

# The Whole Hut and Everything in It: Jack Gold's *Man Friday* (1975) and Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1964) as Lessons in Economic Power Inversion

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 05 Mar 2026; Received in revised form: 03 Apr 2026; Accepted: 08 Apr 2026; Available online: 28 Apr 2026</p> <p>©2026 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">CC BY license</a> (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> auto industry, economic power, electronics industry, Iacocca, Lido A., kaizen, Man Friday (1975), The Pawnbroker (1964), kaizen, tariffs, trade deficit</p>	<p><i>The transfer of power, especially by economic means, usually happens over time and is not often perceived by the casual observer. Elements of the transfer often manifest over a period of years, where the entity initially in power, whether by omission or at times even denial, is unable or unwilling to ascertain the change in dynamic until the scales are indeed tipped to the favor of the formerly disadvantaged in position. This can often cause intense resentment, not only from those who have lost their economic advantage, but from those bystanders who did not take action to improve their own positions. These dynamics are illustrated in this take on the classic Defoe story in the relationship between the characters of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, as well as through the subtleties, as well as the directness and personal ethnic struggles in the character of East Harlem Pawnbroker Sol Nazerman.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Produced by ITC Entertainment, ABC Entertainment, and Keep Films, Ltd., and distributed by Avco Embassy Pictures, *Man Friday* is a 1975 film directed by Jack Gold. It is adapted from the 1973 play by Adrian Mitchell, which was based on Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719. It stars Peter O'Toole as Robinson Crusoe and Richard Roundtree as Friday.

Part of the plot twist, however, illustrates in a very simple way the dynamic of the shift of power in social stratifications and economies of nations and the industries within them, such as the GDP of Japan in the 1970's and 1980's, and in general the principles of merger and acquisition in private industry. How economic power can gradually, and then even suddenly shift hands through prior agreements,

changes in markets, or technological advancement, as well as through military power as an instrument, threat, or element of enforcement in transition.

*The Pawnbroker* is a 1964 film directed by Sidney Lumet, produced by the Landau Company and distributed by American International Pictures. It is an adaptation by Morton S. Fine and David Friedkin of the 1961 novel of the same name by Edward Lewis Wallant, starring Rod Steiger as Sol Nazerman, Geraldine Fitzgerald as Marilyn Birchfield, Brock Peters as Rodriguez, Jaime Sánchez as Jesus Ortiz and a very young Morgan Freeman in a cameo appearance.

In a similar fashion, this story illustrates through its main character the transfer of power more collectively, as a means of financial advancement where it was simply a matter of thriving in order to

survive for entire groups, such as the Jewish community.

## II. BACKGROUND OF MAN FRIDAY

In this version of the famous tale, Robinson Crusoe's and Friday's characters are slightly inverted compared to other incarnations. Here, Friday is much kinder and more sympathetic whereas Crusoe is stauncher and more legalistic in his "righteous indignation" regarding his faith in God, patriotism as an Englishman and love for civilization, even to the point at times of near insanity due to his time in exile. [1]

Friday and four of his friends are blown off course during a fishing trip by a sudden storm. Their canoe is destroyed and they wash up on the beach of the island on which Crusoe has been stranded for 12 years. Three of Friday's friends survive, while his friend Hookloser drowns before he reaches the beach. So, they build him a "journey bird", an arrangement of flowers shaped like a bird to take Hookloser to the afterlife. When they cook and start to consume their fallen comrade in a respectful form of cannibalism, taking part of his spirit with them as they believe, Crusoe sees the smoke coming from the fire on the beach and advances, and realizing what is happening, shoots Friday's friends. Friday binds his hands as Crusoe approaches, and thinking him to be a prisoner, takes him to his camp, naming him Friday, as that was the day of the week that he "rescued" him. [2]

Friday learns the English language very quickly, and Crusoe then tries to educate him about Western concepts like fear of God, personal property, and sportsmanship. But these concepts seem strange to Friday, even ridiculous at times. Friday feels he may be able to soften Crusoe's character by introducing him to a more laid-back style of living, such as he had enjoyed with his tribe back on his island, in many ways in direct opposition to the way of Crusoe's island of England.

Indeed, they are two refugees from two different islands, cultures, and schools of thought, now marooned on the same island, each representative of their original points of origin. [3]

Eventually, Friday sees the results of several of Crusoe's attempts at building a boat or a raft. Yet

Crusoe explains that his shipbuilding experience is limited and he is unable to build a craft capable of reaching an English port which could take months. Yet Friday tells him that his island is only a few days away, and a raft or boat could easily get them there. He is also willing to do most of the work on the island to allow Crusoe time to build it. Crusoe makes no promises, but suggests that if they have the time, he will build a raft and sail to Friday's island within the next year. He draws up plans, but little ever comes from them.

## III. A SIMPLE LESSON, WITH MAJOR IMPLICATIONS

In time, Friday begins to realize that Crusoe has really no intentions of building a craft to take them to his island, and that Crusoe is using this promise to have Friday accomplish most of the daily chores that must be done (such as hunting, fishing, cooking, fire lighting etc.) Crusoe has taught Friday about slaves, and Friday now feels like one. He refuses to do anymore work unless the tasks are shared, even going so far to point Crusoe's musket at his own head and daring his Master to pull the trigger, as he would rather die than live as a slave.

So, in an attempt to make peace with Friday, Crusoe offers him a deal. With a cache of gold coins that he had salvaged from his shipwreck, he offers to now pay Friday wages for all the chores and tasks he performs. This he explains is the difference between being a slave and a free man. He explains to Friday that with the coinage he is paid, he may now be able to purchase things from Crusoe, items he has in his hut, such as a kettle for three coins, a lamp for four coins, a saw for three coins, etc.

Friday, coming from a very communal, collective culture on his own island, is unable to totally comprehend this concept at first, as he uses all these items as he needs them, and doesn't understand why he has to give Crusoe coins now. His Master explains that he is now a free man, and with it comes responsibility. Moreover, Friday really doesn't want any of the items he has been offered. For the time being, he is willing to keep the coins he is being paid.

He asks Crusoe how many coins he would have to give him for his whole hut and everything in it. It is a half-joke, as they both have a great laugh about the

proposal. If Friday buys everything Crusoe has, then he would have to work for him, Friday giving him coins, to buy everything back again. They erupt in laughter at the idea, but Crusoe agrees to the price of 2000 coins, to which they shake hands.

Yet throughout their time together, Crusoe oscillates between having a close friendship with Friday, and then pulling away, reminding him of his place as an inferior. Friday attempts to teach Crusoe about Sorrow Day, a tradition in his tribe where they think and mourn over those whom they have lost. This invokes feelings in Crusoe that he has tried to avoid, sending him into a rage the next day, determined to punish Friday for, in a sense, embracing sadness and evil. He binds Friday to a post, and then ironically goes on a rant about how vile Man truly is in his nature, and in a morbid sense, his own superiority to Friday. Crusoe points his musket at Friday, but in a mad heat, fires at his parrot, Poll when he talks, killing him instantly.

As Friday recounts this to his tribe in telling this story, he relates that this incident was "his last lesson" Their tenuous comradery had come to an end, and he simply stopped trying to teach Crusoe anything, and in kind, stopped learning from him. Friday now simply worked for Crusoe, who paid him. Day after day, month after month, year after year.

Until one day, Friday brings an animal skin bag filled to the top with gold coins. 2000 of them to be exact. Friday dumps the gold on Crusoe's table on the porch of the hut, reminding him of their bargain years earlier. 2000 coins "For the hut, and everything in it". Crusoe is taken aback, not only by Friday's demeanor, but also by his having no choice but to concede the bargain by his own rules, backed up by the fact that now Friday is holding the musket, and everything is now in Friday's hands. Now Crusoe will catch the fish in the water, and hunt the pig in the jungle, and Friday informs him that now Crusoe will *indeed* build that raft, and they will sail to Friday's island.

And much the way Crusoe had done with him, Friday then stands over Crusoe with the musket, supervising his work. And when the raft is finished and launched, after two days and two nights, they

arrive at Friday's island, where he returns to his tribe and shares his story.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF A VERY BASIC HOSTILE TAKEOVER

This change in power, imperceptible to Crusoe until the moment of transition, is highly illustrative of most, if not all transfers whether they be social, economic, or governmental. Revolutions in general rarely are successful long-term, often unstable as those seizing power are frequently unable to manage or maintain, let alone improve the infrastructure built by the previous administrations.

In the case of Crusoe and Friday however, the essential elements for transfer were all indeed in place. Friday, having done the majority of work on the island was skilled enough to maintain, or ensure the maintenance of the quality of life that they had previously enjoyed. And he understood Crusoe's game well enough to appeal to his sense of honor as an Englishman, backed up militarily by the fact that Friday now owned all of Crusoe's possessions, including his firearms and weaponry.

Friday had realized, after Crusoe's last tirade, that change would never come unless supreme action were taken. They would never leave the island, and he would never return to his tribe. Crusoe even mentioned the fact that he feared Friday's tribe in their cannibalism, after witnessing the episode with Hookloser. Yet Friday assured him that he would be treated as a guest, as he indeed was and not attacked when they finally arrived at Friday's island.

Friday had, without knowing, performed the basics of a hostile takeover in the corporate world. He had leveraged his gold coins against Crusoe's integrity, backed up of course by force to which Crusoe had no choice but to concede. Crusoe had unknowingly, even humorously set his price per share, and Friday had met his demand through basically an open-market stock purchase. [4] He had bided his time, acquired sufficient influence, and gained control of the "company" so to speak, being "the whole hut and everything in it", forcing it to change direction.

## V. PATTERNS OF FORCE IN ENTIRE INDUSTRIES

This concept not only applies to individual corporations or entities, but also to entire industries at times, when a group of dominant players in a particular field are unable or unwilling to change, maneuver or simply weather certain shifts in markets, whether due to changing conditions or simply by complacency, such as the infiltration of Japanese companies in the American automobile and electronics markets during the 1970's and 80's.

The fuel crises of both 1973 and 1979 in the United States enabled the Japanese automakers an opportunity to not only sell their products, but in time to pivot and expand their businesses into new markets, later resulting in developing manufacturing facilities in other countries for indigenous customers. As fuel had been inexpensive previously in the United States, most American made passenger cars had been larger, and far less fuel efficient. As fuel availability became scarcer, prices rose quickly, and the demand for smaller more fuel-efficient models exponentially increased almost overnight. Industrialist Lee Iacocca commented that customers wanted better gas mileage so badly, they were willing to pay almost any price to get it. [5]

In addition, American automakers, after years of extremely profitable operations had become somewhat complacent in the areas of build quality, NVH (Noise, Vibration and Harshness) and general reliability. Warranty claims were rising, helping to build an all-around, general dissatisfaction with the products of the Big Three automakers of Detroit. In addition, American manufacturers resisted (and still do to a certain extent) the development and marketing of smaller vehicles due to narrow profit margins. As Henry Ford II often remarked "Mini-cars, mini-profits". [5] Like Crusoe, all statuses were quo, and they did not want to change their practices, nor their products. As a result, the small economy car market, while tolerated, had been practically ignored by American manufacturers.

So almost overnight, Japanese automakers now had a major edge in the marketplace as there was now a strong demand for products they had already been making for years. Their indigenous market had always demanded smaller, fuel-efficient vehicles due

to the size and narrow roads of their island country and the fact that almost all of their petroleum had to be imported, thus raising prices of operation of vehicles. They were specialists, out of necessity, in these two areas. As well as a practice of constant improvement in both products and efficiency in operations through "kaizen", a Japanese term meaning "change for the better". However, in western culture it is more often used to refer to constant improvement within an organization. A system of continuous refinement in a series of generally small changes which can have long-term positive effects, and may be applied within management systems, production lines, corporate communications, and of course product planning and design. [6] This had a dramatic effect over the next decades as market share of the American automotive market began to shift rapidly in favor of Japanese manufacturers.

This, along with the fact that again, like between Crusoe and Friday, Japan's rise from a conquered nation to an economic force to be reckoned with came indirectly from the hand of their conquerors, in a sense. Japan had also placed stringent rules, tariffs and import taxes regarding foreign products entering their markets, whereas American trade laws were far more accommodating. [5] [7]

Another example of this is found in the television manufacturing industry of the late 1960's. After WWII in the United States, there were 27 American companies who were the world's leading manufacturers and exporters of electronics, especially in the areas of radios and televisions including General Electric, RCA, Emerson and Zenith. Yet much like the auto manufacturers, they had difficulty in penetrating the Japanese market. The Japanese government required that for them to sell American products in their country, American manufacturers had to license their technology to Japanese manufacturers such as Sony, Panasonic and Hitachi.

They were reluctant to do so, but they received further incentives from the United States government, who wanted to keep good relations with Japan as an ally. As American companies were developing and moving toward color television, they agreed to license technology in the older, black-and-white television manufacture.

As a result, Japan obtained the technology, but America could not compete as an exporter on price for televisions for sale in Japan. Yet Japanese manufacturers began making good quality black and white TVs and exporting them to American markets. Often offering them to the American consumer at prices below cost, a practice known as “dumping”.

By 1972, sixty percent of black and white television sales in the United States were imports, mostly from Japan. And by 1976, one hundred percent were imports, forcing American manufacturers out of that niche in the market. And the process repeated itself again a few years later in the color television sector. [7]

With this new market advantage, the Japanese government began a serious program to develop a color television industry. Japan again licensed American color television technology from American manufacturers, and began exporting color televisions to American consumers, driving U.S. firms out of the market. By 1980, there were only three American companies still manufacturing color TVs, and by 1987, Zenith was the only one remaining. In 1990 a partial stake in Zenith was obtained by the Korean firm GoldStar (now LG Electronics) as part of a technology-sharing agreement, Zenith later being acquired by them in 1999. [8]

Crusoe, like the American government saw little worry initially in allowing those previously in a disadvantaged position access to something that offered little value at the time. There was practically no use for his gold coins on the island, and he offered them to Friday as a means of equity and peace, as was black and white television technology and the economy car market of little value to American firms at the end of the 1960's. Yet in both cases, the previously disadvantaged gained the upper hand by using that perceived of small worth to develop an advantaged position.

## VI. FURTHER LESSONS FROM THE PAWN SHOP

In *The Pawnbroker*, Sol Nazerman, (Rod Stieger) is a Jewish Holocaust survivor now living with his sister-in-law and her family in a housing tract on Long Island. Once a professor at Leipzig University in Germany before being sent to the concentration camp

at Auschwitz with his family, he now runs a pawn shop in East Harlem.

Sol suffers from what Psychiatrists would one day call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, as he witnessed his two children being killed by the Nazis, and his wife being raped and later killed by German officers. Much like combat veterans, he is subject to recurrent flashbacks of these atrocities, and the feelings of helplessness to prevent them from happening. As a result, he is now nearly devoid of feeling, with an almost contempt for humanity. He acts indifferently to his customers and whatever situations they may be in, in forcing them to pawn their goods with him. [9]

Sol allows no one to get close to him, either through friendships or romantic relationships. Even his mistress Tessie (Marketa Kimbrell), the widow of a fellow camp survivor feels his coldness. Marilyn Birchfield (Geraldine Fitzgerald), a neighborhood social worker also shows interest in Nazerman and desires a relationship with him, yet he keeps her at a distance, never letting her get close to him.

The closest thing that he has to a friend is his assistant, Jesus Ortiz (Jaime Sánchez), a young Puerto Rican who works as his assistant. Through Nazerman, Ortiz is gradually and very ambitiously learning the business and looks up to Sol as his “Teacher”. Sol shows him the way to evaluate goods, how to tell if an item is truly made of precious metal such as gold or silver, or of base material such as brass or pewter by rubbing the item on a touchstone and testing the shavings with nitric and hydrochloric acid. Yet Nazerman also keeps Ortiz at a distance, never letting him get too close.

Ortiz is unaware that most of the revenue from the pawn shop comes from shady sources, mainly as a front for a money-laundering operation run by local racketeer Rodriguez (Brock Peters). And Nazerman himself is naïve of all the nefarious activities that source his income.

Nazerman also explains to Ortiz his view of money, brutally and seemingly, at least at that moment, without remorse. Teaching Ortiz that although it can increase or decrease in value, “Money is the whole thing” and that people in general are “scum” and “rejects”. That he does not believe in God, or art, or science, or newspapers, or politics or philosophy.

“Next to the speed of light which Einstein says is the only absolute in the universe, second only to that, I rank *money!*” This is understandable considering all Sol Nazerman has been through, and the feeling of powerlessness he struggles with, his wife and family being killed, and his being unable to do anything about it. [10]

However, this view begins to melt over time as Sol’s flashbacks continue and then intensify, along with his discovering the types of activities Rodriguez is involved in. As these events progress, his hard shell developed as a shield of survival begins to wear thin as he gradually learns to feel emotion again, albeit the emotion of severe pain, driven home later by the death of Jesus Ortiz. And it should be noted that with Ortiz’s blood on his right hand, and his own from a self-inflicted wound along with his serial number tattoo from the concentration camp, both on his left, it is the right that he cannot keep from staring at.

#### VII. THE THREE-MINUTE MBA

A conquered people often, in simply seeking survival, develop hardiness, strength, and a tenacity for improvement, and this has been illustrated many times in many ways throughout history. One of the most powerful and indeed impactful scenes in the film is in which, Sol Nazerman is asked by Jesus Ortiz why business comes so naturally to his people, meaning the Jews.

“You people?... oh, I see...yeah, I see, I see you want to know the secret of our success, is that right? All right, I teach you. First of all, you start off with a, a period of several thousand years during which you have nothing to sustain you but a great bearded Legend. Oh, my friend you have uh, no land to call your own, to grow food on or to hunt. You have nothing. You’re never in one place long enough to have a geography or an army or a land myth. All you have is a little brain. A little brain and a great bearded Legend to sustain you, and convince you that you are...*special*, even in poverty.

“But this, uh...this little brain...that’s the real key you see. With this little brain you go out, and you buy a piece of cloth, and you cut that cloth in two and you go out and sell it for a penny more than you paid for it. Then you run out and buy another piece of cloth, cut it into three pieces and sell it for three

pennies profit. But my friend, during that time you must *never succumb* to buying an extra piece of bread for the table or a toy for a child. No! You must immediately run out, and get yourself a still larger piece of cloth, and so you repeat this process over and over, and suddenly you discover something...

“You have no longer any desire, or any temptation, to dig into the Earth and grow food, or to gaze at a limitless land and call it your own, no, no...You just go on and on and on repeating this process over the centuries, over and over and suddenly you make a grand discovery. You have a Mercantile Heritage! You are a merchant! You’re known as a usurer! A man with secret resources! A witch! A pawnbroker! a *Sheeny!* a *Mocky* and a *Kike!*”

This monologue, delivered in under three minutes, sums up the struggles, as well as the unfortunate resentment accompanying the transfer of power from the oppressor to the oppressed. Indeed, part of the pain of Sol Nazerman’s People. That it was a matter for them to adapt and overcome economically or perish. And they accomplished this initially, predominantly through the mercantile system, the only means available to them, taking the undervalued and making it work for them. Slowly, steadily, ferociously and above all tenaciously, unlike through many of the more traditional methods such as land development, agriculture, technological advancement or even military conquest.

#### VIII. Conclusion

Film and literature have often attempted to illustrate truth through the form of fiction, as truth often cannot be seen, let alone absorbed when it stands naked in the cold light of day. So, the storyteller attempts to show this to an audience through the parable of the story, as it is often easier to relate to truth when it reveals itself through other characters. And the concept of the transfer of power is no exception. Although there have been many films and books written about actual industries and events which took place in them, such as *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988), *Barbarians at the Gate* (1993), *The Founder* (2016), and *Framing John DeLorean* (2019) the principles are often more easily digested by an audience when they are presented on a more human, basic level. Such as through the shaky relationship

between the characters of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, and the concise, bare-bones frankness of a Sol Nazerman.

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