast between pre-*WWZ* and post-*WWZ*. However, he ascribes the corruption of the pre-war world to George W. Bush and the post-war reformation to Barack Obama:

It [*WWZ*] narrates a neoconservative Armageddon in which the zombies overrun a world in which profit, greed, militarism, partisan politics (in the derogatory sense), and sheer governmental incapacity are swept aside to be replaced, in the post-apocalypse, with an idealized liberal, social-democratic, internationalist system where the common danger to all mankind has succeeded in uniting a significant part of it.⁷⁷

Connecting this version of neoconservatism with Bush, he criticizes the Bush administration for its corruption. However, as we have seen, these characteristics belong to the 1990s and Bush fought his campaign against this

72 Brooks, 137.

73 Ibid., 139–40.

74 Ibid., 139.

75 Ibid., 37.

76 Ibid., 127.

77 Lanzendörfer, 31.

sentiment. Here, I must say Lanzendörfer's definition of neoconservatism is not the most appropriate one. The demarcating line should be drawn not between the neoconservatism of Bush and the liberal humanism of Obama, but between the libertarianism of the 1990s and the producerism of the 2000s. Making the distinction between Bush and Obama poses a grave danger for leftist politics. There is no critical difference between the two; both were based on producerism and were intended to facilitate capitalist operation by shifting the focus from material wellbeing to morality. Therefore, to see critical differences between them is to indicate the liberating potential of liberal humanist politics, which is not the case. As we have seen, liberal humanism aims for not liberation but conservation of the working class. To highlight the conservative nature of liberal humanism, I will focus on the issues of self-development and meritocracy depicted respectively in the novel by the CSSP and by "the Redeker Plan," a strategy guide for the zombie apocalypse.

First, I want to draw attention to the issue of self-development undergirding CSSP and argue that self-development is the obverse of deprivation. The program aims to produce people like "first-generation immigrants."⁷⁸ They are people whose lack of entitlement forces them to teach themselves "how to take care of themselves, how to survive on very little and work with what they had."⁷⁹ Hiring such people as instructors, CSSP teaches the rest of the population "to break from our comfortable, disposable consumer lifestyle."⁸⁰ By encouraging people to be independent, the program succeeds in inducing "a marked drop in requests for government aid."⁸¹

While valorizing producerism, the program implies that the concept of self-development is motivated by the diminishing resources of the state. Thus, the insistence on self-development is appropriate only to (post-)apocalyptic situations. However, during a time when the state has resources to allocate, the insistence on self-development simply means a bifurcation of the society and indicates the dominant class's reluctance to provide support for the dominated class. Understood this way, being competitive is not a virtue but a stigma; it implies a separation from power.

78 Brooks, 140.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid., 139.

Furthermore, the comment of Colonel Christina Eliopolis on “CSSP” reveals the appropriation of the meaning of collective entity by liberal humanism:

We tried to stay away from consumables, things like food and medicine that required regular deliveries. These were classified as DDs, dependency drops, and they got a backseat to SSDs, self-sustaining drops, like tools, spare parts, and tools to make spare parts. “They don’t need fish,” Sinclair [the director of “DeStRes”] used to say, “they need fishing poles.” Still, every autumn, we dropped a lot of fish, and wheat, and salt, and dried vegetables and baby formula. ... Winters were hard. Remember how long they used to be? Helping people to help themselves is great in theory, but you still gotta keep ‘em alive.⁸²

Her remark implies that the collective entity should exist, not to help individual endeavors, but to achieve something that cannot be attained through individual effort. Keeping people alive by the provision of food is one of them. In this sense, the state which helps people to help themselves is an indication of hierarchy.

Next, I focus on the issue of meritocracy by analyzing the implication of “the Redeker Plan,” a strategy guide for the zombie apocalypse. This guide is written by a white Afrikaner, Paul Redeker, and later adopted worldwide. Based on the conviction that “there was no way to save everyone,” the plan proposes the screening of the population.⁸³ After creating “a special ‘safe zone,’” the state allowed “only a small fraction of the civilian population” to retreat to this zone.⁸⁴ This is done for both economic and political reasons. Xolelwa Azania, a former colleague of Paul Redeker, explains to the unnamed narrator:

In his mind, only a small fraction of the civilian population could be evacuated to the safe zone. These people would be saved not only to provide a labor pool for the eventual wartime economic restoration, but also to preserve the legitimacy and stability of the government, to

82 Ibid., 171.

83 Ibid., 108.

84 Ibid.

prove to those already within the zone that their leaders were “looking out for them.”⁸⁵

While those who are left behind are “herded into special isolated zones” and used as “human bait,” the selected few are heavily protected.⁸⁶ As *WWZ* shows, this kind of screening process, interpreted in political terms, is regarded as authoritarian and thus evil. In the novel, many people believe that the cruelty of the plan “will forever ensure Redeker the tallest pedestal in the pantheon of hell.”⁸⁷ Once translated into economic terms, this screening process becomes the liberal humanist ideal of meritocracy, which is viewed as democratic. This interpretation assumes that the market economy is part of nature.⁸⁸ However, as this paper has argued, capitalism is plutocratic, in that big capitalists control society through deciding where to allocate capital. Nothing is further from the truth than the consideration of the market as democratic. Once the economy is correctly understood as part of politics, meritocracy cannot be considered the embodiment of democracy. As Azania’s remark implies, meritocracy makes sense from the viewpoint of authority: desirable citizens must be defended and rewarded to retain a sophisticated labor pool and to highlight the beneficence of the authoritarian state. There is no difference between the Redeker plan and meritocracy. The danger lurks in the liberal humanist use of meritocracy as an emancipatory concept.

Conclusion

By showing that the libertarian sentiment of the working class was suppressed by the producerism of liberal humanism and neoconservatism at the turn of the 21st century, this paper reveals that all the capitalist class can do to justify its operation for the working class is to resort to the philosophical implications of capitalism. It is excruciating to understand that capitalism is not concerned with the working class’s material wellbeing. Instead, we have liberal

85 *Ibid.*, 109.

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*

88 “The laws of production and distribution that determine the allocation of resources in a free economy, are descriptive of the operations of that natural order of events” (Barry, 14).

humanism as the guarantor of the financial security for the working class. As this paper has argued, the problem is that although liberal humanism passionately presents itself as the party for the working class, their plan to provide the working class with financial security through the realization of meritocracy is a distorted form of the original intention. It promises the working class material wellbeing so long as they are useful to the capitalist class. Thus, it is an expression not of equality but of hierarchy.

The above argument is intended to change the current academic trend pertaining to the 1990s. So far, research on the 1990s has ignored the libertarian aspect of the 1990s. For example, two anthologies on the 1990s, *American Fiction of 1990s: Reflections of History and Culture* (2008) and *American Literature in Transition, 1990-2000* (2018), consist of articles which limit themselves to the spheres of globalization and postnational imagination, and the issues of race, gender, and sexuality. In other words, the aspects of the 1990s documented in the academic researches so far are the positive aspects of capitalism. As long as academia does no more than myopically pay attention to these issues, the working class never attain financial security, for there is a possibility that these points will be utilized as tools to vindicate the operation of capitalism. As Karl Marx writes of capitalism, “[t]he need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe”; and the differences between race, gender, and sexuality “have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class” since all are treated as “instruments of labour.”⁸⁹

My hope is that the issues highlighted by this paper—the contrast between libertarianism, liberal humanism, and neoconservatism in terms of producerism, the interpretation of the 1990s as an era of libertarianism, and the juxtaposition of this era with the producerist 2000s—help readers to see the double-dealing of liberal humanism and to take a brave step toward disidentification with this hypocritical political philosophy.

89 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 112; *Ibid.*, 115.

ABSTRACT

The Libertarian 1990s and the Producerist 2000s: Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie* (1995), Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006), and the Political Struggle at the Turn of the 21st Century

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The main purpose of this paper is to illustrate the political struggle at the turn of the 21st century to show the threat of religious fundamentalism was only one of the fears American society was dealing with at this historical moment. By explicating the climate of the 1990s and that of the 2000s, and comparing zombie literature from these respective periods, this paper argues that, at the turn of the century, the libertarianism of the 1990s and the producerism of the 2000s collided. That is to say, neoliberal politics inadvertently fostered the sentiment of libertarianism among the general public during the 1990s; the ensuing massive inequality of the neoliberal society, coupled with the proliferation of the libertarian sentiment, necessitated the producerist counterrevolution of the 2000s to stabilize the neoliberal order. The supplemental use of zombie literature can facilitate the understanding of this argument in that the zombie literature of the 1990s partook of libertarianism, whereas the zombie literature of the 2000s reflected the producerist counterrevolution.

Section One, "The American Political Tradition," elucidates the American political tradition in terms of classic liberalism. Focusing on a producerist aspect of classic liberalism, this paper details how this classic liberalism branched out into liberal humanism and neoconservatism, two different but producerist-based philosophies. These producerist-based philosophies are then contrasted with libertarianism. By pointing out libertarianism's lack of producerism, this paper explains why libertarianism, despite being a logical conclusion of capitalism, has a history of marginalization throughout American history.

This elaboration on the American political tradition sets the stage for the

remaining two sections. Section Two, “The 1990s and Joyce Carol Oates’s *Zombie*,” explicates the climate of the 1990s with a focus on how the general public began to internalize libertarianism and what kind of danger would be posed by this populous internalization of libertarianism for the capitalist society. Section Three, “The 2000s and Max Brooks’s *World War Z*,” elaborates on the issue of producerism. Pointing out the similarities between the neoconservatism of George W. Bush and the liberal humanism of Barack Obama to highlight the conservative nature of liberal humanist politics exemplified by self-development and meritocracy, this paper foregrounds a danger for the leftist politics caused by the liberal humanist abuse of leftist terminologies. In conclusion, this paper suggests that the oppressed class should distance themselves from liberal humanism if they want to be free from the capitalist exploitation.