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# James Chowning Davies: When Men Revolt and Why: Study Guide

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# JAMES CHOWNING DAVIES: WHEN MEN REVOLT AND WHY: STUDY GUIDE, 2002-2003

## Steven Alan Samson

### INTRODUCTION

#### Study Questions

1. This book is concerned with finding out when and why people withdraw their surrender to government of the power to kill and coerce: a surrender that had made civil society and the social contract possible. What distinction does Davies make between right and power? What do we learn from the study of revolution? How did the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the Russian Revolution of 1905 differ from each other? What have been the bloodiest centuries? (3-4)
2. Historically, what are some of the influential explanations of political violence? Aristotle and Hobbes noted that revolution (fire) begins in the minds of men. What did Marx mean by class consciousness? What are some of the practical limitations of this notion? What does Davies see as the purpose for studying when and why men revolt? (4-5)
3. Why is there as yet no consensus among social scientists about the nature of man? When did Marx predict men would revolt? How does Davies subtly modify this view? How does he account for revolts over comparatively trivial grievances? Perceived disrespect and affronts “to the equal dignity of human beings” are powerful motivators. (5-7)
4. Davies maintains that “men naturally desire equality.” What happens when symbols diverge from practice? Identify the needs specified in **Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs**. Davies builds on this model: “People who are *insecure* in the satisfaction of their physical, social-affectional, or dignity needs form the dry tinder of revolutions.” Why does an understanding of revolution require the postulate of a hierarchy of needs? (7-9)

### THOMAS MASARYK: THE RUSSIAN MONK

Masaryk was a Czech sociologist whose father was a serf and coachman on a crown estate of the Austrian emperor. He later became the founding president of Czechoslovakia.

#### Study Questions

1. What are the two halves of Russia? Where are the boundaries and frontiers (transitional areas)? What are some of the European oases? How does Masaryk characterize the transformation from one civilization to another? [This has useful points of comparison and contrast with Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis]. (14)
2. How does the individual Russian experience this transformation? Where does Masaryk find the most intense spiritual contrast between Russia and Europe? What seems to have troubled the monk who served as his guide through the catacombs? How was the monk’s “world-hunger” manifested? (14-15)
3. How did his experiences carry the author in memory back to childhood? To the

childhood of Europe? [An interesting discussion of the darker and more violent ancestral versions of Perrault's fairy tales may be found in Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre*. (15-16)]

## **J. H. BOEKE: THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY IN COLLISION WITH CAPITALISM**

The author is a Dutch scholar who wrote primarily from his experience in Indonesia, but who also makes references to Japan.

### **Study Questions**

1. How do modernizing (Westernizing) governments handle the administration of small rural villages? How do the officials of the municipality and the peasants of the village interact? Who are these outsiders and where do they huddle? How does the use of the Shinto shrine differ from that of the traditional Buddhist temple?
2. How does the alienation of civil servants from village life corrupt it? How does the Western government isolate individuals and fragment communities? Identify several of the consequences for the villagers (*i.e.*, "the crumbling and shrinking of village life")? [Emile Durkheim, an early French sociologist, introduced the term *anomie* to characterize the resulting breakdown of the social structure]. What has substituted for social elements? [The "cash nexus" for this phenomenon is derived from Marx's Communist Manifesto. Joseph Schumpeter referred to market processes as "creative destruction"; Boeke wonders whether government policy "destroys more of the old than it can replace with new equivalents."]
3. Identify several aspects of the dualism between town and country in non-Western countries. What happened in a Chinese village when the cultivation of peanuts for oil was introduced? Who profited in the short run? In the long run? What does the author mean by sham prosperity? [A recent American stock market analogy suggests itself: the dot.com bubble].

## **O. MANNONI: PROSPERO AND CALIBAN: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLONIALISM**

The author is a French psychoanalyst who worked as a civil servant in Madagascar. "He reports psychologically the result when individuals in a static and primitive society, first involuntarily and then voluntarily, become attached to members of a very advanced culture. And he reports the intensification of anxiety when these asymmetrical attachments are threatened with severance. The depth of the anguish is suggested by this fact:" The colonial revolt that broke out in 1947 killed hundreds of thousands and was marked by savagery on both sides. Mannoni "concentrates on the tension inside men of ancient and primitive culture who can no more readily return to it after living with people of advanced culture than a teenager can return to childhood. There are similarities to the mental relationship between blacks and whites in America during the 1950s and 1960s. The basic interaction combines love and hate as between fathers and adolescent sons."

### **Study Questions**

## The Threat of Abandonment

1. What is the colonialists' view of the psychology of the Malagasies (the inhabitants of Madagascar, whose ancestors were predominately Malayan)? How do they exploit this need for dependence? What does the author believe to be the solution to the problems between Malagasies and Europeans? How has conservative opposition to reform aggravated the situation without being able to prevent change? (40-41)
2. How does the author characterize group dependence (which are based on horizontal attachments) in more "primitive" communities? [He is not referring to the Malagasies]. By contrast, how are attachments organized in Malagasy society? Why should a far-sighted administrator encourage horizontal ties? What does Mannoni mean by a "feeling of abandonment"? Here he analyzes adolescent psychology and a sense of betrayal by parents. What is psychologically significant about the Malagasy love of routine? What does a respect for red tape indicate in the psychological make-up of a European civil servant? How does the Malagasy's motivation differ from the European's? What happens when he is expected to act independently (outside existing rules)? (41-43)
3. In what ways do the Malagasy display their intelligence? What do the Malagasy and the Europeans find shocking in each other's behavior? What are some of the characteristics and relationships within his ethical system? What is *sikidy*? How do sorcerers differ from diviners? [The discussion of sorcery bears comparison with Roger Scruton's discussion of *mimetic desire*, which may involve projecting evil (such as an inappropriate desire) onto a scapegoat in order to remove the evil]. (43-44)
4. Why do Malagasies believe Europeans have no soul? [Similarly, the imperial Romans regarded Christians as atheists]. What are some characteristics of the white man's **inferiority complex** (more evidence of his lack of a soul)? Why do "assimilated" (Europeanized) Malagasy have so little influence among his own people? (For that matter, they are ill at ease in all societies). What are the traits of unsuccessful Europeanization? What kind of Malagasy is most apt to be successful? (44-45)
5. **Key Question:** Among Europeanized Malagasies returning to Madagascar, which ones were most likely to foment the revolts? (Here the author is making a comparison with the Caliban character in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*). Here the theme of **abandonment** is clearly stated. What accounts for the hatred shown by natives whose assimilation is incomplete? [The article on "Riots and Rioters" by Wada and Davies makes a similar point about the marginality of the rioters in Japanese internment camps]. (45-46)
6. Why were reports of atrocities exaggerated on both sides during the revolt? What accounted for such ferocity as actually did take place? Note the psychological defense mechanisms that shape Spanish attitudes toward the toreador's bull and Malagasy attitudes toward the sacrificial ox. (46-47)
7. What specific characteristics of Europeans are a source of anxiety (and a subject of folklore) to the Malagasy? The "legendary learning" to which Mannoni refers is developed later on this page in the discussion of totemistic beliefs. **Key Question:** What is significant about the reciprocal nature of the dependence relationship? But it was always a relationship fraught with risks to both parties: "It is the poor patron who humiliates them." What kind of value did the petty kings of the Malagasies set on possessing a white man like Robert Drury? (47-48)
8. As Mannoni searches for more obscure psychological foundations for reciprocity in the dependence relationship, he turns to the idea of **totemism** (a psychological projection of human characteristics and motives onto animals), which was developed by early anthropologists and adopted by Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo*. This discussion

becomes very abstract and obscure. I believe the philosopher of mechanistic theory to whom Mannoni refers was La Mettrie during the eighteenth century French Enlightenment. Why does Malagasy identification with the white man have such negative psychological consequences? **Key Idea:** Here we may see an expression of James Davies's J-curve theory: "If the 'abandoned' or 'betrayed' Malagasy continues his identification he become clamorous; he begins to demand *equality* in a way he had never before found necessary. The equality he seeks would have been beneficial before he started asking for it, but afterwards it proves inadequate to remedy his ills – for every increase in equality makes the remaining differences seem the more intolerable, for they suddenly appear agonizingly irremovable. This is the road along which the Malagasy passes from psychological dependence to psychological inferiority." (48-49)

9. What is the hazard of altering some aspects of a personality which is different from our own? What may be a consequence of a culturally biased education? Why was the need for dependence so important to the colonization process? What are some of the other ways of being conquered? In what sense were the Malagasies conquered by the colonizers? What is the significance of the theatrical sort of violence by the Europeans? What was the purpose of ceremonies of surrender? (49-52)

### **National Independence**

1. What is significant about the belief in the *tody*? What is the alternative of remorse? What led to the violence? Why did the demobilization of the soldiers help ignite the revolt? What kind of leaders did the rebels want? Why did the Malagasies turn against these leaders? [Here René Girard's concept of "mimetic desire" bears comparison]. What kind of "salvation" did the rebels seek? What does it take for a leader to be recognized by the man-in-the-street? If ordinary people cannot identify with a government, how do they regard it? How does the political reversal reflect the psychological reversal? "They no longer reproach us for imposing our civilization upon them; they now accuse us of withholding it from them [a manifestation of a sense of abandonment], of barring the path we opened up for them. . . . [A]t bottom what the Malagasies want is indeed our civilization but not from us." What did nationalism mean to the masses? (53-55)

## **ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE: THE OLD REGIME AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

Tocqueville, a French aristocrat and liberal member of Parliament, was a keen observer of the political scene, one of the great political philosophers of the nineteenth century, and an associate and correspondent of Francis Lieber, the German-American political scientist. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), is considered by many the best single work ever written about the character of America.

### **Study Questions**

#### **How the Spirit of Revolt Was Promoted by Well Intentioned Efforts to Improve the People's Lot**

1. What made the general populace invisible and "inert" in pre-revolutionary France? How did the masses become acutely conscious of the wrongs they suffered? What were the unintended consequences (blowback effects) of the King's attempts to reform the political system, such as the efforts to abolish forced labor, do away with the injustices and restrictions of the guild system (thus supporting a "right to work"), and equalize the tax

burden? What is Tocqueville's ironic comment on the tendency of the King and the *parlement* of Toulouse to blame each other for the suffering of the laboring class?

### **How, Though the Reign of Louis XVI Was the Most Prosperous Period of the Monarchy, This Very Prosperity Hastened the Outbreak of Revolution**

1. What were the two great advantages enjoyed by the Old Regime before its fall? How had the King's authority been effectively limited? How did the English constitutional system differ – to England's great advantage? What was one of the consequences of steadily increasing prosperity? [This is known as the revolution of rising expectations. Mancur Olson's *The Rise and Decline of Nations* attempts to show how growing prosperity may send a country into decline].
2. Where were the chief centers of the revolutionary movement in France? What paradox did Tocqueville discover by studying the tax system? What conclusion did he draw? [This is an early anticipation of James Davies' "J-curve theory"]. "For the mere fact that certain abuses have been remedied draws attention to the others and they now appear more galling; people may suffer less, but their sensibility is exacerbated."

### **How, Given the Facts Set Forth in the Preceding Chapters, the Revolution Was a Foregone Conclusion**

1. What did Tocqueville mean by saying that the virtues of the people made them dangerous masters? [Ortega echoed this idea in *Revolt of the Masses*]. What were the two ruling passions of the people? [Tocqueville's discussion of equality and freedom may be profitably be compared with Kuehnelt-Leddihn's]. Does Tocqueville believe democratic institutions are compatible with free (liberal) institutions? What happened after the ideal of freedom lost its appeal? What accounts for the rise of a dictatorship? What do you think were some of the institutions that favored despotism? [Here a familiarity with Kenneth Minogue's *Politics: A Very Short Introduction* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* might suggest some possibilities. James Billington's *Fire in the Minds of Men* offers some compelling observations about the despotic character of the "revolutionary faith."]