

FROM ORDER TO ORGANIZING:  
RETHINKING POLITICAL REALISM AND DEMOCRATIC THEORY

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This dissertation is about the relationship between the politics of order and the politics of organizing. In particular, it argues that scholars who have taken order to be the central concept of political thought, a group often called political realists, can and should take up the study of organizing as a way of better understanding what order means in democratic politics. Popular organizing creates political power by way of strategically limited form of disorder within an existing political order. Rather than starting with the question of who the people are, how they are represented by the state, or how claims to peoplehood are made, organizing begins with the question of how existing opportunities for political action can be used to constitute the people as a political subject. Studying popular organizing means studying the ideas, institutions, and practices through which disempowered groups can be create new and empowering forms of collective political agency.

I look at how the relationship between political order and political organizing has been theorized by a diverse group of realist thinkers—Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Saul Alinsky. These thinkers allow us look at how different identities and institutions are used to contest and organize against different kinds of political order. For Hobbes, political order is identical to the sovereign state, and organizing, particularly in religious institutions, is tantamount to rebellion. For Marx, order is not simply political but also economic, and the question of what role the state plays in the capitalist economic order is central to his

understanding of what working-class organizing can achieve. Du Bois brings into focus the political order of the United States, which is defined by both capitalism and white supremacy, and he raises the question of how minority organizing against state-sanctioned racial capitalism relates to wider democratic aspirations. Finally, Alinsky's approach to community organizing, which has been profoundly influential for organizers today, provides us with an agent-centric framework for thinking about how organizing confronts an unjust political order and what we, as political theorists, should take from the study of organizing.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vijay Phulwani was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He received his B.A. in Political Science from the Johns Hopkins University in 2007 and his Ph. D. in Government from Cornell University in 2019.

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In *Mao II*, Don DeLillo describes a writer as “a sentence- maker, like a donut-maker only slower.” Sometimes much slower, as this dissertation attests. My interest in the two theoretical positions at the heart of this project—realism and democratic theory—extends back well over a decade to my undergraduate encounter with political theory at Johns Hopkins. I am particularly indebted to William Connolly, Jennifer Culbert, and Daniel Deudney for their guidance in the formative years of my academic development.

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## Introduction – What We Talk About When We Talk About Order

*...what damage is done to the sense of reality by the cultivation of what is now called 'realism.'*<sup>1</sup>  
- George Orwell

On July 7, 2016, Micah Xavier Johnson killed five police officers and injured eleven other people in a mass shooting at an anti-police brutality rally in Dallas, Texas. The attack happened just two weeks before the Republican National Convention, and soon-to-be nominee Donald Trump seized on the killings as way to connect his candidacy to one of the most potent and divisive phrases in American politics. As Trump warned his supporters at a rally in Virginia Beach, “we must maintain law and order at the highest level or we will cease to have a country.” Identifying himself with the rhetoric of “law and order” that has been a staple of conservative politics in the United States since at least the civil rights movement, he told them, “I am the law-and-order candidate.”<sup>2</sup> This moment of self-naming was widely reported in the press, and Trump must have found it to his liking, because he continued to associate himself with “law and order” in the days ahead. When he took the stage in Cleveland to accept his party’s nomination on July 21, he insisted, “there can be no prosperity without law and order.” In a dog whistle reference to the Dallas killings and the movement against police brutality that has crystalized around the slogan “Black Lives Matter,” Trump delivered a “message to every last person threatening the peace on our streets and the safety of our police. When I take the oath of office next year, I will restore law and order to our country.” “In this race for the White House,” he once again proclaimed, “I am the law and order candidate.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, “Second Thoughts on James Burnham,” *Polemic*, (May 1946).

<sup>2</sup> Louis Nelson, “Trump: ‘I Am the Law and Order Candidate,’” *Politico*, (July 11, 2016), <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/trump-law-order-candidate-225372>.

<sup>3</sup> “Donald J. Trump: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117935>.

There is an obvious absurdity to Trump calling himself the candidate of law and order, given the many people who have been charged with crimes committed as part of his presidential campaign and administration. But, as political scientist Amy Erica Smith notes, “it turns out that Trump’s curious use of the term ‘law and order’ is far from unique. ‘Law and order politics’ regularly entails government officials breaking the law.”<sup>4</sup> Smith cites former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, and Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet as examples of other politicians who have used law and order to legitimate illegality, but she could have gone back to the originator of modern law order politics, Richard Nixon. “It is time for some honest talk about the problem of order in the United States,” Nixon told the Republican National Convention in 1968. “The American Revolution was and is dedicated to progress,” he admitted, “but our founders recognized that the first requisite of progress is order.” “So let us have order in America—not the order that suppresses dissent and discourages change but the order which guarantees the right to dissent and provides the basis for peaceful change.”<sup>5</sup> In theory, at least, Nixon’s version of order, with its insistence that “there is no quarrel between progress and order—because neither can exist without the other,” was gentler and more nuanced than Trump’s. In practice, however, from Watergate to COINTELPRO to Cambodia, Nixon provides that clearest example that the rhetorical conjunction of law and order often papers over a massive contradiction between the two terms.

In Nixon’s speech, order plays a more prominent role than law, and this too is typical. As Smith puts it, “‘law and order politics’ is *not* about the law. Instead, it is all about order.” But

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<sup>4</sup> Amy Erica Smith, “‘Law and Order’ Politics Often Undermines the Rule of Law,” *Vox*, (July 9, 2018), <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2018/7/9/17550116/trump-tweet-law-and-order>.

<sup>5</sup> “Richard Nixon: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida,” *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-accepting-the-presidential-nomination-the-republican-national-convention-miami>. On Nixon’s address and the politics of law and order, see Chris Hayes, *A Colony in a Nation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), 26.

what do politicians like Trump and Nixon mean when they talk about order? “Order is a slippery thing,” Chris Hayes notes in his searching account of law and order politics, “it’s in the eyes of the beholder and the judgments of the powerful.”<sup>6</sup> Hayes says he only really understood the dangerous allure of order when reporting in Ferguson, Missouri after the killing of Michael Brown:

I felt a new understanding of the phrase “law and order.” I’d always thought its political appeal lay in the law and all that that term meant: a nation of laws not of men; equal justice under law; the rule of law. But I realized in that moment that the phrase’s power lay in the second term, in the promise of order, where people walk on the sidewalks, not in the street; traffic flows smoothly; and music is played softly and discreetly. In Ferguson that order was being boisterously, furiously, fuck-you’ed. And the beneficiaries of that order—from the local reporters to the homeowners in leafy seclusion just a few blocks away—looked on in horror.<sup>7</sup>

The result of America’s longstanding obsession with the politics of order, and especially of racial order, has been a bifurcation between the political lives of the overwhelmingly white population living in what Hayes calls the liberal, democratic Nation and the overwhelming black population of the Colony. “In the Nation,” he writes, “there is law; in the Colony, there is only a concern with order. In the Nation, you have rights; in the Colony, you have commands.”<sup>8</sup> In law and order politics, order is essentially zero-sum, and justice for some is made possible by state actions that promote a radically unjust order for others. When Micah Johnson opened fire in Dallas, inadvertently opening a path for Trump to solidify his claim to mainstream conservative rhetoric, this was the political order he believed he was attacking.

Not every discussion of political order is an invocation of law and order politics, of course. But it is striking, looking at the rhetoric of the groups on the left Trump positioned himself against and those that have subsequently emerged to oppose him, how slight a role the

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<sup>6</sup> Hayes, *A Colony in a Nation*, 216.

<sup>7</sup> Hayes, *A Colony in a Nation*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Hayes, *A Colony in a Nation*, 37-38.

concept of order plays in their politics. Instead of valorizing order (or even law) as something to be created, maintained, or restored, democratic social and political movements across the left are using a seemingly similar term with a surprisingly different valence. They are talking about organizing.

In the words of Bay Area Black Lives Matter organizing director Nikita Mitchell, “organizing is building and leveraging people power in order to disrupt systems that threaten our lives and the lives of others, and to build our own life-affirming systems.” What are these threatening systems? Ironically, they are the same political institutions that proponents of law and order present as the basis of safety and security. “We organize,” she explains, “because we understand the State benefits from our targeting, criminalization, suffering and death. Therefore, we are committed to protecting and defending Black life, and to dismantling and destroying harmful institutions and systems in order to build, create and innovate.”<sup>9</sup> Or, as Black Lives Matter co-founder Opal Tometti puts it, “for me the solution is always organizing.”<sup>10</sup>

Black Lives Matter is not alone in its commitment to organizing. In the *New York Times*, scholar and labor organizer Jane McAlevey writes, “to save American democracy,” the Democratic Party must “learn the lessons from successful union organizing.”<sup>11</sup> For McAlevey, “organizing, places the agency for success with a continually expanding base of ordinary people, a mass of people never previously involved, who don’t consider themselves activists at all—that’s the point of organizing.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast to McAlevey’s call for “deep organizing,” two

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<sup>9</sup> *Black Lives Matter 4-Year Anniversary Report*, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/resource/4-year-anniversary-report/>, 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Mychal Denzel Smith, “A Q&A With Opal Tometti, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter,” *Nation*, (June 2, 2015), <https://www.thenation.com/article/qa-opal-tometi-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jane McAlevey, “Three Lessons for Winning in November and Beyond,” *The New York Times*, (October 12, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/10/opinion/unions-democrats-organizers-midterms.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10.

staffers from the Bernie Sanders campaign, Becky Bond and Zack Exley, argue for a turn to what they call big organizing. “Big organizing,” they write, “uses technology platforms—particularly free, consumer-oriented, social collaboration tools—to get as many people as possible engaged in executing a campaign plan and to enable those people to talk to each other and to as many voters as possible.”<sup>13</sup> Even *Time* has taken notice, running an article entitled “How the Anti-Trump Resistance Is Organizing Its Outrage” in the lead-up to the 2018 midterms. The author, Charlotte Alter, interviewed grassroots groups across the country and concluded, “if Democrats retake one or both houses of Congress in November, it will be largely because of this emerging national network of progressive organizers.”<sup>14</sup> These authors often mean different—sometimes even contradictory—things when they talk about organizing. But their shared commitment to the idea of popular organizing stands in sharp contrast to Trump, who has never referenced organizing in any of his major political addresses.

It would seem that contemporary politics can be divided into two distinct camps: the party of order and the party of organizing. But this would be too simple. Unlike Micah Johnson, and unlike many earlier generations of political radicals, today’s party of organizing largely eschews violence as a tool for contesting the current political order. Instead, they use popular organizing to challenge the existing order even as they insist that the basic goods of political order—personal safety, security, and well-being—are precisely what they are fighting for. In this sense, the party of organizing is also a party of order. And while Trump has no use for the language of organizing, his political rise has undoubtedly empowered his supporters to organize

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<sup>13</sup> Becky Bond and Zack Exley, *Rules for Revolutionaries: How Big Organizing Can Change Everything* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2016), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Alter, “How the Anti-Trump Resistance Is Organizing Its Outrage,” *Time*, October 8, 2018, <http://time.com/longform/democrat-midterm-strategy/>. Alter adds, “The party seems to be relearning the central lesson of American democracy: what 19th century French writer Alexis de Tocqueville called ‘the knowledge of how to combine.’”

themselves in support of his exclusionary vision of order, as seen most dramatically at the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Without some kind of organization, and someone to organize it, there could be no party of order in the first place. There is, therefore, a kernel of organizing inescapably embedded in demand for political order. Thus, the opposition between order and organizing is not as simple as it initially appears.

This dissertation is about the relationship between the politics of order and the politics of organizing. In particular, it argues that scholars who have taken order to be the central concept of political thought, a group often called political realists, can and should take up the study of organizing as a way of better understanding what order means in democratic politics. I do this by looking at how the relationship between political order and political organizing has been theorized by a diverse group of realist thinkers—Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Saul Alinsky. Though widely disparate in time and in political orientation, their work can help us think through a series of related questions about democratic organizing against visions of political order that are statist, capitalist, white supremacist, or some combination thereof. Furthermore, trying to grasp their ideas by way of the organizing strategies they espoused, and not simply the normative visions of order they rejected or upheld, gives us a clearer understanding of how they understood both structure and agency to be involved in the production and revision of political order. Studying organizing also helps us overcome a simplistic opposition between order and disorder because it shows us how political change is brought about by the dynamic interaction between them. Treating order as something that is must always be subject to change and contestation through democratic organizing helps us see how we can affirm the importance of order without opening the door to law and order politics.

In this introduction, I trace a path for realist thought from the problem of order to the problem of popular organizing. I begin with an examination of what realist political theory is and where its basic commitment to order comes from. I point out the difficulties that follow on realism's understanding of order, particularly the way its static view of order undermines its simultaneous insistence that politics is a realm of action, and I survey some of the ways in which realists interested in democratic theory have tried to overcome these difficulties. Then, in what I see as a friendly amendment, I show how these two ideas—order and agency—are brought together in the category of organizing, which treats order as an ongoing and sometimes contradictory set of political actions. Finally, I turn to the question of how realism's commitment to historical specificity and its emphasis on strategic concepts like power and interest, rather than juridical concepts like right and justice, makes it ideal for studying the role popular organizing has played in the history of political thought. On the whole, my project is less an analysis or critique of today's realist political theory than it is an effort to do realism differently by uncovering some of the things that realists have used theory to do in the past.

### Political Realism: Putting Order First?

Many political thinkers have tried to claim the mantle of realism for their ideas; few have succeeded. To claim one's own position as realistic is an inherently polemical move because it brands one's opponents as unrealistic. But there has been little agreement on what makes an idea realistic. As Raymond Williams cautions in a different context, "the critical attention which is necessary in most cases of the use of real, realistic and reality is at least equally necessary in the case of this extraordinary current variation in uses of realism."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in ethics,

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 257-265. Williams is primarily interested in realism as it is used in art and philosophy, but his discussion is also instructive for

epistemology, ontology, law, and even in literature, realism is used regularly, and not necessarily controversially, to describe a particular theoretical approach to the subject. There are realists in all these fields, but there are also critics who are comfortable with the explicit rejection of realism. There are even self-described anti-realists to be found. In the study of politics, however, the situation is different. Only in international relations has a group of scholars been able to call themselves realists and have others go along with it, and there, realism was a domestication of the long-established *realpolitik* tradition.<sup>16</sup> Aside from that case, political scientists and theorists have long been unwilling to allow anyone to claim the rhetorical high ground of political realism.

It should be surprising, then, that in the past decade a “new realism” in political theory has come to refer to definite position within the field. In a special issue on realism in the *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Alison McQueen defines realism as:

a family of approaches to the study, practice, and normative evaluation of politics that (a) affirms the autonomy (or, more minimally, the distinctiveness) of politics; (b) takes disagreement, conflict, and power to be ineradicable and constitutive features of politics; (c) rejects as ‘utopian’ or ‘moralist’ those approaches, practices, and evaluations which seem to deny these facts; and (d) prioritizes political order and stability over justice (or, more minimally, rejects the absolute priority of justice over other political values).<sup>17</sup>

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its more recent political uses. ‘Let’s be realistic’”, he notes, “probably more often means ‘let us accept the limits of this situation’ (*limits* meaning *hard facts*, often of power or money, in their existing and established forms) than ‘let us look at the whole truth of this situation’ (which can allow that an existing reality is changeable or is changing).” This is the besetting sin of much of the new political realism.

<sup>16</sup> See John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Alison McQueen, “Political Realism and the Realist ‘Tradition,’” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (May 2017): 296–313. In addition to McQueen, articles that attempt to answer some version of the question “what is realism?” include William A. Galston, “Realism in Political Theory,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (October 2010): 385–411, 385; David Runciman, “What Is Realistic Political Philosophy?” *Metaphilosophy* 43, no. 1–2 (January 2012): 58–70; Jeremy Waldron, “Political Political Theory: An Inaugural Lecture,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (March 2013): 1–23; Mark Philp, “What Is to Be Done? Political Theory and Political Realism,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (October 2010): 466–84; Alice Baderin, “Two Forms of Realism in Political Theory,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 13, no. 2 (April 2014): 132–53; and Matt Sleat, “Politics Recovered—On the Revival of Realism in Contemporary Political Theory,” Matt Sleat ed. *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 1–25.

This definition, with its four separate conditions and its strong and weak variants, gives an accurate sense of the variety of realist scholarship and the disagreements within it. But McQueen, along with every other author who writes about the subject, acknowledges that political theory's interest in realism was sparked by the posthumous publication of Bernard Williams's political essays as *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. As a result, we must look to Williams to understand realism's fundamental commitments and conceptual apparatus. What we find is that there is an underlying tension running through realist thought between its desires to explain politics as order and politics as action (or agency). This tension helps explain some of the persistent features of debates surrounding realism and the unsatisfying place in which many of them have ended up, and it is my contention that organizing offers a productive way forward for realist thought.

Williams described his interest in realism as “a reaction to the intense moralism of much American political and indeed legal theory, which is predictably matched by the concentration of American political science on the coordination of private or group interests.” This division created “a Manichaeian dualism of soul and body, high-mindedness and the pork barrel, and the existence of each helps to explain how anyone could have accepted the other.”<sup>18</sup> For Williams, the objective of realism is to acquire “a broader view of the content of politics, not confined to interests, together with a more realistic view of the powers, opportunities, and limitations of political actors, where all the considerations that bear on political action—both ideals and, for example, political survival—can come to one focus of decision.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, Williams saw realism as a way of making sense of political action by examining the factors that weight on political

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<sup>18</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning*, 12.

actors when they have to make a decision. The two kinds of vision he wished to combine here, “a broad view of the content of politics” and “a more realistic view” of political actors themselves, were meant to be complimentary. One emphasized the ends people use politics to pursue, and the other emphasized the means they have at their disposal in particular situations. Crucially, political action cannot be reduced to either means or ends, nor can it be reduced to an abstract formulation of the relationship between them, since the specific identity of a political actor must always be taken into consideration before questions of means and ends can be asked.<sup>20</sup> It was to emphasize the centrality of action to anything calling itself a political theory that Williams repeatedly invoked the line from Goethe’s *Faust*, “in the beginning was the deed.”<sup>21</sup>

However, saying that politics is about action does not tell us anything about what makes an action political. This question, the question of what politics is for, is what Williams calls the first political question. He writes:

I identify the “first” political question in Hobbesian terms as the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation. It is “first” because solving it is the condition of solving, indeed posing, any others. It is not (unhappily) first in the sense that once solved, it never has to be solved again. This is particularly important because, a solution to the first question being required *all the time*, it is affected by historical circumstances; it is not a matter of arriving at a solution to the first question at the level of state-of-nature theory and then going on to the rest of the agenda.<sup>22</sup>

To borrow a phrase from Judith Shklar, political realism means putting order first. Order is both the fundamental end of political action and a constraint on the pursuit of other ends or the use of means that might conflict with the preservation of order. In any political decision, order is always a relevant consideration, though not necessarily the decisive one. This does not mean that

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<sup>20</sup> I take this to be one of the guiding ideas of Williams’s work in moral philosophy. It also appears in some of his writings on politics, both in *In the Beginning Was the Deed* and, especially, in Bernard Williams, “Politics and Moral Character,” *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 54-70.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning*, 3.

any political order better than a hypothetical war of all against all is legitimate.<sup>23</sup> It means that, beyond the mere existence of an answer, the considerations that determine what counts as an acceptable answer to the first political question are historically specific in ways that cannot be settled at the level of philosophical abstraction. For my purposes, the important thing is that the new realism, from its beginning, has invoked the primacy of order while also looking for ways get beyond the pessimistic vision of order as the sole end of politics.

Realism's other leading figure, Raymond Geuss, tries to push Williams's ideas in a more radical direction, but he inherits many of the same difficulties Williams faced. According to Geuss, realists "must start from and be concerned in the first instance not with how people ought ideally (or ought 'rationally') to act, what they ought to desire, or value, the kind of people they ought to be, etc., but, rather, with the way the social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate in some society at some given time, and what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances."<sup>24</sup> Or, more pithily, "political philosophy must recognise that politics is in the first instance about action and the contexts of action, not about mere beliefs or propositions."<sup>25</sup> Like Williams, however, Geuss gives priority to the problem of order. Realism is "centred on the study of historically instantiated forms of collective human action with special attention to the variety of ways in which people can structure and organise their action so as to

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<sup>23</sup> Of all the concepts in realist thought, legitimacy, typically understood to mean the authority of the state to use coercive violence, is the one that has received the most systematic attention. The best article on realism and legitimacy is Matt Sleat, "Legitimacy in Realist Thought: Between Moralism and *Realpolitik*," *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (June 2014): 314–37. Sleat argues, I think correctly, that legitimacy on realist terms is always incomplete and imperfectly achieved, that "the process of legitimation is never going to be able to fully escape the very power relations that stand in need of justification and will rather always remain deeply immersed in them" (17). Legitimacy, in other words, is not and never can be settled; it is always an important terrain for political conflict. Consequently, I agree with Sam Bagg, "Against Legitimacy: Towards an Action-Centered Realism" (unpublished manuscript on file with author), that realists should move on from debates about legitimacy.

<sup>24</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 11.

limit and control forms of disorder that they might find excessive or intolerable.”<sup>26</sup> Order, or at least the limitation of disorder, is singled out as the decisive end of political action, though Geuss is also careful to note that ideas of order and disorder are historically specific and require historically specific solutions.

In the past few years, the resurgence of law and order politics has brought to the fore some of the disadvantages of realism’s fixation on order. Realists will respond, quite fairly, that law and order politics is not what they mean by order at all. In fact, it is the very opposite of what Williams was doing when he connected order to “protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation.” What’s more, subsequent realists have followed him by devising a wide range of sophisticated philosophical devices to keep their idea of order apart from domination in the name of order.<sup>27</sup> But political language does not belong to academics alone, and many self-professed realists, along with other scholars generally sympathetic to their ideas, have already raised concerns about the priority of order as a dangerously anti-democratic, even anti-political, element of realist thought.

Looking at Williams in particular, Bonnie Honig and Marc Stears have diagnosed a conflict in realism between “a free-flowing, open-ended, agonistic politics, attuned to both the possibilities and the dangers of expressive, (dis)orderly action, and the insistence on a more cautious, safety-seeking, pessimistic pursuit of stability and order.”<sup>28</sup> Janosch Prinz worries that, for too many realists, “the appropriate focus of political theory is deemed to rest on order and stability which may lead to political conservatism, namely a tendency to affirm the status quo,

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<sup>26</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> See Paul Sagar, “Legitimacy and Domination,” Matt Sleat ed. *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 113-139.

<sup>28</sup> Bonnie Honig and Marc Stears, “The new realism: From modus vivendi to justice,” Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears eds., *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011): 177-205, 193.

given how difficult it is to predict the effects of political change so that change could be known to be compatible with order and stability.”<sup>29</sup> Prinz believes that Geuss’s brand of realism offers an antidote to this problem. But, as McQueen points out (channeling E.H. Carr), “the realist’s embrace of a certain kind of unmasking criticism, as both a *psychological and an epistemological matter*, leaves her suspicious of even the well-justified moral beliefs and therefore at perpetual risk of political paralysis.”<sup>30</sup> Even William Galston, who influentially described “the proposition that civil order is the *sine qua non* for every other political good” as a “building-block of the realists’ view,” has more recently cautioned, “it is too simple, therefore, for political theorists (especially those who regard themselves as realists) to give strict priority to order over other considerations.”<sup>31</sup>

The most forceful critique comes from Lorna Finlayson. In an incisive dissection of the argumentative and rhetorical moves in realist scholarship, she describes how “the realist emphasis on the permanence of conflict and disagreement (and so on) goes hand in hand with a tendency to emphasise ‘order’ or ‘stability’, or the idea of a ‘modus vivendi’, as the highest ‘realistic’ political aspiration.”<sup>32</sup> The permanence of conflict and the permanent need for the provision of order are turned into enduring constraints on what politics can do. She argues that “if, as realists, we place emphasis on historically constant factors which we regard as constraints on political possibility – and if our main objection to the liberal mainstream is that it overlooks these factors – then our realism will inevitably tend to nudge us towards a greater acceptance of

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<sup>29</sup> Janosch Prinz, “Raymond Geuss’ Radicalization of Realism in Political Theory,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 42, no. 8 (October 2016): 777–96, 788.

<sup>30</sup> Alison McQueen, “The Case for Kinship: Classical Realism and Political Realism,” Matt Sleat ed. *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 243–269, 262.

<sup>31</sup> William Galston, “Anger, Humiliation, and Political Theory: Bringing the Darker Passions Back In,” *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* Matt Sleat ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 93–113, 94.

<sup>32</sup> Lorna Finlayson, “*With Radicals like These, Who Needs Conservatives?* Doom, Gloom, and Realism in Political Theory,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 16, no. 3 (July 2017): 264–82, 269.

the status quo.” Should this particular trajectory come to dominate realist scholarship, “then realism is a de facto conservative force in political theory.<sup>33</sup> That said, Finlayson is at pains to point out that none of these argumentative moves are necessitated by realism’s core theoretical commitments. Embracing realism “need not mean accepting what is in effect a de-politicisation of a ‘non-ideal’ world – the shortcomings of which are traced to unalterable historical universals – and thus a muting of calls to change it.”<sup>34</sup>

Alongside these critiques of realism’s narrow vision of order, other scholars have put forward more progressive programs for realist theory. In using realist concepts to study popular organizing, I join with their efforts to unite the new realism and democratic theory. Initially, realism was not especially interested in democracy, which was treated as one of the historically specific features of modern liberal states that needed to be put aside to understand the deeper nature of political order.<sup>35</sup> The first book to bring realism’s concepts to bear on democratic social movements was Marc Stears’s *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of New Politics*. Stears sets up a division in contemporary political theory between deliberative democrats and what he calls “democratic realists,” a motley assemblage of scholars, some of whom embraced the label of realism and many who did not.<sup>36</sup> Rather than identify with either of these groups, Stears aligns himself with an “American radical tradition” that combined democratic realism’s account of the means necessary for effective political action and

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<sup>33</sup> Finlayson, “*With Radicals like These*,” 270.

<sup>34</sup> Finlayson, “*With Radicals like These*,” 276.

<sup>35</sup> In *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Geuss acknowledges the importance of the idea of democracy as conceptual innovation in shaping modern politics. But he has nothing further to say about democracy except that it is “a term originally coined sometime in the mists of the sixth century BC, which was politically active for a couple of centuries, and was then put away on the shelf for two thousand years to be resurrected and redefined out of all recognition in the early twentieth century” (46).

<sup>36</sup> Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4. Notably, Stears excludes Williams from his list of democratic realists. Honig and Stears, “The new realism: From modus vivendi to justice,” recognizes the democratic side of Williams’s thought.

deliberative democracy's beliefs about the ends political actors should strive for. The ideas of the radical tradition offer guidance on how "to decide between political actions that seek to preserve the best aspects of the prevailing order and those that, even if riskier, might help to construct a better, fairer, more inclusive alternative."<sup>37</sup> Though Stears does not theorize organizing as a distinct form of political agency, his work suggest that without a healthy respect for disorder, realism's commitment to political order is a dead-end.

Since *Demanding Democracy*, an increasing number of scholars have explicitly embraced the category of democratic realism, typically to emphasize the important contribution realism can make to the historical study and contemporary reinvigoration of democratic politics. Josiah Ober has constructed a theory and defense of "basic democracy," particularly as it was practiced in ancient Athens, that follows Williams "in rejecting the necessity for political theory of establishing a prior ground for morality" while insisting that "ethical principles do prove to emerge from the practice of democratic politics."<sup>38</sup> Richard Bellamy defends democracy against a "neo-Machiavellian" belief that "to achieve the democratic ends of government *for* the people, a leader must circumvent and manipulate the democratic means of government *by* the people," by distinguishing the neo-Machiavellian view from Machiavelli's own take on democracy.<sup>39</sup> In a related move, J. S. Maloy argues that a democratic variant of the reason of state tradition, which holds "force and fraud as the primary weapons available in political conflict," is needed to teach the people to exercise the power needed to hold their leaders accountable.<sup>40</sup> Like Maloy, Jason Frank sees a "radical democratic realism" in 19<sup>th</sup> century American populism's efforts "to

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<sup>37</sup> Stears, *Demanding Democracy*, 222.

<sup>38</sup> Josiah Ober, *Demopolis: Democracy before Liberalism in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 6.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Bellamy, "The Paradox of the Democratic Prince," 167.

<sup>40</sup> J.S. Maloy, *Democratic Statecraft: Political Realism and Popular Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 199.

generate cooperative democratic power outside the established institutions of governance.”<sup>41</sup> A number of other scholars have also followed Stears’s lead in seeing American pragmatism—particularly the work of John Dewey—as an important resource for democratic realism.<sup>42</sup> Even Stears, following his time as speechwriter to former Labour leader Ed Miliband, has come to defend a more affirmatively realist posture.<sup>43</sup> These authors point us towards a reconsideration of how a realist lens can be applied to some of the classic problems of democratic politics. I suggest that the best way to do this is to reconceive the primacy of political order in terms of the activity of political organizing.

### From Order to Organizing

To see how order and organizing can be related to each other in a realist framework, I want to briefly turn to one of realism’s most underappreciated ancestors, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British philosopher R.G. Collingwood. Best known for his work on the philosophy of history, Collingwood’s influence on both Williams and on the historical contextualism of Quentin Skinner is well-known.<sup>44</sup> However, his far less known political writings, particularly those from

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<sup>41</sup> Jason Frank, “Populism and Praxis,” *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 629-643.

<sup>42</sup> See Alexander Livingston, “Between Means and Ends: Reconstructing Coercion in Dewey’s Democratic Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 03 (August 2017): 522–34; Samuel Bagg, “Between Critical and Normative Theory: Predictive Political Theory as a Deweyan Realism,” *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 2016): 233–44; Matthew Festenstein, “Pragmatism, Realism and Moralism,” *Political Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (February 2016): 39–49; John Medearis, “Disenchantment versus Reconstruction: Walter Lippman, John Dewey, and Varieties of Democratic Realism,” Matt Sleat ed. *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 140-165; and John Medearis, *Why Democracy is Oppositional* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> See Marc Stears, “Democracy for Realists,” *New Statesman*, (September 22, 2016): 61–62, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2016/09/new-times-marc-stears-why-democracy-long-hard-slow-business>.

<sup>44</sup> Skinner discusses the influence of Collingwood at greatest length in Quentin Skinner, “The rise of, challenge to and prospects for a Collingwoodian approach to the history of political thought,” Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk eds. *The History of Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 175-188. Williams mentions Collingwood in *In the Beginning was the Deed* several times (see ps. 11, 53-5, 67-9), and a posthumous collection of his contains a previously unpublished essay on Collingwood: Bernard Williams, “An Essay on Collingwood,” Myles Burnyeat ed. *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006): 341-360. The best treatment of Williams’s use of

the late 1920's, bear a striking similarity to the arguments of today's realists. What Collingwood shows us is that it is possible to incorporate an expanded and active conception of order into the basic framework of realist thought. Collingwood believed it was a mistake for political theory to take the concept of the state, or the idea of sovereignty, as the starting point for understanding what politics is. "Instead of putting the central issue in the form of the question 'What are the attributes of the state,'" he wrote, "I propose to put it in the form of the question 'What is political action?'"<sup>45</sup> While state-centered theories of politics often convert questions of what political actors should do into irresolvable definitional fights about what the essential attributes of a political actor are, Collingwood thought this impasse could be avoided by starting with the category of action. What makes an action a specifically political action, as opposed to an economic or a moral action (the categories he invoked by way of contrast), is that it is guided by the idea of order. "Political action," as he saw it, "is essentially regulation, control, the imposition of order and regularity upon things."<sup>46</sup> In other words, "politics means the organization of activities."<sup>47</sup>

So far this is a familiar expression of the realist approach. But Collingwood drew some important consequences from his argument that today's realists too often neglect. First, his understanding of order was not limited to the basic provision of security. Instead, "regulation or organization, which is the essence of political activity, consists in thinking out a scheme of action, whether for myself or for others, and putting that scheme into practice."<sup>48</sup> This include

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Collingwood is Colin Koopman, "Bernard Williams on Philosophy's Need for History," *The Review of Metaphysics* 64, no. 1 (2010): 3–30. Collingwood also appears surprisingly often throughout the essays in *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*, one of the most important edited volumes for the development of the new realism.

<sup>45</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy* ed. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 93.

<sup>46</sup> Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 100.

<sup>47</sup> Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 114.

not only issues of physical safety, but also more complex questions of social organization. Second, because his idea of order was so expansive, Collingwood saw politics as much larger than the activities of the state. Most of the political action in a society does not directly involve the state at all, and there is an extent to which “political action is therefore bound to overflow the limits of the state and to appear wherever there is action of any kind.”<sup>49</sup> While the state plays a special role as an institution that exists expressly for the settlement of political conflicts, “every association is a political association, and it is a mere superstition to regard ‘the state’ as having the monopoly of political powers and functions.”<sup>50</sup> Organization, thus, is an activity that people carry out in all parts of their political lives, not simply through the state. Finally, Collingwood understood that even though the goal of political action is order, it always involves an element of disorder, as well. “The imposition of order upon pre-existing action can only mean the supersession of one type of order by another,” he wrote, “which implies the cessation of one kind of action and the beginning of a different kind.”<sup>51</sup> Order and disorder can never be kept entirely apart, and political action does not try to separate them so much as it tries to relate them a productive way. This is the essential political dynamic of organizing, and it brings together realism’s dual concerns with order and agency into the single concept.

The essence of the word ‘organize’ is the idea that parts can be placed in a functional relation to each other in the context of some larger whole. As an early 19<sup>th</sup> century dictionary defined it, to organize means “to construct so that the parts shall be mutually subservient to each other.”<sup>52</sup> The paradigm case is the body, which is alive because of the functioning of its organs, even though the organs can only live within the living body. When applied to politics, the

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<sup>49</sup> Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 113.

<sup>50</sup> Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 105.

<sup>51</sup> Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 101.

<sup>52</sup> James Barclay, *A Complete and Universal English Dictionary...* (London, 1799), ORM-ORT.

broadest definition of organizing is simply that it is the creation, direction, and maintenance of collective forms of political agency.<sup>53</sup> This definition allows us study organizing while remaining agnostic about what collective agency is as a philosophical question. Proponents of robust theories of group agency will certainly ask different questions about what organizing is and how it works than will scholars committed to methodological individualism.<sup>54</sup> But even if organizing is conceived of as nothing more than the dissemination of common knowledge and the creation of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for overcoming collective action problems, it is still an important form of political action and should similarly be an important subject for realist thought.

Under the broad definition, organizing is a universal feature of political life; as long as there is collective agency, it is possible to talk about how a collective agent is organized.<sup>55</sup> However, the word ‘organizing’ is a relatively recent addition to the English political lexicon, dating back no further than the Age of Revolutions.<sup>56</sup> One of the earliest examples in English of ‘organize’ being used in a political sense is Jefferson’s claim in the Declaration of Independence

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<sup>53</sup> My approach to the ontology of collective agency is broadly consistent with Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002). Hacking draws on Foucault to argue, “we constitute ourselves at a place and time, using materials that have a distinctive and historically formed organization. The genealogy to be unraveled is how we, as peoples in civilizations with histories, have become moral agents, through constituting ourselves as moral agents in quite specific, local, historical ways” (3). Though Hacking is focused on subject formation at the individual level, his is the same question I ask about the collective political agents who are involved in organizing. Once again, an important precedent is found in Collingwood, whose account of “metaphysics as a historical science” in his *Essay on Metaphysics* and *Autobiography* anticipates many of these later arguments.

<sup>54</sup> However, Christian List and Philip Pettit, *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) argues for a robust theory of group agency that is compatible with methodological individualism. List and Pettit describe their theory as an example of a “realist” theory of group agency, but it is unrelated to realism in political theory. See also Michael Bratman, *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014) for a theory of collective agency that, much like Collingwood, emphasizes the significance of different individuals being able to share a common plan.

<sup>55</sup> This does mean that the concept of organizing is underspecified or vacuous. Another important political concept that works like this is representation. Only in the modern period did theories of representation become important to politics, but once they did, questions of representation could be asked about political systems that did not describe themselves in terms of representation.

<sup>56</sup> The major exception is that it was normal, particularly for republican thinkers, to talking about organizing a militia.

that “it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish [the existing form of government], and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and *organizing* its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness” (italics mine). As late as 1816, the American linguist John Pickering noted that ‘organize,’ when “used in speaking of political bodies,” was something of an Americanism.<sup>57</sup> This suggests that prior to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, political organizing was not seen as problem by most political thinkers, at least not explicitly.<sup>58</sup> Organizing, therefore, can be seen both as a universal political logic and a historically-specific problem that emerged alongside modern attempts at popular self-government in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>59</sup>

In a sense, many realists already are concerned with organizing as it applies to one particular form of political agency: the sovereign state. For not only are realists interested in the state as the maintainer of order and source of action, they are also interested in how the state, itself an embodiment of political order, is created, maintained, and directed by the actions of other political actors.<sup>60</sup> But, when we look at the way organizing is invoked by contemporary political groups like Black Lives Matter, it is clear that realism’s state-centric approach is too

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<sup>57</sup>John Pickering, *A Vocabulary...* (Boston: Cummings and Hillard, 1816), 144-5.

<sup>58</sup> The late 18<sup>th</sup> century origins of ‘organizing’ also put pressure on like Sheldon Wolin’s account of “The Age of Organization” in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Change in Western Political Thought Expanded Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 315-384. Wolin portrays organization as the sublimation of politics and a substitute for the revolutionary tradition of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But that idea of societies as containing parts that could be rearranged through political action and made to work better was originally part of the revolutionary tradition, not a replacement for it. ‘Organizing,’ perhaps, better preserves that active, political sense than ‘organization’ does.

<sup>59</sup> On the history of modern political organizing, see Henk te Velde and Maartje Janse, eds., *Organizing Democracy: Reflections on the Rise of Political Organizations in the Nineteenth Century* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> In *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Geuss explicitly identifies the state as the central conceptual innovation of modern politics, the cornerstone of the modern solution to the problem of order (42-50). With Williams, on the other hand, the state slips in unannounced as the entity that must solve the problem of order in a legitimate way (*In the Beginning*, 3). No argument is given as to why the state should be the major source of order or the unique object of disputes over legitimacy. Consequently, David Runciman, “Political Theory and Real Politics in the Age of the Internet,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (March 2017): 3–21 criticizes realist arguments for having “a distinctively twentieth-century feel to them, in that they identify power and legitimacy with the state and with the communicative and coercive instruments available to the state” (4).

limited. To understand the importance of organizing today, we must specifically investigate what I call popular or democratic organizing. It is worth noting, however, that studying popular organizing is also a useful way of learning about the state. For the relationship between the state and popular organizing has rarely been a simple matter of controlling the state or overthrowing it. Popular organizing has frequently sought an agonistic relationship to the state as both an object of political pressure and site of continual and productive conflict. We have as much to learn about state by studying the ideas of people who struggle with it as we do from studying those who seek to control it, and the study of popular organizing provides us with a way of accessing this perspective.<sup>61</sup>

Popular organizing, as I understand it, creates political power by way of strategically limited form of disorder within an existing political order. Rather than starting with the question of who the people are, how they are represented by the state, or how claims to peoplehood are made, organizing begins with the question of how existing opportunities for political action can be used to constitute the people as a political subject. Around what sorts of institutions can collective agents be forged, and what possibilities for action does the current order give rise to? How do different kinds of organizing help people learn to exercise power in a democratic way? These are traditionally realist questions insofar as they are questions about how political actions are shaped by in institutions and the identities of the agents who inhabit them. At the same time, organizing goes beyond realism's concern with states, statesman, and the legitimation of sovereign power to understand the emergent forms of popular agency that vivify democratic life.

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<sup>61</sup> Mark Philp, *Political Conduct* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) does engage with protest leaders and other nonstate actors, if only to a limited extent. Though it came out before our current realist revival, Andrew Sabl, *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) is of a piece with Sabl's later, explicitly realist work, and it is unusual in its emphasis on political offices outside the state. See chapter four for more detail.

In short, studying popular organizing means studying the ideas, institutions, and practices through which disempowered groups can be create new and empowering forms of collective political agency.

Following on both Collingwood's analysis of political action and the definitions of organizing given at the beginning of this chapter, we can say that popular organizing operates at two simultaneous levels. The first is the process of creating a collective agent by bringing people together in some durable, more-or-less institutionalized sense. Second, organizing entails the disordering of an existing political order as a result the very same actions through which the collective agent is organized. Crucially, these levels operate simultaneously, not sequentially. Organizing is always about disordering and reordering what is already there. Thus, while order is always important, it is also always being disorganized and reorganized by actions. Organizing is a way of talking about the problem of order that makes it clear that this is a dynamic process and not a static condition. Understanding order dynamically allows us to see how popular organizing can simultaneously challenge and promote order and why a legitimate political order must be open to this kind of contestation. Without this recognition, the realist emphasis on order risks being a problem more than a solution.

### Realism, History, and the Study of Popular Organizing

One of the major difficulties with studying organizing from a theoretical perspective is that organizing is at least as concerned with the practical 'how' questions of political action as it is with the 'what' and 'why' questions that are more familiar to political theorists. Organizing draws on the ideas, concepts, and theories that we often study, but it is also an inherently strategic discourse. Proposals about how to organize and what to organize around are highly

dependent on empirical questions about the distribution of power and the feasibility of specific courses of action that theory cannot answer. Consequently, theories of organizing often look little like the kinds of arguments we are used to treating as theories of politics. They are expressed in plans of action inseparable from the circumstances that produced them. In principle, this means organizing should be grist to realism's mill. The study of historically specific ideas about political action in terms of constraining circumstances and the strategic calculations needed to overcome or bypass those constraints is precisely what realists say political theory should concern itself with. However, as I have argued above, many of the most influential articulations of realism have been loath to pursue these questions beyond the confines of the state. Perhaps the problem with popular agency from a typical realist perspective is that it is disorderly, not at all like the subtle machinations of the expert politicians that realists often commend. But emphasizing organizing as a realist practice helps us see that popular agency, even when it contests the existing political order, is not quite as disorderly as it first appears, because organizing already puts us on the way to the creation of a new order.

In the chapters that follow, I look at how popular organizing has been theorized in the work of four modern political thinkers—Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Saul Alinsky. I realize this is an odd list. Hobbes and Marx familiar objects of realist scholarship, while Du Bois and Alinsky are either scarcely mentioned or scarcely known by most realists. On the other hand, while three of them (Marx, Du Bois, and Alinsky) embraced popular organizing, Hobbes certainly did not. Nevertheless, there are benefits to considering a wide range of thinkers, and there is an overarching conceptual logic to the development of the chapters. First, these thinkers allow us look at how different identities and institutions are used to contest and organize against different kinds of political order. For Hobbes, political order is identical to the

sovereign state, and organizing, particularly in religious institutions, is tantamount to rebellion. For Marx, order is not simply political but also economic, and the question of what role the state plays in the capitalist economic order is central to his understanding of what working-class organizing can achieve. Du Bois brings into focus the political order of the United States, which is defined by both capitalism and white supremacy, and he raises the question of how minority organizing against state-sanctioned racial capitalism relates to wider democratic aspirations. Finally, Alinsky's approach to community organizing, which has been profoundly influential for organizers today, provides us with an agent-centric framework for thinking about how organizing confronts an unjust political order and what we, as political theorists, should take from the study of organizing.

Other important political thinkers appear throughout the chapters. Some are canonical realists, like Thucydides and Machiavelli, who I use to draw out the realist elements in the work of my main authors. Others, like Jane Addams and Ella Baker, are theorists and practitioners who helped define what popular organizing is and why it still matters.<sup>62</sup> My readings are informed not only by their work, but also by the secondary scholarship around them.

Machiavelli, in particular, is often read with careful attention to his historical work and how it illuminates the kinds of agency he analyzed in the *Prince* and the *Discourses*.<sup>63</sup> As one of my guiding interests is the way popular organizing relates to the modern state, Hobbes makes a

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<sup>62</sup> Ella Baker, in particular, is the organizer whose work has been most influential for Black Lives Matter groups. Her chief biographer, Barbara Ransby, has been a mentor to many leading BLM organizers. See Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Barbara Ransby *Making all Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> For example, it is now impossible to discuss Machiavelli's views on democracy without referring to Ciompi Rebellion and other events in his *Florentine Histories*. For a summary of this work, see Boris Litvin, "Mapping Rule and Subversion: Perspective and the Democratic Turn in Machiavelli Scholarship," *European Journal of Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (January 2019): 3–25.

better starting for me than Machiavelli, but it might be fair to say that I read Hobbes, Marx, Du Bois, and Alinsky as if they were all Machiavellians. And in a way, I think they were.

But the thinkers I engage with are more than just representative figures of different kinds of organizing. Across the first three chapters in particular, I trace a sequence of questions about the kind of power that popular organizing can amass and the purposes to which it can be put in remaking a political order. As I will show, each of these thinkers came to confront the problem of organizing when it becomes clear that the more conventional realist categories of states, statesmanship, and individual leadership were inadequate to explaining political events that were driven by larger, popular forces and required similarly large-scale responses.

I begin with Hobbes because his work precedes the widespread recognition of political organizing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and, therefore, gives us insight into how the kinds of activities that would come to be called organizing were understood previously. Hobbes's question was whether institutions capable of independent organizing can exist outside the immediate control of the state or whether this will inevitably lead to rebellion and civil war. Later, the question of how organizing can bring political power to bear on the state without collapsing into civil war was taken up by Marx in his writings on the English working class. Marx looks at how workers used political and economic pressure (then a novel idea) to compel the state to act against the interests of capitalism. Though Marx is normally seen as a theorist of the party form, his own activities with the International Working Men's Association illustrate the importance of organized political pressure groups to the spread of democracy and the development of the working class. In his early career, Du Bois tried to organize pressure politics along similar lines through the NAACP, but, by the 1930s, he had come to recognize the limits of pressure for African-Americans. Instead, Du Bois drew on the history of black politics during Reconstruction

to argue for a cooperative economy that would give African-Americans security and a partial exit from racial capitalism. The goal was not to abandon the fight against white supremacy but to address the needs of minorities who are not able to participate in majoritarian organizing on equal terms. Alinsky, in turn, helps us bring the lessons of democratic organizing into the present by teaching us how organizers think like realists and why realists should learn to think like organizers.

There are two ways in which realism is important to this project. As McQueen argues, realism is not so much a doctrine or a settled tradition as “a range of arguments that have been classified as realist, and recognized as such by self-proclaimed realists, across time and space.”<sup>64</sup> Correspondingly, I try to show how each of these thinkers drew on conceptual vocabularies and analytic methods that are recognizably related to today’s realist scholarship. This takes no special effort for Alinsky, who proclaimed himself a realist loudly and often. As for Hobbes, I show how he applied the lessons of early modern reason of state theory to understand the actions of the nonstate actors who fomented rebellion. Marx did much the same thing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse of *realpolitik*, using it to differentiate between superficial appearances and deeper realities in political and economic thought. Du Bois, on the other hand, framed his organizational arguments by way of a familiar realist trope, that of politics as a realm of tragedy. Contemporary realists regularly emphasize the importance of a tragic worldview to a realist understanding of politics, but Du Bois shows us how to keep that tragic vision from collapsing into the kind of quiescence or conservatism that Finlayson has warned against.

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<sup>64</sup> Alison McQueen, “Political Realism and the Realist ‘Tradition,’” 296. This definition “allows us to retroactively classify some of Machiavelli’s *arguments* about the autonomy of politics and Hobbes’ arguments about the priority of political order as realist without falling into the anachronistic trap of identifying these thinkers themselves as ‘realists’ or of implicitly attributing to them the intention of putting forward a ‘realist doctrine’” (307-8). Though I sometimes refer to the thinkers themselves as realists for convenience, this sort of retroactive classification is what I attempt here.

The second way that realism matters is that it shapes how I engaged with these thinkers. The importance of history to political theory has been a focal point of realist arguments, but, to the consternation of even the most sympathetic historians, realists have had not always been attentive to questions of what historical scholarship is, how it is done, or what the writing of history allows theorists to say that would be more difficult to convey in more abstract genres of political thought.<sup>65</sup> In the first three chapters, I focus on major historical works by each thinker as the most important sources for understanding their views on political order and popular organizing. History is important here because the minimalist political order that realists give priority to—one in which security is separate from ideas about justice, goodness, standing, and desserts—is an abstraction, at least outside of certain situations in international relations. Real political order is never simply political; it is also social, economic, and always a bit moral, though realists are right to point out that there is always some play between these different ways of thinking about order. Realism needs history to study political order in its complex actuality, to see how it is instantiated and what arguments for the priority of order amount to in practice.<sup>66</sup>

The process by which we define order is also the process by which we decide what counts as disorder. If, as with law and order politics, the carceral state becomes a part of the ordinary understanding of political order, protests against mass incarceration and police brutality become disorder, particularly if they refuse to be strictly law-abiding. Theorists can criticize the

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<sup>65</sup> For an intellectual historian sympathetic to realism, see Samuel Moyn, “History and Political Theory: A Difficult Reunion,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 1 (January 2016). Exceptions include Joel Alden Schlosser, “Herodotean Realism,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (June 2014): 239–61; Andrew Sabl, *Hume’s Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the History of England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); and, using a different conception of realism, Ian Shapiro, “Realism in the Study of the History of Ideas,” *History of Political Thought* 3, no. 3 (1982): 535–78.

<sup>66</sup> “Realists,” Robin Douglass admits, “have been quick to criticise other theories” for having “very little to say about the political circumstances in which its prescriptions could actually be implemented,” even though they have rarely done much to address this question themselves. “It is here,” he adds, “that turning to the history of political realism may prove particularly illuminating, as many of its canonical thinkers had a clear idea of how their theories impacted upon the political circumstances of their day.” See Robin Douglass, “Hobbes and Political Realism,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, (November 20, 2016), 1-20.

version of order that operates in a society for not doing what we think political order ought to do, but popular organizing responds differently. It provisionally accepts the assignation of disorder and pushes disorderly actions forward, intensifying them and connecting disparate agents of disorder within the political order. Popular organizing is the organization of disorder. Of course, organizing is not always democratic; the powerful and the privileged often need to be organized to maintain their positions. But when organizing is democratic, when disorder stands for popular empowerment, equality, and other democratic demands made against an order that refuses to abide by them, the organization of disorder can eventually become the organization of a better order, as well.

But proponents of popular organizing need history for reasons that go beyond understanding the order they contest. At its core, organizing depends on what William E. Connolly calls “the ethos of critical responsiveness.”<sup>67</sup> Theorists of organizing are less interested in inventing new ideas or calling new sentiments into being than they are in responding to things that are already happening. Organizing is about orienting existing political movements and trends that escape anyone’s individual control. It draws on history to understand the major historical processes at work in a society and how the changes they bring about can be used to contest an undemocratic order. History allows us to connect problems with the existing political order to actions taken by collective agents in the past. Once the historical basis of the problems with the current order had been revealed, we can imagine how new forms of organization might deal with these problems more successfully in the future. For that reason, historical inquiry is not something that can be done once and set aside. Because political order changes as old possibilities are closed off and new ones develop, history must be returned to again and again.

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<sup>67</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xv-xix.

Thus, the first three chapters do more than look at the political ideas Hobbes, Marx, and Du Bois developed in their historical writings. I track how they adapted their ideas and arguments about organizing over time to respond to changing political circumstances. Seeing the different ways in which they returned to the same events and problems throughout their careers allows us to see the work that history did for them as realists engaged in the study of popular organizing. It also provides us with useful illustration of what a specifically realist approach to the history of political thought might look like.<sup>68</sup>

### Outline of the Chapters

Chapter one looks at Thomas Hobbes, whose theory of sovereignty in *Leviathan* is a touchstone for contemporary realists who see the state as the crucial form of collective agency in modern politics. In contrast, I examine Hobbes's views on rebellion as a form of collective agency potentially as powerful, and just as fearsome, as the state itself. In *Behemoth*, Hobbes's late history of the English Civil Wars, he brings the reason of state tradition (an ancestor of today's realism) together with his own civil science to show how the civil wars grew out of process of popular organizing. Unlike the sovereign state, which gains its power from the consent of individuals uniting themselves into a single entity, rebellion is composed of a variety of subsidiary institutions and collective entities joined into a single monstrous body and held together only by separate interests that are temporarily united by an overarching struggle for

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<sup>68</sup> The difference between what I think of as a realist approach and other sorts of contextualism is a difference of emphasis. As political historians have sometimes complained, the contextualism of the Cambridge school, which originated in a reaction against Marxism, has often understood historical contexts in terms of intellectual trends rather than political institutions. In the words of Peter Lake and Steven Pincus "The Strange Death of Political History," *History Working Papers Project*, [http://www.historyworkingpapers.org/?page\\_id=305](http://www.historyworkingpapers.org/?page_id=305)) the Cambridge school "might be thought to have generated a history of political thought with a good deal of the politics left out." Similarly, Samuel Moyn, "History and Political Theory" argues that "what made the Cambridge school attractive to political theorists proved unconvincing to the rest of the historical profession."

power. An insightful critic of popular organizing, Hobbes uses *Behemoth* to pose the question of how political order can be maintained in the presence of a multiplicity of collective agents not bound together with a unified will, a question that is taken up by the thinkers in each of my subsequent chapters.

The second chapter jumps forward in time to examine Karl Marx's engagement with the movement for factory reform in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. I reconstruct the trajectory of Marx's and Engels's writings on the Ten Hour Movement, from Engel's *Condition of the Working Class in England* through "The Working Day" chapter in volume one *Capital*. I argue that Marx used the history of the Ten Hour Movement to answer the question of how the working class can be the agent of political and social transformation even while it is, in his famous words from the end of *Capital* "trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production." In "The Working Day," Marx shows how the campaign for a ten-hour day politicized the process of capitalist production by leveraging social differences between workers in ways that developed rather than weakened emerging forms of solidarity and class consciousness. In other words, workers organized in a way that turned their diversity into political strength. In "The Working Day," we can see Marx trying to work out a position that Rosa Luxemburg would later describe as his "revolutionary realpolitik," in which the working class develops a form of political realism that seeks not simply to master the rules of the existing political game, but, as a class, to transform the entire political and economic order.

In the third chapter, I turn to W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* to examine how Du Bois used the history of Reconstruction to think about the possibilities and constraints of black politics during the Great Depression and the New Deal. I show how Du Bois's tragic framework for the history of Reconstruction led him to a strategic embrace of

segregation as method for organizing African-Americans in the fight for racial and economic equality. An emphasis on the tragic nature of political action has long been a staple of realist discourse, and Du Bois shows us how that tragic vision can be a source of radicalization rather than resignation. In calling for a separate black economy organized around consumers' cooperatives, Du Bois was seeking a positive, institution-building program for weakening capitalism and resisting white supremacy. Crucially, Reconstruction taught Du Bois that African-Americans needed a form of organization that did not depend on unreliable allies in either the white-led labor movement or the New Deal state. Reconstruction, in sum, was Du Bois's way of theorizing a tragic form of political action that used segregation to subvert America's racial order while moving beyond a fruitless opposition between reform and revolution.

The final substantive chapter, on Saul Alinsky, is pitched at a somewhat different level than the other three. Unlike Hobbes, Marx, and (now, thankfully) Du Bois, Alinsky is hardly a canonical political thinker; most political theorists have little idea who he is. As such, the more specialized and contextual approach taken in the first three chapters is less useful than a broad and synthetic examination of his ideas on organizing. Thus, my final chapter presents Alinsky's theory of community organizing as a modern-day alternative to political realism's fixation on the coercive authority of the state. Whereas the preceding chapters focus on ways in which major political thinkers imagined new forms of democratic agency, this chapter focuses less on the specifics of how Alinsky thought community organizing works and more on the way he uses organizing to rethink the relationship between ethics and democratic politics today. His work challenges the tendency in realist scholarship to focus on statesmanship as the paradigmatic form of political action by showing how an organizer must be both a teacher and practitioner of a distinctive form of political ethics, one he called "the morality of power." Alinsky's morality of

power teaches organizers to embrace the important role realist values of power and self-interest play in organizing ordinary citizens around a vision of radical democracy that celebrates the role of conflict in pursuing the common good. Approaching Alinsky in this way also moves the ideas developed in the more historical chapters into the present, showing us how a realist approach to the study of popular organizing provides us with useful insights into the relationship between order, disorder, and democratic agency in political struggles today.

In the conclusion, I bring these insights to bare on the recent proliferation of books and articles outside of academic political theory that claim the mantle of realism. This wider turn towards realism, I argue, makes many of the same mistakes that academic realism has made in its efforts to understand the relationship between political order and political democracy. Here too, an explicit focus on the kinds of popular organizing going on today would be immensely valuable. The inadequacy of state- and order-centric theories of realism in the era of Trumpism should be too obvious to be worth pointing out. But, without an appreciation of the history of popular organizing as form of realist politics, we find ourselves without the intellectual resources we need to imagine the new forms of power and collective agency we will need to rebuild democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

How to Kill a Mortal God:  
Hobbes's *Behemoth* and the Reason of Rebellion

*The man who has such mastery over you has but two eyes, has but two hands, has but one body, and has nothing more than what the least man in the great, infinite number of our cities has, except the advantage you give him to destroy you. Where did he get so many eyes to spy on you, if you are not granting them to him? How does he have so many hands to strike you, if he does not get them from you? Where does he get the feet that he tramples your cities with, if they are not yours? How does he have any power over you, if not from you? How would he dare to attack you, if he did not have your agreement?*<sup>1</sup>

-Étienne de La Boétie

On September 15, 1643, a London bookseller named George Thomason purchased an anonymously published broadsheet entitled “The Kingdomes Monster Uncloaked from Heaven.” For almost three years, Thomason had been buying every pamphlet, book, and broadsheet he could find that dealt with the conflict between Charles I, King of England, Scotland and Ireland, and the unruly subjects who opposed him in each of his three kingdoms. “The Kingdomes Monster” depicts this conflict as a giant monster with a split body—one half a stereotypical Royalist, the other a Spanish Catholic—and four arms, each holding a different weapon (see figure 1). Where the monster’s head should be, there are instead three long necks, each connected to a separate cluster of human heads. As the subtitle tells us, the monster represents “the Popish Conspirators, Malignant Plotters [royalists], and cruel Irish, in one Body to destroy Kingdom, Religion and Laws.”<sup>2</sup> Behind the monster, and menaced by its weapons, are the key institutions of 17<sup>th</sup> century England: the church, Parliament, the City of London, and the towns and fields that make up the rest of the Kingdom.

“The Kingdomes Monster” represents both the fears of Parliamentary sympathizers in London and their vision of the global forces they were up against. During the summer of 1643,

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<sup>1</sup> Étienne de La Boétie, *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* trans: James B. Atkinson & David Sices (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *The Kingdomes Monster Uncloaked from Heaven*, 1643, Thomason Tracts; 245:669.f.8[24].

when it was created, London was gripped by stories of the so-called Waller Plot, a royalist conspiracy to take over the city from the inside and throw open its gates, allowing the king's army to enter, arrest Parliament, and bring the civil war in England to a swift conclusion.<sup>3</sup> The accompanying poem that describes the monster explains that, "Long time it walked muffled in a cloak/Till Strafford's head was cut off, then it broke." Thomas Wentworth, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Strafford and King Charles I's closest political adviser, had been executed almost two years prior to the Waller plot, before the final breach between King and Parliament and the beginning of armed conflict. Only with his execution, the poem tells us, was the true nature of the rebellion made plain: a monster with one body and many heads. As "The Kingdoms Monster" combines rebellion and of royalism into a single entity, it is surprising that Charles I is neither depicted in the illustration nor mentioned in the text. Whoever created it did not portray the Parliamentary cause as inherently opposed to the King of England, but nor was it depicted as a defense of the King against his evil councilors. Instead, it shows the royalist rebellion as having moved beyond the power of any single person to control or direct it. What "The Kingdoms Monster" reveals is that, by 1643, it was already possible to envision the civil war as a struggle between social groups and institutions that had no need of the king, a struggle between the orderly politics of the legitimate state and the disorderly politics of rebellion.

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<sup>3</sup> The connection between the image and the Waller plot is a conjecture. Thomason dated the broadsheet September 15, and the last identifiable event it references is the Battle of Camp Hill (referred to in the poem as "Brimidgham" i.e. Birmingham), which took place on April 3. Between those two dates, the Waller Plot, which was revealed on the May 31, was one of the most sensational events in London. It discredited the recent peace negotiations between the King and Parliament and led to the promulgation of a new "Vow and Covenant" on the part of Parliamentary supporters. The plot was also taken as evidence of larger, even more treasonous plans to destroy Protestantism with Catholic mercenaries, which explains the poem's seemingly dated obsession with Strafford, who had been accused of similar plots. Interestingly, the leader of the plot, Edmund Waller, who was spared his life in exchange for informing on his co-conspirators, went on to become close friends with Hobbes, even offering to translate *De Cive*. On the Waller Plot, see Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), 291-7.

“The Kingdomes Monster” exemplifies the discourse of political monstrosity that was widespread in England during the Civil Wars. Witches and monsters were closely connected with rebellion in the political imaginary of the time, testifying to the widespread belief that there was a relationship between the condition of the body politic and the physical bodies of its citizens.<sup>4</sup> As civil war produced widespread confusion about the nature and location of political authority, images of political monstrosity often fixated on the head. Reports of monstrous births, in which children were born with multiple heads, or no head at all, were a steady feature of the popular pamphlet literature.<sup>5</sup> “The Kingdomes Monster” draws on these widespread fears and rumors to construct an image of rebellion as a monstrous form of collective political agency whose hallmark was the absence of any unifying authority. But, while the image of the kingdom’s monster is plainly an image of disorder, it is not altogether disorganized. The rebellion is composed of clearly identifiable groups joined into a single body that, however monstrous, is also obviously powerful. This portrait of rebellion poses a fundamental question about political organization: How can collective agency be constituted? Or, put another way, what must a collective agent look like?<sup>6</sup> Must an agent be organized in a form analogous to that of a human being, or are other bodies possible?

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<sup>4</sup> On the role of monsters in Stuart political culture, see William E. Burns, “The King’s Two Monstrous Bodies: John Bulwar and the English Revolution,” *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture* Peter G. Platt ed. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 187-204, Diane Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics during the English Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 163-184, Mark Thomas Burnet, *Constructing Monsters in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and Harriet Lyon, “The Fisherton Monster: Science, Providence, and Politics in Early Restoration England,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 02 (June 2017): 333–62, which briefly describes “The Kingdomes Monster.”

<sup>5</sup> Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire*, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Stone, “Hobbes’ Problem,” *The Good Society* 24, no. 1 (2015): 1–14 identifies “the problem of collective personhood” as the central question of Hobbes’s thought. As he puts it, “If collective persons exist, then they must somehow be similar to natural persons. For Hobbes, the critical property shared by all persons was rational agency...Hobbes’ Problem thus becomes the problem of specifying how a rational collective agent works” (2). Christian List and Philip Pettit, *Group Agency* discusses Hobbes’s theory of group agency as authorized representation throughout. Like most other readers of Hobbes, these authors focus on the juridical question of what makes collective agency legitimate. I am more interested in the political question of what makes it powerful.

# THE KINGDOMES MONSTER

Uncloaked from Heaven: *K. England* 1643. f. 8  
24

The Popish Conspirators, Malignant Plotters, and cruell Irish, in one Body to destroy Kingdome, Religion and Lawes: But under colour to defend them, especially the Irish, who having destroyed the Protestants There, flye hither to defend the Protestant Religion Here.



England looke upon this monstrous Thing,  
That would our Kingdome unto ruine bring,  
Tis framed and composed of three parts  
Which are all joynd both in heads and hearts:  
Doe not behold it with a carelesse eye,  
This Monster brings this Land to misery:  
This Monster following its forefathers hate,  
Seeks to destroy the Kingdome and the State:  
While Church and Kingdome should oppressed lie  
Subjected to their blinded Popery:  
Long time it walked muffled in a cloak  
Till *Straffords* head was cut off, then it broke  
Out of the cloud, but Heavens holy hands  
Hath now unclock'd it, so that now it stands  
In a full figure as this Picture here  
Doth make it lively to your view appeare,  
And in fit Emblems to your sight presents  
His shape, his postures, and his blacke intents;  
So that if you behold it round about  
You shall see how this Monster is set out;  
His Spanish Ruffe, and Jacket shew him here  
To be halfe Popish, and halfe Cavalier;  
His left side Popish is, which on his breast  
Is by the figure of the Crosse exprest;  
Besides his Beads and Popish pardon be  
Emblems that speak his love to Popistry:

So on the left side Popish heads are got  
Together ready to conspire and plot  
Unlathons'd mischief, and left they should  
Brain to be wicked, and should so be scant  
Of knowledge how they might undo this land,  
Plotting malignant heads against them stand:  
The winged cluster of heads do discover  
That Popish Rebels from Ireland flye over:  
These to make strong their party, do combine  
While in one body they together joyne,  
Which in this Monster of the times exprest,  
And to shew that there lodges in his breast  
Nothing but cruelty, while tis his desire  
To kill the Protestants, and their houses fire:  
His double hands a sword, a knife contains,  
A match, a Polcaxe, and a torch that flames;  
Thus arm'd you may aske what he means to do,  
Alas! his dayly actions this doe shew;  
He doth intend to change the Churches coat,  
That masse may be fung through a Friars throst;  
And that the Protestants true Church may grow  
Catholicke, and unto the Pope may owe  
Supremacie, while Popery that hath bin  
Long purged out, may be brought in agen;  
In hope whereof, they oppose the Parliament,  
Which Popish onces to blow up did consent,

As here the match in hand doth represent,  
While the blacke fiend did further their intent;  
Besides this monstrous Body here compact  
Of Popists, Irish and malignants set  
Most horrid cruelties where they do approach,  
Set out here by the sword in hand and torch;  
Firing both Towns & houses where they come,  
As they of late to Brimingham have done,  
And like unthankfull wretches have no pity  
Neither upon this Kingdome nor this City,  
But *Nero* like would laugh while it did burn,  
And would massacre such as would not turn  
To their Religion, robbing them of life,  
Described by the hand armed with a knife:  
Thus under sword and fire this Kingdome lies  
Bleeding, and is this Monsters sacrifice;  
While Popists, Irish, and Malignants are  
Drawne all into the body of a war,  
Who breath destruction, and would ruinate  
Church, Kingdome, City, Parliament, and State,  
Therefore this Picture here set out may be  
Called the Kingdomes Map of misery.  
But there's a God that will at last regard  
Our sufferings, and give them their just reward;  
Let them take heed, here on the side we see't,  
They and the gallows at the last shall meet.

FINIS.

Printed in the Year, 1643.

Figure 1.4: The Kingdomes Monster Uncloaked from Heaven. 1643. Thomason Tracts; 245:669. f.8[24], c.o. Early English Books Online.

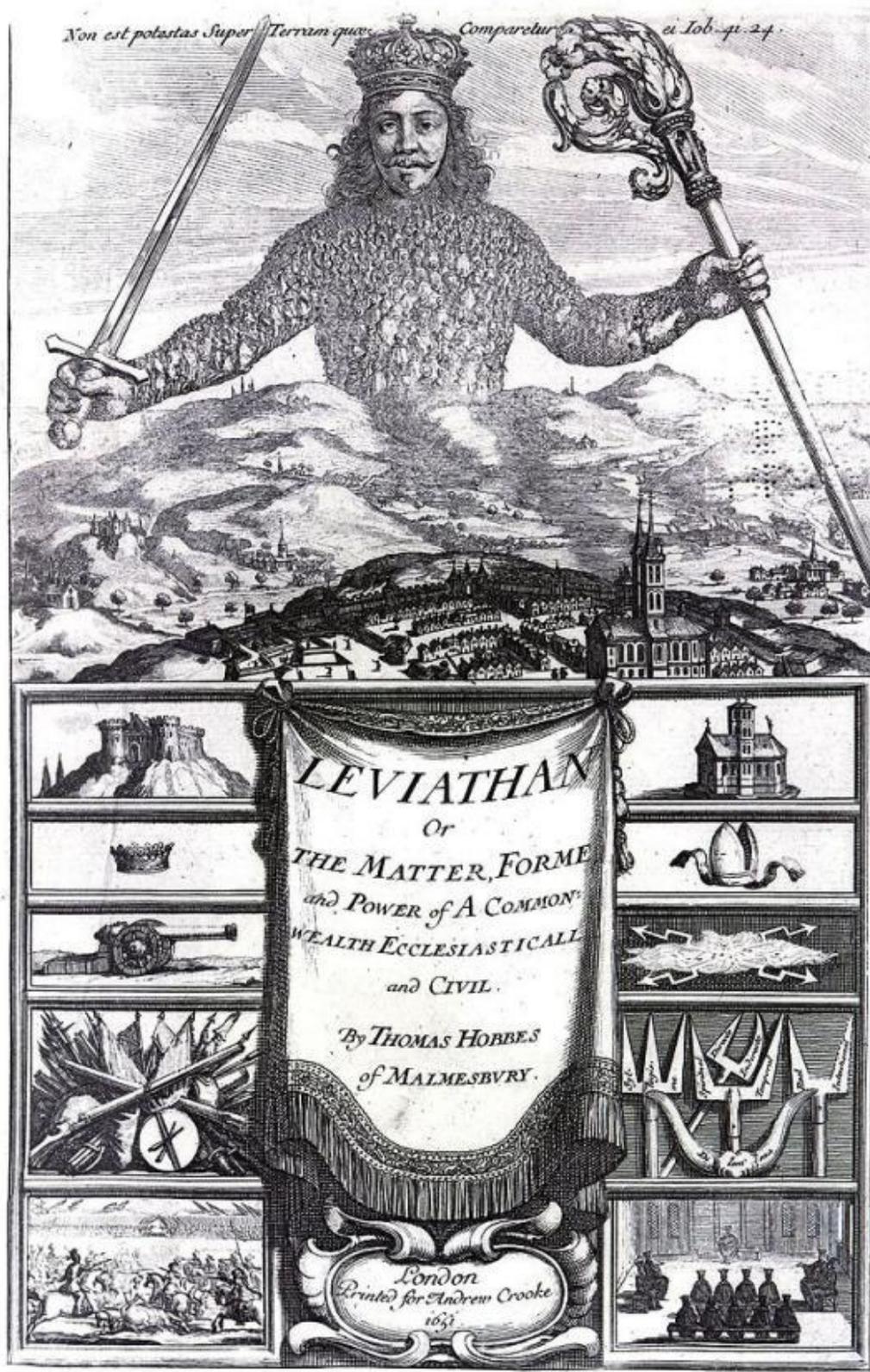


Figure 1.5: Abraham Bosse, Frontispiece of *Leviathan*, c.o. Wikimedia Commons.

“The Kingdoms Monster” helps us think through these questions because the kind of political agent it depicts stands in stark opposition to most famous representation of collective agency in the history of political thought: the frontispiece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (see figure 2).<sup>7</sup> Though there is no reason to think that Hobbes or his illustrator, Abraham Bosse, ever saw “The Kingdoms Monster,” their image of Leviathan was clearly meant to provide a reassuring contrast with the images of deformed monsters on the covers of so many political pamphlets. Hobbes’s monster is also an armed giant made of many other people, but the people in Hobbes’s image form the body of the monster, while in the Kingdom’s Monster, they form what should be its head.<sup>8</sup> Leviathan has but a single head, the sovereign, which unifies the people by providing them with a single will. This illustrates the core of Hobbes’s argument: When the people are united by one sovereign will, they become an artificial person capable of acting in the defense of each of its members. That is to say, they become a state.<sup>9</sup> As Hobbes represents it, the state

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<sup>7</sup> The literature on the frontispiece is vast. Horst Bredekamp has argued most forcefully for the attribution to of the image to Bosse. For a summary of his position, see Horst Bredekamp, “Thomas Hobbes’s Visual Strategies,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan* Patricia Springborg, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29-61. That attribution is now accepted by both Noel Malcolm and Quentin Skinner: see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* Noel Malcolm ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 128-141; and Quentin Skinner “Hobbes and the Humanist Frontispiece,” *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 222-315. Magnus Kristiansson and Johan Tralau, “Hobbes’s Hidden Monster: A New Interpretation of the Frontispiece of *Leviathan*,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 13, no. 3 (July 2014): 299–320 proposes a radically unorthodox interpretation of the frontispiece as a depiction of the commonwealth at war with a foreign enemy, but Skinner (see above) has convincingly rebutted their argument. Skinner now holds that the images on the lower half of the frontispiece represent not the dual political and ecclesiastical forms of sovereign authority, as has traditionally been thought, but the unchecked powers of nobility and episcopacy, “the commonwealth’s deadliest enemies, who are shown stacked against it and pressing upon it from both sides” (278). In other words, the frontispiece contains images of both the sovereign state and the process of rebellion.

<sup>8</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm* Nicholas Heron trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 61-5 draws attention to the unity of the Leviathan’s head as departure from the iconographic tradition the image draws from.

<sup>9</sup> David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) kicked off a long running debate, primarily with Skinner, on whether the state is an artificial person or a person by fiction. Largely, this debate turns on whether a Hobbesian person is a representor, represented, or both, though it also overlaps with a debate on whether the frontispiece is supposed to depict the state as an automaton (in which case it is an artificial person) or as an optical illusion (in which case it is a person by fiction). Skinner’s current position is that the sovereign is an artificial person while the state is a person by fiction (see Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and the Concept of the State,” *From Humanism to Hobbes*, 341-383). Recently, several other scholars have

embodies a form of agency resembling that of an individual person, though on a vastly larger scale. Though a monster, it is also recognizably human, unlike the Kingdom's Monster, whose human form is simply a disguise. Putting Leviathan alongside "The Kingdoms Monster" reveals that the difference between a properly-constituted collective agent and an improper one is not a question of whether the agent is organized, but of how. Consequently, the contrast between these two images provides us with a starting point for rethinking realism's relationship to non-state forms of collective political agency.

Hobbes thought the only collective agent capable of combating disorder was the sovereign state, and though today's realists have little sympathy for Hobbes's absolutism, his attachment to the state continues to inform their work. According to Raymond Geuss, "modern political philosophy begins in Europe in the seventeenth century when Hobbes attempts to find a solution to the problem his contemporaries have in living together without assuming either a divinely ordained or enforced order, or a naturally implanted, invariable, and irresistibly powerful human impulse towards one particular form of cooperative action."<sup>10</sup> Geuss positions his realism as a kind of radicalism, but Honig and Stears argue that, in his work, "a particular kind of politics – state politics – is also occasionally lionised as the means by which humans create order out of the most unlikely of material."<sup>11</sup> "This," they add, "is the Hobbesian project, whereby the horrors of

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argued, I think sensibly, that Hobbes is too inconsistent on this question to allow a single, definitive answer. For this position, and for summaries of the arguments, see Paul Sagar, "What Is the Leviathan?," *Hobbes Studies* 31, no. 1: 75–92, Sean Fleming, "The Two Faces of Personhood: Hobbes, Corporate Agency and the Personality of the State," *European Journal of Political Theory*, October 30, 2017, and A.P. Martinich, "Authorization and Representation in Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes* A.P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 315-338. This debate, which is largely about the juridical identity of the state, does not bear strongly on my main interest in this chapter, which is about how power can be organized and exercised by different kinds of collective agents. Thus, when I refer to the state as an artificial person, I do it to emphasize the connection between the juridical idea of the state and the machinery of government that makes that idea into a working reality, precisely the same link Hobbes meant to defend by insisting that the state could not act or exist except by way of the sovereign, who in turn acted through organized political institutions.

<sup>10</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 31. Geuss's most extended discussion of Hobbes is in *Changing the Subject*, 138-156, but it mostly restates, in more detailed form, arguments he has already made in other places.

<sup>11</sup> Honig and Stears, "The new realism: From modus vivendi to justice," 183.

anarchy are avoided through a particularly limited kind of political aspiration focused largely on the controlling power of the modern state.” Similarly, realism’s other dominant figure, Bernard Williams, based his realist theory of legitimacy on the “first political question,” which he understood, “in Hobbesian terms as the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation.”<sup>12</sup> Here too, the state plays a special role as the only agent capable of solving the first political question in modern conditions and, therefore, of establishing a legitimate political order. As with Geuss, Honig and Stears note that Williams “seems finally to put in with Hobbes and with Hobbes’s own peculiar variant of legitimacy in politics. The priority of order and security provides Williams’s account of politics with a solidity and predictability that would otherwise be lacking.”<sup>13</sup> This is not say that either Geuss or Williams accept Hobbes’s account of what the state must be able to do if it is to maintain order. But they, and other realists who follow them, accept the Hobbesian idea that the creation of order is made possible by the creation of a distinctive form of collective agency called the state.

As David Runciman admits, “there is something faintly ridiculous about reducing Hobbes to the confines of political realism, and identifying him primarily as a philosopher of legitimacy.” Although Hobbes was “interested in power, constraint, contingency, luck, timing, along with everything else” that realists care about, “*Leviathan*, shot through with metaphors and wildly expansive in the scope of its political vision, was not a work of political realism. It is just as plausibly understood as a work of utopian political philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> And yet, when Runciman elsewhere explains Hobbes’s contribution to political thought, he resorts to a familiar realist

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<sup>12</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning*, 3. Williams’s regular invocations of Hobbes in this book are surprising because Hobbes was one of the few canonical philosophers Williams never wrote about at any length. When Williams did mention Hobbes in passing, as in his book on Descartes, it was often critically.

<sup>13</sup> Honig and Stears, *The new realism: From modus vivendi to justice*, 193.

<sup>14</sup> Runciman, “What Is Realistic Political Philosophy?,” 68.

portrait. He writes, “thinking about violence is a starting-point for considering where politics comes from, what makes it different from other activities and why it still makes all the difference.”<sup>15</sup> And, “the philosopher who did most to put the control of violence at the heart of thinking about politics was a seventeenth-century Englishman called Thomas Hobbes.”<sup>16</sup> Among Hobbes greatest innovations, “he thought politics would only have a secure hold over us if it could prove its usefulness for us: people as we are. Politics justified by its utility for regular human beings is a distinctly modern view, and one that still exercises a strong grip.”<sup>17</sup> Though Runciman does not explicitly call this realism, his description of Hobbes as a distinctly modern political thinker due to his emphasis on violence, utility, and human nature is very much a realist view. Thus, Runciman wants to distance himself from the claim that Hobbes is a realist while still emphasizing the importance of Hobbes’s realist arguments, specifically his commitment to the politics of order and the indispensable role of the state.

The primacy of the state shapes many of the other lessons realists draw from Hobbes’s work. In the most thorough discussion of Hobbes’s relationship to contemporary realism, Robin Douglass highlights three issues: “the priority of legitimacy over justice, the relation between ethics and politics, and the place of imagination in politics.”<sup>18</sup> According to Douglass, Hobbes’s belief that “the pursuit of peace (and what it entails) solves the fundamental problem of politics, rather than simply being the precondition for further political disputes to be negotiated,” is not the example of a minimalist theory of legitimacy that realists think it is. Instead, “Hobbes is better read as trying to form a moral consensus around peaceful coexistence.”<sup>19</sup> Douglass’s

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<sup>15</sup> David Runciman, *Politics* (London: Profile Books, 2014), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Runciman, *Politics*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Runciman, *Politics*, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Douglass, “Hobbes and Political Realism,” 2.

<sup>19</sup> Douglass, “Hobbes and Political Realism,” 2.

second point is that realists who look to Hobbes for an expression of the autonomy of politics from ethics wind up limiting the space ordinary citizens have for political action much more drastically than they realize. For Hobbes, politics is only an autonomous sphere of activity for the sovereign. For everyone else, morality is subsumed under the political relationship of the subject to the sovereign and the obedience it requires.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Douglass emphasizes that the state is an imaginative project for Hobbes. It is a fictional entity that people can, with the help of his theory, learn to recognize and even to identify with. “That many realists still take Hobbes as their starting point for thinking through the problem of politics,” Douglas concludes, “is just one amongst many signs indicating that he largely succeeded in capturing our imaginations.”<sup>21</sup>

To make his theory of the state appealing, Hobbes also had to get his readers to imagine alternatives to its politics of order. The most famous example is his account of the state of nature, which, McQueen argues, “might serve as a model for harnessing the apocalyptic imaginary to elicit the salutary fear required to secure obedience and maintain the commonwealth.”<sup>22</sup> But the natural condition of mankind is not the only thing to which the state can be contrasted. As Runciman points out, the English Civil War “was not a state of anarchy. It was a fight between highly politicised groups that possessed the power to keep the conflict going.”<sup>23</sup> This should

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<sup>20</sup> See below for Hobbes’s discussion of the “difference between the ethics of subjects and the ethics of sovereigns” in *Behemoth*.

<sup>21</sup> Douglass, “Hobbes and Political Realism,” 20. So great was his success that it seems hard to find anyone who discusses realism in politics without genuflecting in Hobbes’s direction. For example, Rutger Bregman, *Utopia for Realists* Elizabeth Manton trans. (New York: Little, Brown, 2017) begins by invoking Hobbes’s famous description of the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty brutish, and short” (1). For more on Bregman’s book and its claim to realism, see chapter two and the conclusion.

<sup>22</sup> Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*, 144. The most comprehensive accounts of the role the state of nature plays in Hobbes’s thought are Ioannis D. Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy: The Rhetoric and Science in Hobbes’s State of Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), James J. Hamilton, “The Origins of Hobbes’s State of Nature,” *Hobbes Studies* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 152–70, and Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbes and the Natural Condition of Mankind,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, 109–128.

<sup>23</sup> Runciman, *Politics*, 18. He continues, “It is often assumed that Hobbes’s ‘state of nature’ – where, as he notoriously put it, life is ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’ – corresponds to a condition of civil war. It doesn’t. There is a big difference for Hobbes between a world without politics and a world where politics has gone wrong.”

remind us that, for all the subsequent fame of the state of nature, it was not the most pressing problem for Hobbes's politics. As Adrian Blau puts it, "Hobbes is rightly prized as a political philosopher abstract discussing issues such as obligation and rights, but he also gives practical concrete advice on political and social reform. Many Hobbes scholars focus on how to escape the state of nature, but Hobbes himself wrote far more about how avoid its return."<sup>24</sup> Describing the terrors of the state of nature that civil war returned us to was an important part of Hobbes's strategy, but he knew he had to discredit the causes of civil war, as well as its consequences. Preventing civil war meant preventing the creation of an organized collective agent capable of challenging the rule of the legitimate sovereign; it meant preventing rebellion.

Surprisingly little has been written on Hobbes's theory of rebellion. But if we want to understand how Hobbes thought about political agents other than the state, his theory of rebellion is essential. Though Hobbes described rebellion as a collective agent possessing an artificial body of its own throughout his political works, his views on what sort of agent rebellion is and how it is put together changed over time. In fact, it is only in *Behemoth*, his posthumously published history of the English Civil Wars, that Hobbes examines rebellion at a level of detail similar to what he gave the sovereign state in *Leviathan*, though he does this in a historical narrative rather than a philosophical treatise. Rebellion, for Hobbes, is the process by which a collective agent is created that can challenge the power of the sovereign state. Rebellion leads to civil war, and civil war marks a reversion to the state of nature, but rebellion is reducible to neither of these. Like the sovereign state, rebellion is a mortal god, albeit a monstrous one.

To uncover Hobbes's theory of rebellion, we must read him with a different set of concerns than most scholars have brought to his work, realists or otherwise. In the influential words of

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<sup>24</sup> Adrian Blau, "Reason, Deliberation, and the Passions," *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, 195-220, 215.

Richard Tuck, “the central problem” of Hobbes’s ethical thought, “was not the explanation of human action,” which would properly belong to his physics, “but the problem of ‘natural right’ – the existence or non-existence of common ethical standards by which men should live their lives.”<sup>25</sup> When read in this light, Hobbes appears primarily as a juridical theorist of sovereign right.<sup>26</sup> The juridical approach allows us to see the organization of the state in an idealized and purely hypothetical way. Correspondingly, this view elevates Hobbes’s more philosophically abstract works, like the *Elements* and *De Cive*, over the often more practical *Leviathan*, and it largely neglects Hobbes’s historical writings, of which *Behemoth* is the most important. It is impossible to understand Hobbes’s theory of rebellion in these terms because, according to his theory of sovereignty, rebellion cannot be legitimate. Since there is no right of rebellion, there is nothing to explain. Rebellions, because they have no lawful basis, must instead be understood empirically, historically, and realistically. This is why Hobbes’s most detailed explanation of rebellion occurs via historical narration rather than philosophical argument. Thus, taking rebellion as our object of inquiry also helps us get some distance from Hobbes’s juridical theory of sovereignty and allows us to focus on what I will (polemically) refer to as his realist theory of political organizing.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Tuck, *Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61. To be fair, Tuck is describing Hobbes’s ethics as somewhat distinct from his politics, which he discusses later. But a great deal of Hobbes scholarship, even in a contextualist vein, treats his political theory as being primarily normative.

<sup>26</sup> Kinch Hoekstra, “A Lion in the House: Hobbes and Democracy,” *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* Annabel S. Brett, James Tully, and Holly Hamilton-Bleakley eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191-218 describes the difficulties created by this tendency in a critique of Tuck’s “sleeping sovereign” argument: “Hobbes’s Thucydidean penchant for the underlying fact of the matter brings him to insist upon effective rather than nominal sovereignty. This is in tension, however, with a more formal and juridical strand of his thought, in which he develops what he learned from Bodin, and reckons from the consequences of established names ... The former is the tradition of thought that has been neglected in this context, yet it may well be the dominant one” (203).

<sup>27</sup> Put a different way, juridical readings often focus on the most formal and philosophically rigorous passages in Hobbes’s work. My interest, on the other hand, is in looking at the terms and arguments that carry explanatory weight when Hobbes analyzes historical events or suggests responses to contemporary ones. Neither approach is inherently superior, but the latter ought to be of particular interests to realists.

In this chapter, I track the ways in which Hobbes theorized rebellion in his major political works, from the *Elements of Law* to *Behemoth*. In the *Elements*, Hobbes argued that a rebellion is not a disorganized multitude of separate people; it is an organized political body that resembles an incipient state. *De Cive* subsumes rebellions under the general category of factions, but, despite the insistence by many scholars that factions are constitutively different from commonwealths, hints of his earlier argument remain. In *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes presents a radically different image of rebellion, one that surprisingly resembled the image of the Kingdoms Monster. Rebellions are still collective agents, but unlike the sovereign state, which gains its power from the consent of individuals uniting themselves into a single entity, rebellions are created by joining other artificial persons and corporate agents into a single monstrous body. Hobbes saw this kind of agency as dangerously unstable, and his political project was to devise a theory of the sovereignty that would show rulers and subjects alike why and how to resist the mortal god of rebellion. In *Behemoth*, Hobbes does not use the language of monsters, but his emphasis on rebellion as a thing created by the imperfect joining of other forms of collective agency and social institutions is even stronger than it was in *Leviathan*. Hobbes uses history to reveal the workings of rebellion, as well as its nefarious objectives, by bringing together both the civil science he developed in *Leviathan* and the interpretive techniques of the older reason of state tradition. *Behemoth* shows us that to prevent rebellions, the sovereign must also be an organizer, someone with the power to reorganize the social relationships, collective agents, and political institutions from which rebellions emerge in order to reinforce, rather than undermine, sovereign authority.

Between States and Factions: Leadership and Rebellion in Hobbes's Early Political Works

Hobbes's earliest discussions of rebellion occur in the *Elements of Law*, which means they slightly predate the outbreak of the English Civil War. The *Elements* seems to have been written around the time of the Short Parliament in April and May of 1640. It was circulated in manuscript form among royalist notables like Hobbes's patron, the Earl of Newcastle, prior to the sitting of the Long Parliament in November, at which point Hobbes famously fled to France.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, its account of rebellion and civil war is drawn from literary sources, like Thucydides, and a long history of warnings about civil war in English politics that dated back to the early Tudors, who came to power at the end of the War of the Roses.<sup>29</sup> In particular, Hobbes's insistence on the important role that leaders play in uniting rebellions recalls the baronial revolts of earlier in English history, the last example of which was the Earl of Essex's abortive uprising against Queen Elizabeth in 1601, when Hobbes was thirteen years old.<sup>30</sup> In the *Elements*, rebellions are generally presented as incipient states that, though unlawful, are organized in roughly the same way as the state itself. The *Elements* reveals that Hobbes

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<sup>28</sup> Noah Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) points out that, two centuries after Gutenberg, manuscripts continued to play an important role in Stuart politics. Since they were not officially published, they could be used to make arguments that would have been censored in print or were too dangerous to openly avow. With the help of an extended network of scribal copyists, they could still circulate quite widely within their intended audience, which is why we have many more surviving copies of the *Elements* in manuscript than we do of the small, first edition printing of *De Cive*. Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) reasonably conjectures that one of the recipients of the *Elements of Law* was the Earl of Strafford, Newcastle's patron and the man whose execution revealed the true nature of "The Kingdoms Monster." Hoekstra's discovery that Strafford acquired a copy of Hobbes's translation of Thucydides around the same time supports Tuck's hypothesis.

<sup>29</sup> See Hamilton, "The Origins of Hobbes's State of Nature."

<sup>30</sup> John Adamson, *The Noble Revolt: The Overthrow of Charles I* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2007) provides a detailed reconstruction of the political maneuverings of a group of powerful dissident lords, most notably Earls of Bedford, Warwick, and Essex (heir to the rebel of 1601), from the dissolution of the Short Parliament to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642. Though Adamson admits that the Civil War was no mere baronial revolt, he demonstrates that a baronial revolt was an important part of it. Given Hobbes's association with the Cavendish Earls of Devonshire and Newcastle in this period, and his previous acquaintance with Warwick through the Virginia Company in the 1620s, he may have had accurate intelligence about what the dissidents were doing, and this may account for the role leadership plays in the *Elements*. Similarly, his later views may reflect a post-hoc recognition of the larger structural and institutional factors that allowed this baronial revolt to turn into a full-blown revolution.

understood rebellion to be a form of collective agency even before the Civil War broke out. What changed over time was the kind of agent he thought it was.

Hobbes's first mention of rebellion in the *Elements* it takes place in an important argument about the nature of collective agency. In chapter XXI, "Of the Three Sorts of Commonwealth," Hobbes famously criticizes authors who fail to distinguish between a people and multitude. A multitude "signifieth only a number of men, distinguished by their place of habitation ... which is no more, but the multitude of those particularly persons that inhabit those regions, without consideration of any contracts or covenants amongst them."<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, a people exists "when the multitude is united into a body politic ... and their wills virtually in the sovereign."<sup>32</sup> Failing to distinguish between the two leads to confusion, as when it is said, "the people rebelleth, or the people demandeth, when it is no more than a dissolved multitude, of which though any one man may be said to demand or to have a right to something, yet the heap, or multitude, cannot be said to demand or have a right to anything." Unless they are united in subjection to a single will, a multitude remains a multitude "how well soever they agree, or concur, in opinions amongst themselves."<sup>33</sup>

This passage is an early statement of what is perhaps the guiding idea for juridical approaches to Hobbes, the difference between unity and concord.<sup>34</sup> According to Sophie Smith:

The fact of this single will, as opposed to a multitude of wills concurring, was the essence of union. And whilst Hobbes changed the precise terms in which he expressed this thought across his various works of political theory, in each iteration he maintained the

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* J.C.A. Gaskin ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 124. To avoid confusing inconsistencies between the various editions, I have chosen to modernize spelling when quoting from Hobbes's texts whenever it did not threaten to alter his meaning, though I have generally preserved the original punctuation, capitalization, italicization, and chapter titles.

<sup>32</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 124.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Tuck, "Hobbes and Democracy," *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 171-190 writes, "At the heart of this theory was a distinction between what he called in English 'concord' and 'union'" (172). See also István Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2005), 20-1.

same distinction between concord as that which left men with their separate wills (even if an end was agreed upon), and union, which involved the replacement of one's individual will with the will of whatever person or group was the sovereign.<sup>35</sup>

Concord is the basis of “confederacies based on honor and advantage, as well as families based on natural love and the limited bonds of friendship.”<sup>36</sup> But, so the argument runs, none of these qualify as collective agents because they lack the unifying will that attributions of agency require. However, the force of this argument is primarily juridical insofar as denying the multitude the status of people (and therefore, the ability to make binding agreements or claim rights) does not directly limit their power to compel others to obey their desires, however fleeting the agreements about those desires turn out to be. It is also possible to read Hobbes, at this point in the *Elements*, as making a narrower point about the proper usage of the term “the people” and Parliament’s claim to speak for them, not offering a general theory of collective agency.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, it does not answer the question of how we should understand the kind of agency involved in rebellion.

When Hobbes first discusses rebellion at length, in chapter XXVII of *The Elements*, “Of the Causes of Rebellion,” it initially appears that his discussion will align with the view that collective agency only exists when there is lawful unity. In this chapter, Hobbes sets out to describe “by what causes, and in what manner” commonwealths are destroyed. “To dispose men to sedition,” he wrote, “three things must concur.” They are “discontent,” “pretense of right,” and “hope of success.” “Without these three,” he continued, “there can be no rebellion; and when the same are all together, there wanteth nothing thereto, but a man of credit to set up the standard

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<sup>35</sup> Sophie Smith, “Democracy and the Body Politic from Aristotle to Hobbes,” *Political Theory* 46, no. 2 (April 2018): 167–96, 172.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Sagar, *The Opinion of Mankind: Sociability and the Theory of the State from Hobbes to Smith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 33. Concord is also the only available basis for cooperation between individuals living in the state of nature, as Evrigenis, Sagar, Hoekstra, and others emphasize.

<sup>37</sup> Tellingly, this passage uses the verb “rebellet,” rather than the noun “rebellion.”

and to blow the trumpet.”<sup>38</sup> So far there is nothing to imply that rebellion is anything other than the concordant action of discreet individuals.

Later in this chapter, Hobbes complicates the unity/concord distinction when he expands on the role of the “man of credit” and lists the four reasons rebels might hope for success. These are “1. That the discontented have mutual intelligence; 2. That they have sufficient number; 3. That they have arms; 4. That they agree upon a head. For these four must concur to the making of one body of rebellion, in which intelligence is the life, number the limbs, arms the strength, and a head the unity, by which they are directed to one and the same action.”<sup>39</sup> Here Hobbes is picturing rebellions as incipient states, with heads and bodies capable of exercising something resembling sovereign power according to a unified will. Rather than being a disordered multitude, rebellion, because it has a head, possesses the same sort of unity the state has, and is a collective agent in the same sense. He makes this point explicit by using an anatomical metaphor strikingly like the one he will later use at the beginning of *Leviathan*. In fact, this is a most thorough deployment of the anatomical metaphor for collective agency that exists in the *Elements*, much more so than any use Hobbes makes of it to describe the state itself. At the same time, it is clear that rebellions cannot be united in the juridical sense because whatever unity they possess in practice is contrary to law. Rebellions cannot be based on the alienation of each person’s rights because these have already been alienated to the sovereign. Thus, in rebellion we see how unity can emerge from concord, even in the absence of right, given the proper organizational form.

There is another important sense in which rebellions in the *Elements* are portrayed as incipient states, which is that they have authors. Immediately after the passage quoted above,

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<sup>38</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 162-163.

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 169.

Hobbes refers to “the authors of rebellion, that is, the men that breed these dispositions to rebel in others,” and he lists the qualities they must have. Those qualities are “1. To be discontented themselves, 2. To be men of mean judgement and capacity; and 3. To be eloquent men or good orators.”<sup>40</sup> Here, Hobbes opens up the possibility that the authors of rebellion might be its real organizers, and they might be different from the “man of credit” who leads it publicly. What’s more, the use of the word “author” in this context has intriguing implications. Not until *Leviathan* did Hobbes develop his distinctive theory of the state as authorized representative, and in the *Elements*, he never uses the word “author” in relation to the state.<sup>41</sup> The only things that have authors in it are nature (which is authored by God), rebellion, and sedition, which are authored by men. Perhaps, then, the idea of the state as an artificial actor created by the authorization of its subjects, which plays such a crucial role in *Leviathan*, was adapted from Hobbes’s description of rebellion as an artificial person created by authors of a very different sort.

The final point to make about the *Elements* is that, both here and in his later words, Hobbes uses the words ‘rebellion’ and ‘sedition’ in slightly different ways. ‘Sedition’ typically refers to the breakdown of unity (or sometimes concord). ‘Rebellion,’ on the other hand, is the organizing of another collective agent within and against the state.<sup>42</sup> Thus, when Hobbes discusses bees and other creatures that exist in a state of natural concord, they are described as “free from sedition,”

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<sup>40</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 169. Arguably, eloquence might make someone a “man of credit” who could lead a rebellion, but it is hardly obvious that eloquence would be preferable to, say, military experience, in carrying out this role.

<sup>41</sup> Robin Douglass, “Authorisation and Representation before Leviathan,” *Hobbes Studies* 31, no. 1 (March 2018): 30–47 argues that the alienation theory of the *Elements* and the authorization theory of *Leviathan* are closer than is often supposed. However, he does not notice that there already are authors present in the *Elements*, though once again, they are not engaged with authorization in the juridical sense.

<sup>42</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the first definition of rebellion as “an organized armed resistance to an established ruler or government,” and sedition as “violent party strife; an instance of this, esp. a factious contest attended with rioting and disorder.” The connotation of organization in rebellion and disorder in sedition is a normal feature of their use. Thus, I am not suggesting that “rebellion” and “sedition” are Hobbesian terms of art so much as pointing out how consistently and carefully he used them.

meaning that they have no natural tendency towards disorder.<sup>43</sup> They are not described as free from rebellion, which simply does not arise as a meaningful question for entities that naturally organize themselves in one, and only one, way. Seditious, in other words, it is the condition of a collective agent experiencing disorder, as when Hobbes likens it to “the death of the commonwealth, but like to that which happeneth to a man from sickness and distemper.”<sup>44</sup>

Rebellion is a form of collective agency that cannot be understood purely in terms of disorder because it also has an organizational component. A rebellion has a body and a unified will coming from a single head. As a process, rebellion is the creation of a collective agent that resembles, but is opposed to, the sovereign state. At least in humans, this process identical to the process of sedition, but the terms ‘rebellion’ and ‘sedition’ capture it from two different perspectives because rebellion refers to agent that is put together while sedition refers to the one that is taken apart.

The difference in usage between sedition and rebellion is important for understanding the way Hobbes deals with these same issues in *De Cive*, which he started writing shortly after fleeing London for Paris in November 1640. In general, the similarities between the *Elements* and *De Cive* are more striking than their differences, but there are reasons to think that Hobbes was already dissatisfied his earlier treatment of rebellion. Whereas the *Elements* refers to sedition and rebellion equally often, the language of sedition is much more prominent than that of rebellion in *De Cive*. In the preface, he states his objective in the book is to “certainly reveal not only the royal road to peace but also the dark and shadowy ways of sedition.”<sup>45</sup> The chapter that was “Of

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<sup>43</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 105. See also Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>44</sup> Hobbes, *Elements*, 162. This is one of the major applications of the anatomical metaphor to the state, and it is clearly less developed here than in the passage about rebellion.

<sup>45</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, 10. Hobbes’s stated intent to explain how sedition works is a reminder that we should take with a grain of salt the claim that Hobbes was primarily concerned with what people ought to do. Of all Hobbes’s books, *De Cive* is the one that is most focused on questions of right, and even it stresses the practical import of Hobbes’s

the Causes of Rebellion” in the *Elements* is here re-named “On the internal causes which tend to dissolve a Commonwealth” (chapter XII). These changes suggest Hobbes was trying to emphasize the perspective of the state and to deemphasize the organized body of rebellion.

Hobbes’s explanation of sedition in chapter XII begins by treating the dissolution of commonwealths as analogous to the motion of natural bodies.<sup>46</sup> He divides threats to the commonwealth into three categories according to his analysis of how that motion can be disrupted. First, “the *internal disposition* by which bodies are capable of making motion” can be weakened by “doctrines and passions inimical to peace.” Second, sedition can undermine “the *external agent*, by which a certain specific motion is actually produced.” This is what happens the authors of rebellion “take people who are already disposed to rebellion and violence, and incite, assemble, and direct them.”<sup>47</sup> Third, there is “the action itself,” which is here described as “faction.”<sup>48</sup> When discussing the four sources of hope required by those would engage in sedition, Hobbes claims:

none of these things [numbers, trust, and arms] has value without union under a *leader*. He must be a *leader* whom they willingly obey, not because they are obligated by having submitted to his command (for we have argued in this very chapter that men in this situation do not know that they are obligated beyond what seems right and good to themselves), but because they value his courage and military skill, or because they share his passions. If these four things are available to men who can barely tolerate their present conditions and who measure the rightness of their actions by their own arrangement, the only other thing needed to create sedition and turmoil in the commonwealth is *someone to rouse them and incite them to action*.<sup>49</sup>

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doctrines. Kinch Hoekstra, “The End of Philosophy (The Case of Hobbes),” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 10 (2006): 25–62, rightly emphasizes the relentlessly practical nature of Hobbes’s thought.

<sup>46</sup> Natural bodies here should not be taken to imply the idea of the state as a person or as an anatomical metaphor for the body politic. The motion of natural bodies is comprehended by Hobbes’s physics. When he needs to explain unlawful actions, like sedition, Hobbes does not banish them to other parts of his philosophy. Instead, he incorporates other parts of his philosophy into his politics

<sup>47</sup> It is also significant that Hobbes tells us to look to “what sort of men take the people...” indicating that he is more interested in the role social groups play in fomenting sedition than specific individuals.

<sup>48</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, 131.

<sup>49</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, 139.

In the *Elements*, the leader explicitly unites rebellion into a single body. Here, the anatomical metaphor is notably absent, and the only suggestion that leaders provide unity is in the first sentence, which is ambiguous as to whether the people are being united into one entity by the leader or whether the leader unites the other three sources of hope into the prospect of success.<sup>50</sup> Instead, the attributes of the leader seem to have more to do with ensuring concord among the rebels, a thought more in keeping with the juridical form of the concord/unity distinction.

Hobbes again complicates this position as he delves into the role of those who “rouse” and “incite” the people to sedition, the group he previously called the authors of rebellion.<sup>51</sup> At the end of chapter XII, Hobbes warns, “even many of those who are loyal to the commonwealth unwittingly cooperate in disposing the citizen’s minds towards sedition, by infecting the young people in schools and the rest of the population from the pulpit with teaching that follows the opinions we have spoken of.”<sup>52</sup> These people may not have seditious intentions, but because they do not understand sovereignty, the things they teach are objectively seditious. In contrast to the unintentionally seditious, “those who want to turn that disposition into action devote the whole thrust of their efforts first to uniting the disaffection as *faction* and a *conspiracy* and then to getting the leading role of the *faction* themselves.”<sup>53</sup> By placing this sentence immediately after the sentence about how schools and churches unwittingly foster sedition, Hobbes gives us every reason to believe that these people, the deliberate authors of sedition, are most likely to be found in those same institutions. Rather than separating leaders and authors, Hobbes suggests that the authors of sedition have a tendency to eventually become its leaders, as well. This dynamic,

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<sup>50</sup> There is some doubt as to how the passage ought to be translated. The word “without” is an emendation. See Hobbes, *De Cive*, 139 ft. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Hobbes does not use the language of authors to describe sedition in *De Cive*, but it is obvious from the passage above that the “someone to rouse them and incite them action” is not (at least initially) the leader.

<sup>52</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, 140.

<sup>53</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, 140. In the paragraph prior to this, Hobbes cites Cataline as the ideal author of sedition, and he was also a leader.

along with its more forceful account of how a seditious faction acquires unity, suggests that traces of the incipient state model linger in *De Cive* despite the absence of the anatomical metaphor.

This impression is confirmed in chapter XIII, “On the duties of those who exercise the sovereign power.” There, Hobbes describes factions as collective agents in almost the same way he treated rebellions in the *Elements*. “By faction,” he wrote, “I mean a crowd [*multitudo*] of citizens, united either by *agreements* with each other or by the power of one man, without authority from the holder or holders of sovereign power.”<sup>54</sup> As this passage makes clear, factions can be based either in concord or in an unlawful unity created by one person’s power.<sup>55</sup> “A *faction*,” he continued, “is like a commonwealth within a commonwealth, for just as a commonwealth comes into being by men’s union in a natural state, so a faction comes into being by a new union of citizens.” If the category of faction subsumes the category of rebellion, then this passage, in contrast to chapter XII, suggests that rebellions are, or at least can be, incipient states, just as they were in the *Elements*. So long as a leader with enough power to enforce his decisions is chosen to will on behalf of the members, the difference between a faction and commonwealth is purely juridical.

On the whole, *De Cive* is an index of Hobbes’s growing uncertainties about the nature of rebellion and of collective agency more broadly, uncertainties perhaps occasioned by the English Civil War itself and Hobbes’s encounter with the practical realities of rebellion. It is clear that Hobbes wanted to maintain the distinction between the state, which is based on the lawful unity of subjects under a single will, and other forms of human association, which are not. However,

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<sup>54</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive* 149.

<sup>55</sup> On the distinction Hobbes draws in this passage between power, authority, and sovereign power, see the discussion of *potential* and *potestas* below.

his efforts to reveal “the dark and shadowy ways of sedition” force him to complicate this simple binary. In other words, *De Cive* shows Hobbes trying to move away from the incipient state model of rebellions without having yet found a satisfying alternative.

### Of Monsters and Systems: Collective Agency in *Leviathan*

By the time Hobbes published *Leviathan*, he had found his way to an alternative conception of rebellion as kind of political monstrosity. “The Kingdoms Monster” reminds us there was nothing particularly novel in seeing rebellions as monsters. Instead, the novelty of Hobbes’s theory of rebellion in *Leviathan* is that it suggests how political monsters are constructed out of subsidiary forms of collective agency conjoined by a mixture of concord and union. Rebellions are to be understood as unstable but extremely powerful compound agents that cannot answer the question of where sovereignty resides because they possess (partially) unified bodies, but no unified will. Though scholars in the past few decades have been keen to point out the similarities between *Leviathan* and Hobbes’s earlier political treatises, *Leviathan* deploys a new vocabulary of collective agency, with terms and metaphors that are only slightly anticipated in *De Cive* and the *Elements of Law*, and it is hard not to believe that the events Hobbes saw unfolding in England had something to do with these changes. The practical problems of politics feature much more prominently in *Leviathan* than they did in his earlier works, and no problem was more important to Hobbes than preventing rebellion.

At the heart of *Leviathan*’s practical politics is a new conception of power. Sandra Field has argued for a distinction between the “entitled power” or “authority” of the Hobbesian sovereign and the sovereign’s “effective power” or “causal capacity.”<sup>56</sup> Tracing the ways Hobbes uses the

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<sup>56</sup> Sandra Field, “Hobbes and the Question of Power,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 1 (2014): 61–85.

terms *potentia*, *potestas*, and *imperium* in his Latin works, Field sees a growing divergence between the usage of *potentia* to designate effective power on the one hand, and *potestas* or *imperium* to designate entitled power on the other. She argues that all three terms are basically interchangeable in *De Cive*, but, by the Latin edition of *Leviathan* (1666), they have been clearly distinguished, and the relationship between these two senses of power is one of the more important, if unappreciated, problems dealt with in *Leviathan*. She writes:

‘Potentia’ now refers only to the sovereign’s effective capacity and does not purport to illuminate entitled capacity; entitled capacity or authority is now considered separately under the heading of the sovereign’s ‘potestas’ or ‘imperium.’ To be sure, the science of potestas is dominant in Hobbes’s works, explaining commentators’ neglect of his science of potentia. However, the development of a distinct science of potentia corresponds to a new understanding of the problem of politics. The challenge for the political philosopher is not merely to establish a science of entitled power elaborated through a doctrine of right blithely assuming that effective power will readily follow; it is also necessary to understand the real determinants of effective power as systematically and precisely as possible, in order to bring that effective power to coincide with right.<sup>57</sup>

Field connects the distinction between *potentia* and *potestas* with a change in the way Hobbes conceives of individual power. In his earlier works, a person’s *potentia* is biological and non-social, whereas, in *Leviathan*, individual *potentia* includes all of a person’s “present means to obtain some future apparent good,” and explicitly extends as far as a person’s social resources and relationships, rather than just their individual capabilities. “Therefore,” wrote Hobbes, “to have servants is power; to have friends is power; for they are strengths united,” and “reputation

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<sup>57</sup> Field, 79. In “*Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics*,” on file with the author, Field argues that the growing importance of *potentia* puts pressure on the juridical tendencies in Hobbes’s argument: “human *potentia* is relational and actual, and subject to great inequalities. Furthermore, individual human powers can accumulate into relatively stable informal allegiances and social groupings, endowed with their own power, even without any formal union ... The new conception of *potentia* sits uncomfortably with the juridical theory of absolute state *potestas*, because in the face of competition from private informal powers in the political domain, the state may not have *potentia* commensurate to its *potestas*: call this mismatch ‘the political problem’. The political problem can be solved only by looking beneath the juridical order of *potestas* to consider the concrete determinants of a stable collective power *potentia* of the populace.”

of power, is Power, because it draweth with it the adherence of those that need protection.”<sup>58</sup>

This means that effective power can be generated outside of the process of mutual covenanting that converts the separate *potentia* of the multitude into the unified *potestas* of the sovereign.

These new centers of social *potentia*, in turn, become threats to the sovereign’s ability to exercise the entitled powers of sovereignty. “The result,” according to Field, “is that it is a challenge for the sovereign to achieve actual effective capacity commensurate to its entitlement.”<sup>59</sup>

Hobbes’s increasing emphasis on the gap between entitled and effective power has important consequences for his theorization of collective agency. The most obvious change to Hobbes’s vocabulary is anatomical metaphor of the commonwealth and the representation of this metaphor in the image of the Leviathan. In the introduction, he famously breaks the Leviathan, the artificial person of the state, into its constituent organs:

*Sovereignty* is an Artificial *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The *Magistrates*, and other *Officers* of Judicature and Execution, artificial *Joints*; *Reward* and *Punishment* (by which fastened to the seat of the Sovereignty, every joint and member is moved to perform his duty) are the *Nerves*, that do the same in the Body Natural; The *Wealth* and *Riches* of all the particular members, are the *Strength*; *Salus Populi* (the *Peoples Safety*) its *Business*; *Counselors*, by whom all things needful for it to know, are suggested unto it, are the *Memory*; *Equity* and *Laws*, an artificial *Reason* and *Will*; *Concord*, *Health*; *Sedition*, *Sickness*; and *Civil war*, *Death*.<sup>60</sup>

The idea of the commonwealth as something with a human form was vaguely present in Hobbes’s earlier work, but the only developed anatomical metaphor before this was the description of rebellion in the *Elements of Law*, which was much less elaborate than the

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* Noel Malcolm ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012),132. To avoid confusion, citations to Malcolm’s 350-page introduction will be noted as “Malcolm ‘Introduction’” and the text itself *Leviathan*.

<sup>59</sup> Field, “Hobbes and the Question of Power,” 82.

<sup>60</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 9. See Skinner, “Hobbes and the Humanist Frontispiece,” 301-2 on why there is no contradiction between Hobbes’s treatment of the soul as “an animating force” dispersed throughout the body politic and the sovereign as being specifically represented as its head.

anatomical metaphor of the state presented here.<sup>61</sup> Also, that earlier metaphor played no role in structuring Hobbes's broader argument, but here it both introduces the book and guides several of its chapters. As Noel Malcolm notes, "it was not Hobbes's habit to structure large-scale arguments on analogies," and though Hobbes leaves the metaphor behind for many of the book's early chapters, it plays a major role in those chapters where collective agency is a central concern.<sup>62</sup>

Hobbes examines the relationship between the sovereign and other artificial persons in chapter XXII, "Of Systemes Subject, Politicall, and Private."<sup>63</sup> He wrote, "having spoken of the Generation, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, I am in order to speak next of the parts thereof. And first of systems, which resemble the similar parts, or Muscles, of a Body natural."<sup>64</sup> Though systems and muscles are not part of the anatomical metaphor in the introduction, the anatomical metaphor serves to structure the argument for much of the rest of the chapter. Hobbes uses the term "Systems" to describe "any number of men joined in one Interest, or One Business." These systems are the commonwealth's subsidiary corporate bodies and collective agents. In chapter XXII, Hobbes offers a taxonomy of different systems, as well as detailed

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<sup>61</sup> This passage also makes it clear that it is only slightly anachronistic to describe the problem of bringing together the state's entitled and effective power as a problem of organizing. While the word "organize" was not used to describe political association in the 17th century, it was often used to describe the relationship between the animating soul and the animated body. The lone example that I have found of "organize" being used in a political context carries this sense and comes from *Pseudo-Martyr*, an anti-Catholic polemic by John Donne: "So though in true Divinity the Pope is merely spiritual, yet to enable him to depose Princes, they will invest and organize him with bodily and secular Jurisdiction." Here, Donne moves "invest" and "organize," words with strong spiritual connotations, across the divide between the sacred and secular, slyly parodying the expansion of papal authority. In 1622, Hobbes would hear Donne preach at a meeting of the Virginia Company, on which see Patricia Springborg, "Hobbes, Donne, and the Virginia Company: *Terra Nullius* and 'The Bulimia of Dominion,'" *History of Political Thought* 36, no.1 (2015), 113-164. The point here is that insofar as Hobbes uses the anatomical metaphor to specify the ways in which the sovereign soul animates the body politic, it might have struck him as odd, but not incomprehensible, to call it a description of how the commonwealth is organized.

<sup>62</sup> Malcolm, "Introduction," 58.

<sup>63</sup> The most extensive recent discussions of this oddly neglected chapter are David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*, 26-33 and Springborg, "Hobbes, Donne, and the Virginia Company."

<sup>64</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 348.

guidance for the highly circumscribed terms on which they are permissible in a commonwealth. Systems comes in two kinds, regular and irregular, depending on whether they have a “constituted representative” who is able to speak for the whole. Regular systems maybe be either “absolute and independent,” in which case they are sovereign commonwealths, or “subordinate.” Subordinate systems may be either “political,” in which case they are called “Bodies Politic or Persons in Law,” or they may be “private,” in which case they are “constituted by the subjects among themselves.”<sup>65</sup> “The variety of Bodies Politic,” wrote Hobbes, “is almost infinite.”<sup>66</sup> They include local and regional governments within a commonwealth, colonies, chartered corporations and merchant companies, even Parliament itself. On the other hand, the only example Hobbes gives of a permissible private regular system is the family, where the father can act as authorized representative of the whole without special permission from the sovereign. The other examples he gives, such as the “Corporations of Beggars, Thieves, and Gypsies,” are illegal, as are systems “for making a party, against the Power of the Commonwealth,” which to say, rebellions.<sup>67</sup>

When dealing with activities of unlawful regular systems, or illegal activities by legitimate bodies politic, Hobbes relies on his juridical argument about sovereign authorization. He argued that a system’s power and agency only exist within the rules the sovereign sets for them. Beyond that, they cease to exist as groups at all and become separate individuals. So, if the representative of regular system (the director of a corporation, for example) borrows money without the authorization of people he represents (shareholders), he is liable for the debt, not them. If the representative is a council rather than an individual, only those members who voted for it are liable, not those who voted against it.<sup>68</sup> When collective agents violate the laws, or when their

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<sup>65</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 348.

<sup>66</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 358.

<sup>67</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 368.

<sup>68</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 156-7.

representatives violate the terms of authorization, Hobbes argued that the impermissible action is not a collective action at all.

Despite its elaborate development in chapter XXII, the language of systems appears nowhere else in *Leviathan*. Nevertheless, Hobbes obviously thought this material was important. Chapter XXII is almost wholly new to *Leviathan*; it is not based on *De Cive* or the *Elements of Law*. Much of this new material takes the form of Hobbes offering advice to a sovereign on how best to run a commonwealth, a form of political theory that he generally avoided in his earlier works, which suggests that he hoped powerful people would read it.<sup>69</sup> To understand why this new material was so important to Hobbes, it is worth looking at how historians think about the functioning of the state in early modern England. When this institutional context is ignored, it is easy to believe that “if there is surely one thing which Hobbes neither discussed nor countenanced, it was the diffusion of power within society.”<sup>70</sup> But the diffusion of political power was a simple fact in Stuart England, and chapter XXII is devoted to the question of how to deal with this reality. Apart from this context, the juridical concept of the state is nothing more than “a mind without a body.”<sup>71</sup> For the perennially cash-strapped Stuarts, the problem of how to embody the abstract authority promised by the idea of sovereignty was always a difficult one.

Noah Millstone describes the operation the 17<sup>th</sup> century English state in terms of an uneasy mix of cooperation, negotiation, and carefully controlled conflict between central and local elites. In his words:

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<sup>69</sup> Malcolm speculates, on the basis of both internal evidence and his careful reconstruction of the time-line over which the book was written, that Hobbes’s original purpose in writing *Leviathan* was to provide an English-language statement of his political theory and its applications to the future Charles II, who Hobbes was then tutoring in mathematics.

<sup>70</sup> Duncan Kelly, “Reconfiguring Reason of State in Response to Political Crisis,” *Law, Liberty and the State: Oakeshott, Hayek and Schmitt on the Rule of Law* D. Dyzenhaus and T. Poole eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 185-213, 186.

<sup>71</sup> Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c. 1550-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24.

the early Stuart regime's effectiveness relied almost entirely on the cooperation of an extensive network of amateur office-holders. In the counties, justice and administration lay in the hands of substantial local men who served as justices of peace, took turns being sheriff, assessed their neighbours' taxes, and executed commissions: to inspect flood defences, to repair prisons, and to resolve trade disputes. In towns and cities, cliques of urban oligarchs executed similar functions. At bottom, villages and parishes were patrolled by constables and vestrymen. Even under the best of circumstances, mobilizing these men to act – to disarm recusants, to collect money, to enforce new rules – could be onerous; add 'variance', and action might become downright impossible. The complaints and delays attendant on unpopular orders might attenuate their effectiveness, extraordinary contributions might be met with indifference or hostility or come in far short of expectations, and parliaments might prove more difficult to manage than ever.<sup>72</sup>

The resulting system has been called "government through, rather than by, the monarch," a claim which—in theory, if not in practice—is entirely congenial to Hobbes's idea of the people governing themselves by authorizing the sovereign to make judgements and punish infractions on their behalf.<sup>73</sup> But Hobbes also reminds us that the point could easily be put the other way around, for just as the Stuart state was embodied in dense networks of social relations, office holding, and corporate actors that it could not fully control, so too were these organized into a coherent whole by the authority of the sovereign. "The experience of royal power," Millstone adds, "was almost never an unmediated contact between subject and sovereign; as Sir Edward Coke observed, the king 'sees with other men's eyes and proceeds with other men's hands.'"<sup>74</sup> Unlike Hobbes, Coke worried constantly about what men's hands might do when animated by

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<sup>72</sup> Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation*, 65.

<sup>73</sup> Braddick, *State Formation*, 24. Braddick is a drawing on the 19<sup>th</sup> century historian F.W. Maitland's description of the long history of English politics as "self-government at the King's command," a formula he also refers to in *God's Fury, England's Fire*. Maitland's ideas about bodies politic and political personality are discussed in Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*, 89-123.

<sup>74</sup> Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation*, 216. Sophie Smith, "Democracy and the Body Politic," draws attention to John Case, whose 1588 *Sphæra civitas* used language similar to Coke's to argue for the superiority of monarchical governments like the Elizabethan state. Smith shows that Case's ideas belonged to a tradition of scholastic and humanist interpretations of Aristotle's monstrous, but hardly hostile, description of democracy as "one man who has many pairs of feet and hands and many senses," which Case held was an esoteric defense of monarchy (9). This tradition is also the background for the quotation from La Boétie used as this chapter's epigraph.

the King's authority, but like Hobbes, he understood that in politics, the will counts for nothing without a body through which it can act.

*Leviathan's* frontispiece is a juridical rendering of the sovereign body in which each citizen stares directly up at the sovereign without the slightest hint that other forms of collective agency might exist among them. In practice, however, state power was closely dependent on these regular systems, or bodies politic, which is why Hobbes describes them as the muscles of the commonwealth. According to Phil Withington, "the undoubted extension of centralized public authority in this period enhanced rather than diminished the power and corporate identity of officeholders within local communities," because "new methods of keeping the peace, serving on juries, regulating credit relations, or relieving the poor required, in practice, an unprecedented level of self-governance and discretion both personally and communally."<sup>75</sup> Incorporation allowed for political institutions to extend beyond the chronically overstretched capacities of the central state, but it also created sites of organized resistance within the body politic.<sup>76</sup> Hobbes was intimately familiar with the workings of chartered corporations from his involvement with the Virginia Company in the early 1620s, which Springborg describes as "a school for statesmen."<sup>77</sup> The state did not have the power to govern without corporations, and it is telling that Hobbes did not call for a centralized, bureaucratic form absolutism to replace their functions. Instead, his philosophy aimed to convert his readers to an ideological absolutism that would make them enthusiastic participants in self-governance under the control of a unified sovereign.

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<sup>75</sup> Phil Withington, "Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 1016–38,

<sup>76</sup> Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation*, 228-37 describes the role of a trade stoppage by the Levant company in precipitating the political crisis that led Charles I to disband parliament in 1629 and not call another for eleven years.

<sup>77</sup> Springborg, "Hobbes, Donne, and the Virginia Company," 125.

This strategy, however, is much more difficult to implement for irregular systems, those “which having no Representative, consist only in the concourse of People.” Irregular systems include, leagues (such as the Solemn League and Covenant made between the Scots and the Long Parliament against Charles I), conspiracies, factions, crowds, and riots, “proceeding only from a similitude of wills and inclinations.”<sup>78</sup> Not all irregular systems are equally disorganized. Leagues, for example, “are a connection of men by Covenants, if there be no power given to any one Man or Assembly (as in the Condition of mere Nature) to compel them to performance.”<sup>79</sup> Compared to the covenant that creates a body politic, the process of covenanting that creates leagues is defective because it does not resolve the question of how the league wills. But, this does not allow Hobbes to eliminate the collective agency of irregular systems entirely, as they still partially succeed in “uniting of strength by private men,” something he views as dangerous and unnecessary for people already living in a commonwealth.<sup>80</sup> By aggregating power without bringing it under control of a single will, irregular systems pose a threat to peace and security that can only be controlled through the sovereign’s discretionary power and constant supervision.

The problem, if not the language, of irregular systems returns in chapter XXIX, “Of those things that Weaken, or tend to the DISSOLUTION of a Common-wealth,” which is plainly derived from chapter XXVII in the *Elements of Law* and chapter XII in *De Cive*, though much enlarged. Hobbes presents the threats to the commonwealth as “infirmities,” comparing them to

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<sup>78</sup> In 1666, when he translated *Leviathan* into Latin (around the same time he was also writing *Behemoth*), Hobbes made some telling changes to his account of irregular systems. In particular, he amended the description of the “concourse of people” as “an irregular system” to read that concourse is “a body, but an irregular one, since it is without the unity of a person” (*Leviathan*, 374). Here we see Hobbes hinting at the idea of collective agent whose unity is not the “unity of a person,” one who possesses “a body, but an irregular one.” In other words, Hobbes is hinting at the idea that irregular systems, a category into which he placed many of the elements of rebellion, could be understood as monsters.

<sup>79</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 370.

<sup>80</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 370.

illnesses that have the same effect on the natural body as these have on the body politic.<sup>81</sup> In a section on the errors of mixed government, Hobbes wrote, “Sometimes also in the merely Civil government, there be more than one Soul,” one for each of the branches that carries out some of the tasks of sovereignty. “Such government,” Hobbes continued, “is not government, but division of the Common-wealth into three Factions, and call it mixed Monarchy; yet the truth is, that is not one independent Common-wealth, but three independent Factions.”<sup>82</sup> The problem is that these three factions are still inseparably joined in ways that are hard to capture using the terms of Hobbes’s juridical theory. Therefore, he returns to the anatomical metaphor to see if he can understand mixed monarchy as a kind of sovereign disease. “To what Disease in the Natural Body of man, I may exactly compare this irregularity of a Common-Wealth,” he wrote, “I know not. But I have seen a man, that had another man growing out of his side, with an head, arms, breast, and stomach, of his own: If he had had another man growing out of his other side, the comparison might then have been exact.”<sup>83</sup>

Here, for the first time, Hobbes presents an improperly organized collective agent as a monstrous, deformed body. As one body with three heads, three wills, and three souls, mixed monarchy produces a body politic that explodes the concept of the commonwealth and strains the very idea of collective agency. The three wills should mean that there are three agents, which is

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<sup>81</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 498

<sup>82</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 512.

<sup>83</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan* 512-4. This passage was entirely deleted from the Latin edition of *Leviathan*. It is impossible to know why, but my argument suggests that Hobbes might have been unhappy with the claim that a mixed monarchy could be seen as three separate commonwealths when the image he used to accompany this argument suggested a different approach. Another possibility can be gleaned from Lyon, “The Fisherton Monster.” In the 1660s, the Royal Society sought to tamp down on political interpretations of monstrous births and other natural phenomena as part of a program of national forgetting undertaken after the restoration of Charles II. Hobbes, though never admitted to the Royal Society, was close to many members, and removing explicit references to political monstrosity (without abandoning the ideas about collective agency they upheld) in the Latin *Leviathan* may be his way of adhering to its program. The idea of an irregular body, however, is still present in that Latin edition. Aside from its title (on which see below), *Behemoth* also avoids direct references to political monsters without abandoning the kind of agency Hobbes used monsters to represent.

what the division of the commonwealth into three factions implies. But, Hobbes's image of mixed monarchy as conjoined triplets reminds us that a unified will is necessary for being an agent, but it is not sufficient; an agent must also have a body. In a mixed monarchy, three wills are forced to share one body, undermining the agency that each faction can exercise on its own.<sup>84</sup>

This image taps into the popular rhetoric of monstrosity and bears a certain resemblance to the image of rebellion in "The Kingdoms Monster." But it also has some specific sources. First, as David Armitage notes, the image of a two-headed commonwealth comes from the Roman historian Florus's *Epitome of Roman History*, a book with which Hobbes was familiar.<sup>85</sup> Second, when Hobbes said he had "seen a man, that had another man growing out of his side," he was almost certainly referring to Lazarus Colloredo, an Italian nobleman who toured Stuart England in the 1630s and 1640s exhibiting his conjoined and "stunted" twin, John Baptist, who stuck out of his fully-formed brother's chest (see figure 3).<sup>86</sup> Colloredo was an example of what was known as "parasitic ectopy," or "the phenomenon of a host body attached to, and providing nourishment for, a weaker, imperfectly formed sibling," which was the most popular genre of monster in 17<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>87</sup> While many cases of parasitic ectopy died young, Colloredo was already twenty when he first arrived in England, in 1637. His appearance touched off a debate about how to define the boundaries of personality, agency, and responsibility that Hobbes drew on to depict the confusions of mixed monarchy.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Burns, "The King's Two Monstrous Bodies," 190 shows that image could also be inverted. James I complained that without the union of his two Kingdoms, England and Scotland, he was a head with a "divided and monstrous body." He was also King of Ireland, but uniting Catholic-majority Ireland with the other kingdoms was never even considered; that would have been too monstrous.

<sup>85</sup> David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 2017), 95, 107.

<sup>86</sup> Burns, "The King's Two Monstrous Bodies," 192 suggests the connection between Colloredo and Hobbes.

<sup>87</sup> Burnet, *Constructing Monsters*, 18; Lyon, "The Fisherton Monster," 336.

<sup>88</sup> On these debates, see Karen Jillings, "Monstrosity as Spectacle: The *Two Inseparable Brothers'* European Tour of the 1630s and 1640s," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 2, issue 1, 54-68. Given that Colloredo's life was, by all accounts, reasonably prosperous, happy, and long, it also makes sense that Hobbes, trying to depict political monstrosity as something fearful, would not name him outright.



Figure 1.6: Lazarus Colleredo and Baptista Colleredo, (possibly by Wenceslaus Hollar), NPG D28521, c.o. National Portrait Gallery.

The connection between Hobbes's image of mixed monarchy and Lazarus Colloredo reminds us of two important things. The first is that political monstrosity was not necessarily a fictional discourse. When Hobbes explicitly refers to monsters in *Leviathan*, he often describes them as the products of human imagination, as when he claims, "a man can fancy Shapes he never saw; making up a Figure out of the parts of diverse creatures; as the Poets make their Centaurs, Chimaeras, and other Monsters never seen."<sup>89</sup> But not all 17<sup>th</sup> century monsters were human/animal hybrids, and not all of them were products of the imagination.<sup>90</sup> Second, the contrast between Lazarus and John Baptist shows that we should not assume that all the factions in a political monster, like mixed monarchy, are similarly developed or equally powerful. The extent to which each faction is able to act as agent depends on how it is constituted and what portion of the shared body politic it is able to control. Thus, the practical realities of organized power play a crucial role in determining how we ought to respond to political monsters and which head we ought to look to for sovereign authority and protection.

The idea that a body politic might take the form of a monster, rather than a person, opens up space in Hobbes's thought to see rebellions and other sorts of collective agents as sharing a body, and possessing a kind of unity, without being united in the way a commonwealth is. Consequently, nowhere in *Leviathan* does Hobbes claim that leaders unite rebellions or are even a necessary feature of them. In chapter XXX, he does recommend punishing "the Leaders, and teachers in a Commotion," rather than the ordinary people who follow them, once again emphasizing that the people who lead a rebellion and the people who teach others to rebel might be different groups. But nothing here suggests that either leaders or teachers unite a rebellion into

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<sup>89</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1032.

<sup>90</sup> The image of the frontispiece might be seen as an inverted version of parasitic ectopy, in which the mighty Leviathan emerges out of the ordinary bodies of the citizens who comprise it. As to the question of whether it is a fictional or an artificial monster, see above.

one body the same way the sovereign representative unites the multitude into the people of the commonwealth.<sup>91</sup> In Chapter XXIX, unlike its predecessors in the *Elements* and *De Cive*, Hobbes does not even mention rebellions as having leaders. Instead, he warns against “the Popularity of a potent Subject,” as disrupting the normal motions of a body politic by drawing the people “away from their obedience to the laws,” which “is plain Rebellion; and may be resembled to the effects of Witchcraft.”<sup>92</sup> This much reduced warning about popular men is sandwiched between warnings about the dangerous and potentially abusive powers monopolies, the “immoderate greatness of a town,” and the existence of too many corporations, “which are as it were many lesser Commonwealths in the bowels of a greater, like worms in the entrails of a natural man.”<sup>93</sup> Overall, chapter XXIX clearly emphasizes the role of systems and institutions in fomenting rebellion as being more important than the actions of particular individuals. In other words, the authors, teachers, and even the leaders of rebellions may not be natural persons at all. Instead, they might be the other artificial persons the state depends on for its own embodiment.

Finally, Hobbes’s emphasis on institutions rather than individuals helps us understand his use of one of the most important early modern images of rebellion: many-headed hydra of Greek myth. As early as 1610, James I’s secretary of state, the Earl of Salisbury, warned Parliament, “from the want of kings unrepaired, there ariseth such a hydra of evils, as all men ought, that love their country, to make haste to destroy this monster.”<sup>94</sup> Salisbury, who had exposed the Gunpowder plot, wanted Parliament to modernize the finances of Stuart monarchy by playing on fears of a Catholic uprising aided from without by Spain. In the *Eikon Basilike*, James’s son

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<sup>91</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 544.

<sup>92</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 516.

<sup>93</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 516.

<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey Baldwin, “Reason of State and English Parliaments, 1610–42,” *History of Political Thought* 25 (2004): 620–41, 626. Baldwin’s article also shows how members of Parliament sometimes referred to reason of state thinking as a kind of monster.

Charles I invokes the hydra of rebellion to explain why he preferred death to diminishing the power of the Crown, arguing that under republican rule the people would be:

subjected to those many factious distractions, which must needs follow the many-headed Hydra of Government: which as it makes a shew to the people to have more eyes to foresee; so they will find it hath more mouths too, which must be satisfied: and (at best) it hath rather a monstrosity, then any thing of perfection, beyond that of right Monarchy; where counsell may be in many as the senses, but the Supreme Power can be but in One as the Head.<sup>95</sup>

The *Eikon*, which appeared in print just ten days after Charles's execution, was easily the most popular book of the civil war era, and Hobbes would certainly have seen it while he was writing *Leviathan*, where the hydra also makes an appearance. In chapter XXX, Hobbes warns that trying to buy the loyalty of dangerously ambitious subjects is:

a contention with Ambition, like that of *Hercules* with the Monster *Hydra*, which having many heads, for every one that was vanquished, there grew up three. For in like manner, when the stubbornness of one Popular man, is overcome with Reward, there arise many more (by the Example) that do the same Mischief, in hope of like Benefit: and as all sorts of Manufacture, so also Malice increaseth by being vendible. And though sometimes a Civil war, may be deferred, by such ways as that, yet the danger grows still the greater, and the Public ruin more assured.<sup>96</sup>

Hobbes's point is that rebellions cannot be prevented just by controlling individual leaders who, like the hydra's heads, will simply regenerate if dealt with one at a time. The exercise of sovereignty is about shaping the dispositions of the citizenry by organizing and controlling the institutions through which those dispositions are formed. Thus, to prevent rebellion, the sovereign must "oppose the beginnings of such men" before they become serious threats.<sup>97</sup> But how far back must the sovereign go to uncover these beginnings, and how can the development of rebellious subjects be brought under control? To find the answers to these questions, we must

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<sup>95</sup> Jim Daems and Holly Faith Nelson eds., *Eikon Basilike* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), 90-1.

<sup>96</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 544.

<sup>97</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 544.

turn from the philosophy of the state to the history of rebellion and to Hobbes's other monstrous book, *Behemoth*.

### Taking an evil argument in hand: Reason of State and Hobbes's Return to History

So far, we have seen how Hobbes's image of rebellion shifted over time from the incipient state model of the *Elements* to idea of political monstrosity in *Leviathan*. In all these books, however, Hobbes's efforts to describe the organization of rebellion are secondary to his main goal, which was the creation of a science of politics that demonstrated the necessity of a unified sovereign will at the heart of every political system. Consequently, piecing together a theory of rebellion from them requires focusing on ideas that are displaced or concealed by Hobbes's emphasis on the juridical theory of sovereign right. It is no surprise, therefore, that Hobbes's most detailed account of rebellion comes in the book where juridical concerns are least dominant, namely *Behemoth*, his history of the English Civil Wars. *Behemoth* builds on the idea of rebellion as a monstrous, compound agent that Hobbes developed in *Leviathan* by narrating the process through which this agent was organized by the enemies of Charles I. In telling this story, Hobbes produces as innovative, institutionally-oriented hybrid of *Leviathan*'s civil science and the 17<sup>th</sup> century discourse of reason of state, one that we might call the reason of rebellion. If we want to see Hobbes's realist theory of popular organizing most clearly, then it is to *Behemoth* that we must look.

*Behemoth* has never been as celebrated, condemned, or studied *Leviathan*. In fact, it was never officially printed in Hobbes's lifetime, though pirated copies began appearing in 1679, when licensing restrictions on book publishing were relaxed.<sup>98</sup> These pirated copies were

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<sup>98</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the information in the next few paragraphs come from Seaward's introduction to Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or, The Long Parliament* Paul Seaward ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010). But also see

presumably made from the manuscript copy available in the shop of Hobbes's regular publisher, William Croke, who published his own edition of the popular book in 1682, two years after Hobbes's death. The political context for the book's publication was the Exclusion Controversy, in which Parliamentary leaders tried to exclude Charles II's brother, James, from the royal line of succession because he was a Catholic. In the context of its publication, Hobbes's history of the Civil War was clearly meant as to remind readers of the dangers of Parliamentary overreaching and fear-mongering.<sup>99</sup> However, *Behemoth* was actually written roughly a decade prior to the appearance of these pirated copies, sometime in the late 1660s, during the second Anglo-Dutch War, another period in which the Restoration government was under severe stress. In a letter from 1679, when Hobbes was trying to convince Croke not to publish an authorized edition, Hobbes said he tried to get *Behemoth* published soon after he wrote it, but the King would not permit it. John Aubrey, Hobbes's close friend, wrote John Locke in 1673, encouraging Locke to get a manuscript copy from Croke by claiming, "the king has and likes [it] extremely, but tells [Hobbes] there is so much truth in it he dares not license for fear of displeasing the Bishops."<sup>100</sup> We do not know whether Locke ever followed Aubrey's advice, nor do we know whether Aubrey was correct to claim that the king had read and liked *Behemoth*, but there can be no doubt that the Anglican clergy hated the book and were instrumental in preventing it from being published, as they did with all of Hobbes Restoration-era texts.

We are also unsure whether the book should even be called *Behemoth*. Hobbes never referred to the book by that title, typically calling it his dialogue, or simply book, on the civil

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Tomaž Mastnak, "Making History: The Politics of Hobbes's *Behemoth*," *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, 575-602 for the most up to date overview of the literature on *Behemoth*.

<sup>99</sup> Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 11.

wars. The copy Hobbes gave Crooke for manuscript circulation was listed in his catalogue as “Epitome of the Civil Wars of England,” while most of the pirated editions called it Hobbes’s “History of the Civil Wars of England.”<sup>101</sup> The title *Behemoth* has two sources: the authorized edition Crooke published after Hobbes’s death and the formal presentation manuscript given to Henry Bennet, Baron Arlington, one of Charles II’s closest advisers and Hobbes’s chief protector in court. Only the presentation copy carries the full title by which the book is most commonly known today, *Behemoth, or The Long Parliament*. Even if we accept that the title of the presentation copy is the one Hobbes intended, it is still not clear what the title means. Unlike *Leviathan*, which explains its own title in the text, Hobbes never uses the title the text of *Behemoth*. In Hobbes’s entire corpus, he uses the word ‘Behemoth’ only twice. First, in his dispute with Bishop Bramhall in the 1650s, Hobbes archly suggests a title for the books Anglican clerics were writing against his views, “Behemoth against Leviathan.” The second comes from Hobbes’s Latin verse history of Christianity, the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, “[the Pope] took Leviathan by the nose, and hooked Behemoth, both the king and the people were enslaved.” The first reference to Behemoth associates it with the Anglican clergy, the second with the people (and Leviathan with the king) who are misled by the Pope, and the presentation copy connects Behemoth with the Long Parliament. The diversity associations is the point. The biblical monster Behemoth had strong associations with plurality and disorder in the early modern period, partly because “Behemoth” is plural in Hebrew.<sup>102</sup> Behemoth had already been used to describe the Pope, particularly by Protestants who associated the papacy with the Antichrist, and royalist poet John Cleveland had already used it in relation to the Long Parliament. Titling his book *Behemoth*

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<sup>101</sup> Armitage, *Civil Wars*, 95 points out that Hobbes’s use of “epitome” is probably another reference to Florus.

<sup>102</sup> For a discussion of the range of symbolic resonances available to Hobbes, see Patricia Springborg, “Hobbes’s Biblical Beasts: *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*” *Political Theory* 23, No. 2 (May 1995): 353-375.

allowed Hobbes to use its associations to represent rebellion as a method of organizing power that was inimical to sovereignty because it was built on the centrifugal forces of 17<sup>th</sup> century English society.

The presentation copy of *Behemoth* that Hobbes gave to Lord Arlington includes a dedication that summarizes the content of each of its four dialogues. “The first,” he wrote, “contains the seed of [the Civil War], certain opinions in Divinity and Politics. The second hath the growth of it in Declarations, Remonstrances, and other writings between the King and Parliament published. The two last are a very short Epitome of the War it self, drawn out of Mr. Heath’s Chronicle.”<sup>103</sup> Chronologically, the first section covers Hobbes’s views regarding background and causes of war and ends at the about the time the Long Parliament began to sit in 1640, which is also the point at which Hobbes fled England for France. The second section goes from the sitting of the Long Parliament to the raising of the King’s standard at Nottingham in August 1642, which symbolically marked the beginning of the Civil War. In the second section, Hobbes’s primary source was the Parliamentary publisher Edward Husbands’s collection of the documents exchanged in the “paper war” between Parliament and King from 1640 to 1643. The third section covers the war from the outbreak of hostilities to the execution of Charles I and the declaration of the Commonwealth in 1649, two years after which Hobbes published *Leviathan* and returned to England. The fourth section covers the life and death of the Commonwealth, ending with the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.<sup>104</sup> The historical information in the third and

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<sup>103</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 106.

<sup>104</sup> All this gives a misleading impression as to the historical tidiness *Behemoth*. Inside each dialogue, Hobbes embarks on long digressions that cover everything from the history of Parliament after the Norman Invasions and origins of English universities to the definition of heresy in the councils of the early Church and the writings of ancient Greek historians on the role played by priests in societies around the world. Though these digressions, Hobbes is able to place the forces involved in the Civil War on varying time scales to see how they operate together to undermine sovereign power, as well as to consider what sorts of responses will be effective at each level. On the peculiar temporal structure of *Behemoth*, see David Wootton, “Thomas Hobbes’s Machiavellian Moments,” *The*

fourth dialogues is largely a summary (“epitome”) of the royalist history of the Civil War James Heath published shortly after the Restoration.<sup>105</sup>

But why did Hobbes choose to write a history of the English Civil Wars at all? Aside from the reference to it as a history in his Latin autobiography, all of Hobbes’s references to *Behemoth* in English avoid calling it a work of history, and his comments on history in *Leviathan* are notoriously skeptical of its intellectual value. There, he separates history from philosophy (which is “*Knowledge of the Consequence of one Affirmation to another*”) altogether, arguing that history is just “the Register of *Knowledge of Fact*,” and civil history, “The History of Voluntary Actions of men in Commonwealths.”<sup>106</sup> However, Hobbes gave a very different assessment of historical knowledge in his first published work, a translation of Thucydides accompanied by a substantial historiographic essay, “On the Life and History of Thucydides.”<sup>107</sup> In it, Hobbes identifies the two chief elements of historical writing as “*truth* and *elocution*. For in *truth* consisteth the *soul*, and in *elocution* the *body* of history. The latter without the former, is but a picture of history; and the former without the latter, unapt to instruct.” In writing on the Peloponnesian Wars, Thucydides “took an evil argument in hand” because he understood that “men’s miseries do better instruct, than their good success.” Similarly, in the dedication of *Behemoth*, Hobbes wrote, “there can be nothing more instructive towards Loyalty and Justice then will be the memory, while it lasts, of that War.”<sup>108</sup> Hobbes also commends Thucydides’s

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*Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800* Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210-242.

<sup>105</sup> For a description of Heath’s history and its relation to *Behemoth*, see Royce MacGillivray, *Restoration Historians and the English Civil War* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1974).

<sup>106</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124.

<sup>107</sup> David Grene, *The Peloponnesian War: The Complete Hobbes Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 569-586. Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbes’s Thucydides,” *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, 547-574 argues that Hobbes purpose in translating Thucydides was to offer a quiet warning against England’s bellicose, imperial foreign policy in the 1620s. On the other hand, Springborg, “Hobbes, Donne, and the Virginia Company,” argues that that the translation was meant to support he imperialist project of reviving the Virginia company.

<sup>108</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 106.

approach to historical causality, “putting first the narration of the public and avowed cause of this war, and after that the true and inward motive of the same,” saying, “I think a more clear and natural order cannot possibly be devised.” To be sure, Hobbes is clear that a historian’s guess at inward motives is a conjecture that should be made cautiously, but he is also clear that questions of causality are as much a part of history as questions of fact. Even the stated reasons for a conflict are causally important, “for without a pretext, no war follows.”<sup>109</sup>

The framework for classifying different sorts of histories Hobbes uses in his essay on Thucydides comes from Francis Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*. At the end of his section on civil (i.e. political) history, Bacon pauses to consider something called “Ruminated History.” Ruminated history is “a form of Writing, which some grave and wise men have used, containing a scattered History of those actions, which they have thought worthy of memory, with politique discourse and observation thereupon; not incorporate into the History, but separately, and as the more principal in their intention.”<sup>110</sup> For Bacon, ruminated history is not history in the strict sense of the term, “for it is the true office of History to represent the events themselves. Together with the counsels, and leave the observations, and conclusions thereupon, to the liberty and the faculty of every mans judgment.” Ruminated histories, he argued, are “more fit to be place amongst Books of policie,” though he despairs of giving this genre a more satisfying definition because “Mixtures, are things irregular, whereof no man can define.”<sup>111</sup> Bacon’s judgment on ruminated history may explain why Hobbes was so loathe to describe *Behemoth* as a work of history. *Behemoth*, which is as much a series of philosophical and historical digressions as it is a narrative of the civil war (and most of the narrative summary of another book), is obviously very

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<sup>109</sup> Grene, 582-2.

<sup>110</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* Michael Kiernan ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 70.

<sup>111</sup> Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 70.

different from either Baconian history or the Thucydidean form of instructive narration that Hobbes praised early in his career.

That Hobbes meant for *Behemoth* to be read as something other than a simple history may also be suggested by his choice to write it in the form of a dialogue. In the dedication, Hobbes describes it as, “four short Dialogues concerning the memorable Civil War in his Majesty’s Dominions from 1640 to 1660.”<sup>112</sup> The dialogue’s two interlocutors are known only as A and B, and the only thing the text tells us about them is that A was old enough to have witnessed and remembered the entire course of events, while B was not. Hobbes used the dialogue form in other of his Restoration-era works, most obviously in the *Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* and the Appendix to the Latin edition of *Leviathan*, but there was no established convention of writing histories in dialogue form in 17<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>113</sup> Rather, the use of the dialogue form suggests that *Behemoth* was meant to be read a “book of policy” or “ruminated history” along the lines that Bacon laid out in the *Advancement of Learning*. In particular, *Behemoth* recalls many of the themes and tropes of the reason of state literature that flourished in late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Not only was Bacon himself a prominent contributor to this genre, but, in his early career, Hobbes also engaged extensively with reason of state, translating a propaganda pamphlet that made extensive use of reason of state arguments, addressing some of its core questions in his translation of Thucydides, and possibly writing the “Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus,” a line by line exegeses of the most important author for reason of state theorists.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 106.

<sup>113</sup> For an account of the possible pedagogical uses of the dialogue form, see Geoffrey M. Vaughan, *Behemoth Teaches Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Political Education* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2002).

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Reason of State, Propaganda, and the Thirty Years’ War* Noel Malcolm ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007) and Thomas Hobbes, *Three Discourses: A Critical Modern Edition of Newly Identified Work of the Young Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). See also Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*; Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation*; and Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*.

Reason of state was “a political art that concerned itself with the problems of maintaining the stability of states, and addressed the moral ambiguity between such an end and the possible means to achieve it.”<sup>115</sup> As Noah Millstone has argued, reason of state was less a settled doctrine than “a way of seeing grounded in suspicion, the prevalence of deceit and the conviction that things were not as they seemed...it worked not primarily as a legitimizing language, but as a form of technical reasoning, and particularly as an interpretive framework or way of seeing the world.”<sup>116</sup> By studying reason of state, “political sophisticates learned a series of hermeneutic techniques, including the application of historical parallels and the discovery of secret documents, to unveil the true, hidden causes behind events.”<sup>117</sup> This provided a framework of principles for making intelligible European events in a period of shifting alliances, continental warfare, and rapidly disseminated, if frequently inaccurate, information via the printing press. Learning how to interpret events and public pronouncements would allow practitioners to become experts in controlling public opinion through the prudent use secrecy and publicity. Reason of state,” Millstone writes, “was the science of managing a collaborative monarchy, and publicity was part of that science. If publicity efforts were moves, then shifting the cumbersome, decentred Jacobean state apparatus was the game.”<sup>118</sup>

It would be an exaggeration to say, as Millstone sometimes implies, that this framework had no substantive political content. It “regarded the state as a person whose health had to be safeguarded for the good of all. This meant seeing politics as an art or a science that gave the

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<sup>115</sup> Baldwin, 623-4. For a recent attempt to claim reason of state as a source of democratic thinking for today’s realist scholarship, see Maloy, *Democratic Statecraft*.

<sup>116</sup> Noah Millstone, “Seeing Like a Statesman in Early Stuart England,” *Past & Present* 223, no. 1 (May 2014): 77–127, 81. The strength of Millstone’s work is that he makes it clear how reason of state operated as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense, rather than as a specific doctrine or even an intellectual tradition. Consequently, his conceptualization is much broader than that of most of the other authors cited here.

<sup>117</sup> Millstone, “Seeing Like a Statesman,” 82.

<sup>118</sup> Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation*, 91.

appropriate response to events in time, rather than the art of creating an appropriate constitutional framework.”<sup>119</sup> This implied a specific moral doctrine: “If something is necessary to the existence of the republic, justice as an abstract measure of right is set aside, and the substantive end of preserving the republic transforms the action.”<sup>120</sup> Reason of state arguments could be deployed on many sides of a conflict, as they were by both Royalists and Parliamentarians during the English Civil War, but the core of its doctrine was that states were ethically distinct actors whose special powers and responsibilities required they act according to unique moral standards, a point that Hobbes carries to dramatic extremes in *Behemoth*.

It was clear to some of *Behemoth*'s earliest readers that it was connected to the reason of state tradition. Noel Malcolm has discovered a 1708 manuscript translation of *Behemoth* into Latin by Adam Ebert, a Prussian scholar and courtier. According to Ebert, “Hobbes not only adapted his efforts to demonstrating the savagery of rebellious injustice, but also ... wanted to make known the arts by which Cromwell, that unparalleled politician, climbed to the top of the ruins of royal power.”<sup>121</sup> Another reader, perhaps less idiosyncratic, who saw *Behemoth* in reason of state terms was John Whitehall, whose *Behemoth Arraign'd* is the only contemporary published response to Hobbes's book. As a disciple of Hobbes's chief enemy at court (and former friend), Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, the substance of Whitehall's response to Hobbes stays close to Clarendon's common law constitutionalism. However, the beginning of Whitehall's book deploys the same techniques of suspicion and historical parallelism that Millstone identified as the hallmarks of reason of state. Whitehall tells his readers that Hobbes's objective in *Behemoth* is to “separate the King in his affection from his Subjects (as it was the

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<sup>119</sup> Baldwin, 641.

<sup>120</sup> Baldwin, 625.

<sup>121</sup> Noel Malcolm, “*Behemoth latinus*’ Adam Ebert, Tacitism and *Hobbes*,” *Hobbes's Behemoth: Religion and Democracy*, Tomaž Mastnak ed. (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2012), 28-72, 45.

part of *Leviathan* perpetually to separate the Subjects from their King).”<sup>122</sup> He also alludes to the story of the Roman aristocrat and general Sejanus, a popular parallel for reason of state theorists in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, to imply that Hobbes’s apparent absolutism is actually a deliberate strategy for undermining Charles II by convincing the King to govern illegally, thereby provoking a new rebellion.<sup>123</sup> Whitehall asks his readers to see Hobbes not as a truth-seeking philosopher or historian, but as an evil councilor pursuing his own objectives at the expense of the sovereign he claims to uphold.

What’s striking about the reception of *Behemoth* in these terms is that reason of state was out of fashion by the time it was published. In a way, the exhaustion of reason of state was a direct consequence of its extraordinary success, as parties on both sides of political conflicts deployed its arguments and common people learned to use some of its interpretive strategies. “The crucible of the war had forced reason of state into the open,” writes Geoff Baldwin, “but it also demonstrated that arguments of legitimacy which based themselves on the safety of the state could be appropriated by people and institutions other than those that had originally deployed them.”<sup>124</sup> According to Millstone, as reason of states became “a common language for ‘low’ political thinking, ‘high’ political thinking moved on: to Hobbesian rationalism, to highly technical political arithmetic, and so on.” For these new forms of political reasoning, “impersonal forces rather than human intention became their main object of enquiry,” with the result that “by around 1650 [reason of state] analysis was no longer cutting-edge.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> John Whitehall, *Behemoth Arraign’d, or, A Vindication of Property against a Fanatical Pamphlet Stiled Behemoth, or, The History of the Civil Wars of England from 1640 to 1660, Subscribed by Tho. Hobbes of Malmsbury* (London: Thomas Fox, 1680).

<sup>123</sup> Ben Jonson’s play, *Sejanus his Fall*, was a particularly important retelling of this story for 17<sup>th</sup> century English readers. Hobbes and Jonson knew each other, as both were clients of the Cavendish family.

<sup>124</sup> Baldwin, 641.

<sup>125</sup> Millstone, “Seeing Like a Statesman,” 125.

Hobbes's role in this transformation was substantial, for though he shared many starting assumptions with reason of state theories, *Leviathan* announced a fundamentally different project. "It is possible to read the *Leviathan*," writes Millstone, "as Hobbes's attempt to construct a politics without fraud, arguing that rulers could obtain firmer obedience from subjects through consent and public recognition of the community of interest between the governors and governed."<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Noel Malcolm argues that Hobbes "aimed at something quite different" from reason of state's techniques of manipulation. He wanted "a true science of politics, which would guarantee the certainty of success for future rulers by systematically undeceiving the people." Malcolm concludes that reason of state "mattered for Hobbes, but it did so only because it described the problem. To that problem, he offered a fundamentally different solution."<sup>127</sup>

Why, then, did Hobbes write a philosophical history of the English Civil Wars that drew strongly on the reason of state tradition in the late 1660s? Part of the answer is to be found in the politics of the English court, where the downfall and exile of Clarendon in 1667 freed Hobbes of his main enemy there, while the rise of Arlington gave him an influential supporter who would be in a position to act on his advice. Equally, the spread of reason of state thinking beyond the political class meant that, if *Behemoth* were widely published, there would be readers able to understand its lessons. Since Hobbes's own civil science started with the same skeptical ideas about morality, the state, and the natural right of self-preservation, it was not hard for Hobbes to provide a reason of state analysis of the conflict that supported the doctrines of *Leviathan*. But, Malcolm notwithstanding, Hobbes's problem in *Behemoth* is not the same as the old reason of state problem of finding ways for "the wise man to adapt his actions to the conditions of cupidity

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<sup>126</sup> Millstone, "Seeing Like a Statesman," 93.

<sup>127</sup> Malcolm, "*Behemoth latinus*," 71.

and stupidity that prevail among the people.”<sup>128</sup> Though Hobbes accepted that accuracy of that description of the people, the guiding question of *Behemoth* is not simply how best to respond, but “how came the people to be so corrupted?”<sup>129</sup> The question of the historical origins of political subjectivity is prior to reason of state’s typical starting place, but Hobbes uses the tools of reason of state to answer it. He deploys its techniques of suspicion to examine some of the dominant institutions of Stuart society and expose the means by which they spread false ideas that corrupted the King’s subjects in order to enhance their own power and further their own interests. Where *Leviathan* begins with a theory of human nature and builds to a theory of politics, *Behemoth*’s innovative application of reason of state deals with how human nature is produced by institutions that, like the state itself, are artificial persons not subject to natural death, making them mortal gods in their own right.<sup>130</sup> The story Hobbes tells in *Behemoth* shows how these lesser gods came together to form a powerful monster that brought forth anarchy by killing the sovereign Leviathan it could not replace.

#### A View from Devil’s Mountain: *Behemoth* and the Organizing of Rebellion

*Behemoth*’s opening lines of dialogue announce its objectives terms familiar from the reason of state tradition. A, the primary interlocutor, tells B:

If in time as in place there are degrees of high and low, I verily believe that the highest of time would be that which passed between the years of 1640 and 1660. For he that thence, as from the devil’s mountain, should have looked upon the world, and observed the actions of men, especially in England, might have had a prospect of all kinds of Injustice, and of all kinds of Folly that the world could afford, and how they

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<sup>128</sup> Malcolm, “*Behemoth latinus*,” 59.

<sup>129</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 108.

<sup>130</sup> Mastnak, “Making History,” argues that *Behemoth* shows how Hobbes’s civil science can counter reason of state’s “art of unmaking the state” (594). I think he underestimates how much reason of state thinking Hobbes folded into his description of what the sovereign would have to do to make sure his subjects learned to internalize civil science.

were produced by their dams hypocrisy and self-conceit, whereof the one is double iniquity and the other double folly.<sup>131</sup>

B responds that he would be glad of the view since A had “lived in that time, and in that part of your age wherein men used to see best into *good* and *evil*, I pray that you set me (that could not then see so well) upon the same mountain by the relation of the actions then saw, and of their causes, pretensions, justice, order, artifice, and event.” As Millstone has pointed out, “the metaphor comparing politic thinking to a form of vision was itself developed in the early seventeenth century,” and the substance of this exchange is also familiar from Hobbes’s description of Thucydidean history.<sup>132</sup> A proposes to show B the actions of men and describe the means by which those actions were brought about in order to show examples of injustice from which B can learn something useful. A’s pedagogical authority is stated purely in terms of his age and the wisdom that comes with it, not in terms of his superior knowledge of the science of politics.<sup>133</sup> By taking history, experience, and vision as sources of knowledge A can draw on in teaching politics, Hobbes contrasts the approach he takes in *Behemoth* with that of *Leviathan*, aligning the former much more closely with reason of state.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 107.

<sup>132</sup> Millstone, “Seeing Like a Statesman,” 79. Patricia Springborg, “‘Behemoth’ and Hobbes’s ‘science of just and unjust,’” *Hobbes’s Behemoth: Religion and Democracy*, 148-169 compares *Behemoth*’s opening to Machiavelli’s use of sight at the beginning of *The Prince*. But an even closer parallel exists with Francis Bacon’s reason of state-inspired *History of the Reign of Henry VII*, which also uses a topographical metaphor for time in its introduction. “He was a wise man, and an excellent king,” writes Bacon, “and yet the times were rough, and full of mutations and rare accidents. And it is with times as it is with ways. Some are more uphill and downhill, and some are more flat and plain.” Bacon, of course, was strongly influenced by Machiavelli.

<sup>133</sup> Here I use the masculine when referring to A and B, but this is nothing in the text to determine the genders of the interlocutors.

<sup>134</sup> Hobbes’s reason of state language is one of the reasons he is less precise about the use of some his signature terms in *Behemoth*. “The people” and the “multitude” are used more interchangeably than they are in his other works, while terms like “union,” “league,” “covenant,” “concord,” “rebellion,” “sedition,” and “confederacy” also lose some of the precision they had in his earlier work. Given that many of these words were used to describe specific factions in the Civil Wars (e.g. The Scottish Covenanters or the Irish Confederates), insisting too precisely on his own technical definitions might have made the text more confusing. In some cases, it is possible to compare terms and passages in *Behemoth* with revisions Hobbes made, around the same time, to the Latin *Leviathan* in order to see if they reflect changes in his concepts or simply the demands of writing in a different genre.

Reason of state rhetoric can also be seen in Hobbes's habit of introducing a simple thesis that is subsequently complicated or criticized by the ensuing exposition. This allows him to present the ostensible or "pretended" explanation before exposing how different practical realities actually were. A's response to B after the opening exchange is an example of this technique. A says, "in the year 1640 the government of England was monarchical," after which he traces Charles I's claim to the throne and attests to the King's fitness to rule by pointing out that Charles "wanted no virtue either of body or mind."<sup>135</sup> B asks how a monarch who has the basic individual powers a person needs to carry out the duties of sovereignty could possibly be deposed when England had an army that could quash the rebellion. A answers that the army would have been adequate to prevent rebellion, but it did not obey Charles because "the people were corrupted generally, and disobedient persons esteemed the best Patriots." B insists there must have been enough people "to have made an Army sufficient to have kept the people from uniting into a body able to oppose him."<sup>136</sup> A replies that there would have been enough soldiers if the King had been able to pay them, as "few of the common people that cared much for either of the *Causes*, but would have taken any side for pay and plunder." But, because the people were corrupted, they would not pay their taxes, and so the King still did not have an army. As B is later forced to admit, "in such a constitution of people, me thinks the King is already outed of his government."<sup>137</sup> In other words, the England of 1640 may have been a monarchy in name only, though few knew it at the time.

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<sup>135</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 107.

<sup>136</sup> Here, the revisions to the Latin *Leviathan* regarding irregular bodies and the union without design (see above) suggest that Hobbes meant "uniting into a body" to be taken seriously. This uniting is what makes rebellion the process of organizing and creating a new collective agent rather than just being a form of civil breakdown marking an immediate reversion to the state of nature.

<sup>137</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 107.

Having shown how popular corruption prevented Charles from either using his army or raising the funds to command mercenaries, Hobbes makes B ask the decisive question, “but how came the people to be so corrupted? And what kind of men were they that could so seduce them?” A answers with a list of types of people who caused the general corruption and brief accounts of what they contributed. They are:

1. Presbyterian ministers
2. Catholics
3. Religious Independents
4. Educated gentlemen with republican sympathies
5. The City of London and other commercial towns
6. Greedy fighters-for-hire
7. The people, who were ignorant of the nature of sovereignty.<sup>138</sup>

It is important to note that B’s question to A was “what kind of men were they,” not “which men were they?” *Behemoth* is focused on kinds of people, and particular individuals do not play a prominent role in it. To an extent, this is because Hobbes is working in the confines of the 1660 “Act of Free and General Pardon, Indemnity, and Oblivion,” which pardoned and officially forgot much of what was done in the Civil War. Hobbes himself hid behind this act when his enemies (like John Whitehall in *Behemoth Arraign’d*) accused him of betraying the King’s cause by publishing *Leviathan*, so it was not a law he had an interest in undermining. But the act explicitly did not cover the regicides and other Parliamentary leaders, so Hobbes could have said more about them if he had wanted to. Instead, the only person who the narrative deals with at any real length is Oliver Cromwell. Not even Charles I is described very much, and the Parliamentary leaders who started the Civil War are only named in passing.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 109-11.

<sup>139</sup> Perhaps the best way to appreciate the novelty of Hobbes’s approach to history in *Behemoth* is to compare it with the most famous 17<sup>th</sup> century history of the English Civil Wars, Clarendon’s *History of the Rebellion*. Clarendon uses his celebrated “portraits,” or character sketches, to emphasize the role of individuals in bringing about a rebellion that could have been avoided but was also a form of divine punishment, coming “from the same natural

By focusing on kinds of people, rather than specific individuals, Hobbes makes a theoretical virtue of oblivion, completing the turn away leadership that he began in *De Cive*. There was no one leader who corrupted the people, and popular corruption was what effectively disarmed Charles I and made military resistance to his rule possible. Eventually, Cromwell emerges in *Behemoth* as the leader of the rebellion for precisely the reasons that Hobbes anticipated in *De Cive*: military skill and shared religious enthusiasms. But, Hobbes does not pretend that Cromwell was particularly influential in starting the Civil War. He was just one “democratical gentleman” among many until the formation of the New Model Army put him at the head of a new, highly organized, and extremely powerful collective agent. The work of organizing the rebellion was carried out at many different sites by a diverse range of actors, most of whom were not knowingly cooperating in their efforts to corrupt the people. As with the image of the Kingdom’s Monster, rebellion was formed by combination of groups whose joined body had neither a clear hierarchy of authority nor a unified, sovereign will.

That said, not all the seducers of the people were equally important, nor were they important in the same ways. Later in the first dialogue, A says, “certainly the chief leaders were ambitious Ministers and ambitious Gentlemen, the Ministers envying the Authority of Bishops whom they thought less learned, and the Gentlemen envying the Privy Counsel and principal Courtiers, whom they thought less wise than themselves.”<sup>140</sup> The power that these gentleman and ministers

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causes and means which have usually attended kingdoms swollen with long plenty, pride, and excess, towards some signal mortification, and castigation of Heaven.” Consequently, his narrative does not go back further than the beginning of Charles I’s reign. Hobbes’s time frame is vastly larger, individuals are not the center of his narrative, and he has as little use for divine plans as had Thucydides two millennia earlier. On the differences between Hobbes and Clarendon, see MacGillivray *Restoration Historians*. Paul Seaward, “Clarendon, Tacitism, and Europe’s Civil Wars,” *The Uses of History in Early Modern England* Paulina Kewes ed. (San Marino: Huntington Library, 2006), 285-306, argues that Clarendon also drew on Tacitus to describe how the English Civil Wars came about even as he rejected reason of state as guide for royal policy.

<sup>140</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 137. As Hobbes earlier wrote in *Leviathan*, “Men that have a strong opinion of their own wisdom in matter of government, are disposed to Ambition. Because without public Employment in counsel or magistracy, the honor of their wisdom is lost” (156).

were able to exercise over the rest of the people came from the positions they occupied in government and in the church.<sup>141</sup> As A puts it, “for commonly men of age and quality are followed by their inferior neighbors that look more upon the example of those men whom they reverence, and whom they are unwilling to displease, than upon precepts and Laws.”<sup>142</sup> B is even more cynical, complaining that “the common people always have been and always will be ignorant of their duty to the public; as never meditating any thing but their particular interest, in other things following their immediate leaders, which are either the Preachers, or the most potent of the Gentlemen that dwell amongst them.”<sup>143</sup> B’s scorn is tempered by A’s reminder that “many cannot read, many though they can have no leisure, and of them that have leisure the greatest part have their minds wholly employed, and taken up by their private businesses or pleasures. So it is impossible that the multitude should ever learn their duty but from the Pulpit, and upon Holy-days.” Himself the son of a drunken village parson, Hobbes understood why ordinary people followed examples rather than doctrines, but he also saw how this allowed rebels to build local centers of effective power that could be brought to bear against the sovereign state. In the single most famous line from *Behemoth*, A says “the Power of the mighty has no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people.”<sup>144</sup>

Hobbes’s emphasis on the variety of social types involved in the production of rebellion and the range of motivations they appealed to has led Stephen Holmes to praise *Behemoth* as a realistic work of moral and political psychology, in contrast to the abstract, philosophical

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<sup>141</sup> James J. Hamilton, “The Social Context of Hobbes’s Political Thought,” *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 01 (April 2014): 1–29 argues that Hobbes held a deeply conservative social theory in which common people are, when it comes to questions of politics, intellectual blank slates who will acquire whatever views are impressed on them by their social betters, provided these views are conveyed in a suitably simplistic way.

<sup>142</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 178.

<sup>143</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 158-9.

<sup>144</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 128. Mastnak, “Making History,” points out that opinion was a central concept for reason of state theorists, who viewed the people as fickle and easily manipulated.

psychology of *Leviathan*.<sup>145</sup> However, the people's opinions and beliefs are as much the result of the places that teach them as the ideas they are taught, and so the sovereign must control the institutions that produce opinions in order to prevent them from accumulating power independent of the state. Arguments have little power outside institutions of pedagogical authority and are almost useless for changing people's minds, which is why the authors of rebellion "tended to teach men [not] *what*, but *whom* to believe."<sup>146</sup> Thus, in the second dialogue, Hobbes excoriates Charles I's advisers (like Clarendon) for engaging in a "paper war" of arguments, petitions, answers, objections, and responses to Parliament's claims in the crucial year of 1642. "For the common people," B says, "whose hands were to decide the controversy, understood not the reasons of either party. And for those that by Ambition were once set upon the enterprise of changing the Government, they cared not much for what was reason and justice in the cause, but what strength they might procure by seducing the multitude with Remonstrances from Parliament House or by Sermons in the Churches."<sup>147</sup> The paper wars were not merely counterproductive; they were actively harmful to the King's cause. Unable or unwilling to follow the arguments in detail, the people saw that the King responded to Parliament's encroachments with words rather than arms, leaving them with "an opinion that the Parliament was likely to have the victory in the War."<sup>148</sup>

But Hobbes does not simply hold ministers and gentleman accountable for causing the rebellion by believing their knowledge of religion and politics to be greater than it actually was. He goes further than this by seeking the causes behind the personalities involved. Not just a work

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<sup>145</sup> Stephen Holmes, "Hobbes's Irrational Man," *Passions and Constraints: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 69-99.

<sup>146</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 128.

<sup>147</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 262.

<sup>148</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 275.

of political psychology, *Behemoth* must also be seen as an account of the role institutions play in producing either rebellious or obedient forms of subjectivity.<sup>149</sup> Hobbes explains that, for both ministers and gentlemen, intellectual vanity is a result of university education. At university, students encounter the classics of Greece and Rome, most importantly Aristotle. “From the *universities* it was that the philosophy of Aristotle was made an ingredient to religion,” says A, and the reason for doing so was to make religion more complicated. They used “unintelligible distinctions to blind men’s eyes, whilst they encroached upon the right of kings.”<sup>150</sup> If ordinary people believe that obscure philosophical ideas like Aristotle’s doctrine of separated essences are relevant to the salvation of their souls, they will defer to the clergy and learned ministers for fear of eternal damnation.

Gentlemen also learned to esteem their political knowledge too highly at universities, “having read the glorious Histories, and the Sententious Politics of the ancient Popular governments of the Greeks and Romans; amongst whom Kings were hated and branded with the name of *Tyrants*, and *Popular governments* (though no Tyrants was ever so cruel as a Popular assembly) passed by the name of *Liberty*.”<sup>151</sup> However, instilling republican sympathies in the gentry was an accidental by-product of universities, which did not teach republicanism. Instead, students “became acquainted with the democratical principles of Aristotle and Cicero, and from the love of their eloquence, fell in love with their Politics, and that more and more till it grew into the Rebellion we now talk of.”<sup>152</sup> As a result of their crucial role as nodes of rebellion,

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<sup>149</sup> As Arash Abizadeh, “The Representation of Hobbesian Sovereignty: *Leviathan* as Mythology,” *Hobbes Today: Insights for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* S.A. Lloyd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 113-154 rightly argues, “the sovereign must therefore not only wield the sword, he must also seize the apparatuses of socialization, such as university, church, and press” (117).

<sup>150</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 160-1.

<sup>151</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 137.

<sup>152</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 164.

university reform is one of Hobbes's main concerns in *Behemoth*. According to A, "the core of Rebellion...are the Universities, which nevertheless are not to be cast away, but to be better disciplined," which is to say that Hobbes's principles are to be taught there. B agrees, adding "men may be brought to a love of obedience, by Preachers and gentlemen that imbibe good principles in their youth at the Universities, and also that we never shall have a lasting peace till the Universities themselves be in such a manner as you have said reformed."<sup>153</sup>

The importance of the universities also helps explain why Catholics are the list of those who seduced the people into civil war. A specifically lists of English Catholics, which means that he is not referring to the rebellion of Irish Catholics against Charles I, an event Hobbes treats as a consequence of England's internal disorder, rather than a cause. But English Catholics tended to be loyal to Charles, and A's claim that civil war "might possibly make way to the restoring of the Pope's Authority" is obviously a stretch.<sup>154</sup> It is true that many of the doctrines of Catholicism called pernicious in *Behemoth* were also held by the Anglican Church, and, as commentators have often noted, Hobbes is clearly using the Catholic Church as an indirect way to criticize the Anglican establishment of the Restoration.<sup>155</sup> But the majority of the space Hobbes devotes to criticizing Catholicism is given over to its role in founding the universities. Hobbes traces this history at great length, but the point is clear when A's says, "from the *Universities* also it was, that all Preachers proceeded, and were poured out into the City and Country to terrify the people into an absolute obedience to the Popes Canons and Commands."<sup>156</sup> After the English Reformation, when the Catholic Church lost control of the universities and all its other assets in

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<sup>153</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 182-3.

<sup>154</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 133.

<sup>155</sup> Jon Parkin, "Baiting the Bear: The Anglican Attack on Hobbes in the Later 1660s," *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 3 (2013): 421-458.

<sup>156</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 161.

England, Anglican bishops and Presbyterian ministers sought to use the power of the universities to their own ends. Thus, the most important element of Catholic responsibility for the civil wars is the long-term cause of creating universities that served as centers of sedition.<sup>157</sup>

University reform is a long-term strategy for securing sovereign authority, but A was originally led to the question of how the people became corrupted because he had to explain why Charles I was unable to use the militias to suppress the rebellion immediately. Throughout *Behemoth*, A and B frequently equate sovereignty with the control of military forces.<sup>158</sup> “The power of the Militia,” says A, in one of many sections where this point is made, “is in effect the whole Sovereign power. For he that hath the Power of levying and commanding of the Soldiers, has all the other Rights of Sovereignty which he shall please to claim.”<sup>159</sup> But it would be a mistake to think that being entitled to control the military is the same thing as having the power to control it. The King already had, or ought to have had, the right to control the militias in 1640, “but that signifies little, when they had the custody of the Navy and Magazines, and wit them all the Trained Soldiers, and in a manner all his subjects, were by the preaching of Presbyterian Ministers, and the seditious whisperings of false and ignorant Politicians, made his enemies, and when the King could have no money but what the Parliament should give him.”<sup>160</sup> The problem is this: the effective power needed to control the military can only be exercised by the sovereign

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<sup>157</sup> Here we see *Behemoth* using its different time scales to show why Hobbes’s science of politics is so important to grasping the long term causes and consequences of political action. Combining reason of state and the science of politics allows Hobbes to get back even behind the types of people who caused the Civil Wars to the institutions that produced them and the different powers those institutions have served.

<sup>158</sup> See Adam Yoksas, “Strategy as Enough: Statesmanship as the Peacemaker in Hobbes’s *Behemoth*,” *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 2 (2013): 226–251. Command of the military, especially the ability to appoint officers, had been one of the major disputes between the King and Parliament that precipitated the civil war. Hobbes’s insistence on the importance of military command is one of the reasons that the treatment of sovereignty in *Behemoth* weakens the distinction between sovereignty and administration developed in Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). If citizens are peaceful and obedient, a sleeping sovereign is possible, but such citizens can only be produced by the efforts of a very wakeful and active sovereign over a great deal of time.

<sup>159</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 211.

<sup>160</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 142.

when the people have been taught to understand the nature of sovereign right, which is to say, when they have not been corrupted. As B says at the end of the first dialogue, “if men know not their duty, what is there that can force them to obey the Laws? An Army, you’ll say. But what shall force the Army?”<sup>161</sup>

The problematic relationship between military power and political authority also explains the instability of the Commonwealth, which is the subject of the fourth dialogue in *Behemoth*. B summarizes the problem earlier, at the end of the second dialogue:

I understand now, how the Parliament destroyed the Peace of the Kingdom, and how easily by the help of seditious Presbyterian Ministers, and of ambitious ignorant Orators, they reduced this Government into Anarchy; but I believe it will be a harder task for them to bring in Peace again, and settle the Government. For granting that they obtain victory in this War, they must be beholding for it to the valor, good conduct, or felicity of those to whom they give command of their Armies, especially to the general.<sup>162</sup>

Without the authority of the pre-existing sovereign, the Long Parliament and the New Model Army it created were two systems joined together monstrously, and there was no way to say which of them was responsible for winning the war and was therefore sovereign. Parliament was able to influence the people through the Ministers and gentlemen who hoped to gain power through it, but the military had defeated the King’s forces and could impose its will on others through violence, provided it could acquire the funds to ensure its own existence. When the military purged the Long Parliament, and again later when Cromwell unseated the Rump, it seemed that the question of sovereignty was settled. But the same views that led to the Civil War made it impossible for Cromwell to govern or raise funds for the army without some kind of Parliament, and these Parliaments always sought to establish their own independent authority. The seduction of the people meant that they did not understand that they could follow one and

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<sup>161</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 183.

<sup>162</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 252.

only one authority. As long as they did not understand this, there could be no real sovereignty in the Commonwealth.

*Behemoth* is inconsistent in its accounts of who had sovereign power, and since there is no Latin edition, it is impossible to follow Field by looking at *potentia* and *potestas* separately. But a particularly important exchange occurs when B asks A who had “Supreme Power” after Cromwell removed the Long Parliament. A responds, “if by Power you mean the right to govern, no body [here] had it. If you mean Supreme Strength, it was clearly in Cromwell.”<sup>163</sup> The distinction Hobbes draws between the “right to govern” and “supreme strength” aligns exactly with the distinction between *potestas* and *potentia*. It also seems to challenge the argument Hobbes made in the “Review and Conclusion” to *Leviathan*, where he argued that the “mutual Relation between Protection and Obedience” at the heart of his doctrine of sovereignty obliged Englishmen to accept the authority of the Commonwealth as a sovereign by conquest.<sup>164</sup> It is important to remember that Hobbes wrote the “Review and Conclusion” at one of the high points of cooperation between Parliament and the Army, when it seemed plausible that Cromwell had united the forces of rebellion under a single will. *Behemoth*, on the other hand, was written years after the collapse of the Commonwealth from its own internal disorders. In the intervening years, Hobbes did not change his mind about the nature of sovereignty. Rather, he changed his mind about the kind of collective agency embodied by the Commonwealth. Like the Kingdom’s Monster, the Commonwealth had many heads and many wills, and after they had destroyed the state, they fell to fighting each other. A subject cannot obey such a monster because there is no single will to obey, and when a subject does not know how to obey, sovereignty’s exchange of protection for obedience impossible.

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<sup>163</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 354.

<sup>164</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 491.

Having explained the nature of rebellion and the sources of popular corruption, Hobbes is now able to return to the traditional question of reason of state. How can the sovereign, Charles II in this case, secure his sovereignty and prevent the cycle of sedition, rebellion, and civil war from happening all over again? At the end of the first dialogue, A says, “I would have [the King] have money enough readily to raise an army able to suppress any Rebellion, and to take from his enemies all hope of success, that they may not dare to trouble him in the Reformation of the Universities.”<sup>165</sup> The control of the military granted to Charles II to conduct the Second Anglo-Dutch War, was not, in itself, the basis for stable sovereignty, but it provided the King with the short-term power he needed to reform the universities in such a way that they might become schools of obedience rather than sedition. Hobbes gives every indication that he hopes this can be done without violence, but he also admits that massacring the seducers of the people would be a justifiable way to prevent future rebellion:

Our Late King, the best King perhaps that ever was, you know, was murdered, having been first persecuted by war, at the incitement of Presbyterian ministers; who are therefore guilty of the death of all that fell in that war; which were, I believe, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, near 100,000 persons. Had it not been much better that those seditious ministers, which were not perhaps 1,000, had been all killed before they had preached? It had been (I confess) a great massacre; but the killing of 100,000 is a greater.<sup>166</sup>

For a philosopher who prized peace above all else, this is a profoundly violent proposal. But it cannot be dismissed as a mere flight of fancy, because it follows directly from one of the most important commitments that Hobbes shares with contemporary realists, the “difference between the ethics of subjects and the ethics of sovereigns.” As A explains, “the virtue of a subject is comprehended wholly in obedience to the laws of the commonwealth,” while “the virtues of sovereigns are such as tend to the maintenance of peace at home, and to the resistance of foreign

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<sup>165</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 182.

<sup>166</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 231.

enemies.”<sup>167</sup> This distinction also illuminates the way Hobbes combines civil science and reason of state in *Behemoth*. The sovereign must be prepared to take extraordinary and seemingly immoral measures to constrain and control other forms of collective agency that exist within the commonwealth to ensure that they act in support of the sovereign’s authority. Other sorts of collective agents are merely subjects for whom morality is obedience to the sovereign’s will. But, the experience of the Civil Wars had taught Hobbes that the institutions the sovereign relied on to create the obedient subjects of an orderly commonwealth could also teach sedition and foment rebellion. Consequently, disciplining them would require that the sovereign use the same reason of state tactics that they used against him, even mass violence. In other words, *Behemoth* reveals that in a world of unruly subjects and power-seeking institutions, the price of order is likely to be very high indeed.

### Conclusion – Political Order as a Curious Perspective

*Behemoth*’s historical description the reason of rebellion leads us back to the two images with which this chapter began, the Leviathan and the Kingdoms Monster, and to the contrasting ways in which they ask us to think about power, agency, and organizing. Looking at them together should remind us that *Leviathan*’s depiction of the commonwealth in terms of the juridical theory of sovereign legitimacy is designed to conceal as well as reveal. In particular, it conceals the crucial role that systems and subsidiary forms of collective agency play in turning sovereign authority into a real political power. Thus, Hobbes’s famous frontispiece can be seen as an illusion that transforms the messy realities of political organizing into the image of a stable, authoritative political order. Hobbes renders the sovereign’s role as organizer-in-chief invisible

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<sup>167</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 165.

even as he offers detailed advice on how that role should be carried out. With *Leviathan*, Hobbes produced a picture that has held captive much of the subsequent history of political theory.

But in 1643, when that anonymous Parliamentary pamphleteer drew the image of royalist rebellion as a disordered monster, Thomas Hobbes was still an obscure intellectual. And though “The Kingdoms Monster,” was created by Hobbes’s political opponents, is as close to a frontispiece for *Behemoth* as we are likely to find. In fact, it can be said to anticipate Hobbes’s thinking, since, when it was printed, he was still trying to understand rebellion in terms of the unified collective agency of a state. This model of rebellion may have worked for the examples from English history that he was able to draw on in the *Elements of Law*, but, by the 1660s, it was clear to Hobbes that it could not explain what happened in England in the previous two decades. When he wrote *Behemoth*, Hobbes saw the Civil Wars as the result of a variety of collective agents joining into one body without dissolving themselves as discrete groups or ceasing to exercise their own wills. He saw in this rebellion the creation of a new and anti-sovereign form of collective agency marked by a profusion of centers of power and popular action. This was a monstrous form of politics that filled him with horror.

To resist it, Hobbes argued in *Behemoth* that the people became actors only insofar as they themselves had been authored by institutions, like the churches and universities, that make them one sort of subjects, rather than another. By presenting institutions as the authors of rebellion and the people as its actors, Hobbes reversed the juridical version of his theory of sovereign authorization. If the sovereign state depends on the authorization of people who are themselves authored by political institutions, then the sovereign must have the power to organize the institutions that shape political subjectivity. In fact, this is a conclusion that was intimated in what may be his first piece of political writing, the anonymously published “Discourse upon the

Beginning of Tacitus” of 1620, which describes Augustus’s rise to power as a strategy of mind control. “And now,” he wrote, “having power over the bodies of the people, he goes about to obtain it over their minds, and wills, which is both the noblest and surest command of all.”<sup>168</sup>

This is the Hobbesian politics of organizing on which the image of the sovereign order depends.

For their part, realists have tended to focus on the question of how to make Hobbes’s sovereign monster into a workable form of political agency, one that can provide order without recourse to the fearsome and unchecked power he thought sovereignty requires. But realists should learn to look equally to the Kingdoms Monster and what it can teach us about the popular organizing.<sup>169</sup> The thing Hobbes called rebellion is, at its core, the idea that power can be dispersed by being concentrated in plural centers. He thought this was the collapse of politics, the return of the very thing politics exists to avoid. But he also knew that, whatever its juridical status, rebellion was a collective action by a collective agent with organizational powers of its own. And though he deplored this kind of organizing, Hobbes’s ideas about how rebellion worked are a starting point for realists who want to free themselves from his captivating picture. For popular organizing, as we will see, need not lead to rebellion, but it is certainly rebellious.

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<sup>168</sup> Hobbes, *Three Discourses*, 42.

<sup>169</sup> On democracy in *Behemoth*, see Tomaž Mastnak, “Godly Democracy” and Ingrid Creppell, “The Democratic Element in Hobbes’s ‘Behemoth,’” both in *Hobbes's Behemoth: Religion and Democracy*.

Force Decides:  
Pressure Politics and Revolutionary Realpolitik in the Struggle for the Working Day

*Such a people circulates not order but disorder, through every vein of it.*<sup>1</sup>  
- Thomas Carlyle

If Hobbes is a surprising source of inspiration for the study of organizing, Karl Marx certainly is not. For at least a century and a half, Marx's name has been synonymous with the revolutionary overthrow of a bourgeois political order defined by capitalism and the nation-state. In what has often been seen as Marx's defining commitment, this would be carried out by workers and their allies organized into an explicitly revolutionary political party. Debates about the form that party should take, how workers should be organized, and what the revolution will look like began during Marx's life and continue today. Such debates notwithstanding, few would question Marx's status as one of the foremost critics of the modern political order and as one of the most devoted advocates of popular organizing.

But what does it mean to talk about Marx in relation to realism? Given realism's views about the centrality of order to politics, a revolutionary like Marx would seem to be an odd fit. Nevertheless, though he is far less prominent than Hobbes, Marx has also been claimed as an ancestor by contemporary realists. "Marxists," according to Geuss, "have always been of the opinion that irreconcilable conflict, continuing disagreement, and social division are the normal states of all forms of society that have existed up to now," making them realists *avant la lettre*.<sup>2</sup> Marx's legacy to realism includes, "an emphasis on the historical and concrete nature of claims

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: James Fraser, 1840), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 19. Williams did not write about Marx at any length. An article entitled "Right-Wing Marx" was supposed to run as a companion to Williams's "Left-Wing Wittgenstein" in *Common Knowledge*, but it never appeared. However, Williams did use Marx and Engels's *The Holy Family* as a jumping off point for his reflection on the relationship between ethical ideas and historically-specific political institutions in "St. Just's Illusion," Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 135-150.

about what was good and what people should or ought or must do, a rejection of moralization, the idea that society was to be seen as a totality, and the theory about ‘abstraction,’ its virtues and limits.”<sup>3</sup> Geuss affirms “the deepest intuition behind Marxism, which is that humanity should be capable of collectively self-organising activity, which instantiates appropriate self-control, self-direction, and even, when necessary, self-limitation, without needing to appeal to any external principle.”<sup>4</sup> For Geuss, Marxism provides us with a way of thinking about real politics that avoids both the acceptance of the political world as it is and the rejection of understanding that world in favor of utopian speculation.<sup>5</sup>

That said, Geuss is more interested in the Marxism as a tradition of thought than he is in Marx specifically. In *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Geuss polemically opts to describe his position as “neo-Leninist” rather than Marxist, and *Changing the Subject* has chapters on Hegel, Lukács, and Adorno, but not on Marx.<sup>6</sup> This sets the tone for much realist scholarship, in which Marx is regularly invoked—sometimes aptly, sometimes not—but rarely examined in detail. Recently, Paul Raekstad has developed Geuss’s approach in a more historicist direction by drawing on 19<sup>th</sup> century Marxist and anarchist understandings of concepts like ‘the state’ and ‘democracy’ to challenge the way realists use these ideas today.<sup>7</sup> His work shows us some of the things that a more careful engagement with Marx can offer realism, but it does not broach the question of what realism can help us see about Marx.

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Geuss, *A World without Why* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 66 (parenthesis omitted).

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Reality and Its Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 115.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Geuss is opposed to all forms of utopianism; it is the speculation on the nature of nonexistent societies that disturbs him. In *Reality and its Dreams*, he argues “realism and a certain kind of utopianism are in principle compatible” (28).

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 99.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Raekstad, “Realism, Utopianism, and Radical Values: Realism, Utopianism, and Radical Values,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (March 2018): 145–68, Paul Raekstad, “Human Development and Alienation in the Thought of Karl Marx,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (July 2018): 300–323, and Paul Raekstad, “Democracy Against Representation: A Radical Realist View,” *Abolition*, July 22, 2018, <https://abolitionjournal.org/democracy-against-representation/>. Raekstad’s focus is generally on Marx’s early work.

This oversight should be surprising because the question of Marx's realism was a major point of dispute in one of the most important events in the history of Marxist thought, the Revisionist Debate. In the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Eduard Bernstein, a longtime member of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and one of Friedrich Engels's executors, published a series of articles arguing that many of Marx's economic predictions concerning capitalist crisis were not coming true. Marxist parties would have to respond by participating in bourgeois governments in order to build a socialist society through evolutionary reforms, rather than a revolutionary seizure of power.<sup>8</sup> Bernstein's argument sparked a long-running debate, which he officially lost, that fed into the eventual split between revolutionary socialism and 20<sup>th</sup> century social democracy.

"My concern," Bernstein wrote in 1899's *Preconditions of Socialism*, "is to strengthen equally the realistic and the idealistic element in the socialist movement by opposing what remains of the Utopian way of thinking in socialist theory."<sup>9</sup> This meant that Marxists needed to acknowledge the real force of moral ideas in socialist politics and to devise policies that could be implemented in existing states, not wait for an apocalyptic crisis to usher them into power. "What Social Democracy should be doing," he maintained elsewhere, "is organise the working class politically, train it for democracy, and fight for any and all reforms in the state which are designed to raise the working class and make the state more democratic."<sup>10</sup> To orient the activities of socialist parties around the inevitable collapse of capitalism was to indulge in the

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<sup>8</sup> On the Revisionist Debate, see Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955).

<sup>9</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>10</sup> H. Tudor and J. M. Tudor, eds., *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 169.

utopian attitude that Marx had never fully succeeded in extinguishing, not even in himself. As Bernstein notoriously admitted, “I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed ‘the final goal of socialism.’ This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything.”<sup>11</sup>

This last claim was too much for Rosa Luxemburg, who emerged as one of Bernstein’s most forceful critics. In “Reform or Revolution,” she agreed that “the daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the Social Democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war.” But this was not the defining feature of Marxism. “The final goal of Socialism,” she insisted, “constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire Labor movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order.” Thus, “between social reforms and revolution there exists for the Social-Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.”<sup>12</sup> What Bernstein called realism she denounced as mere opportunism.

Elsewhere, Luxemburg identified Bernstein’s revisionism with backsliding embrace of parliamentarism and “bourgeois realpolitik.” She defined realpolitik as “a kind of politics which formulates only achievable goals for itself, and which knows how to pursue them with the most effective means and by the shortest route,” and she had no objection to it when practiced correctly.<sup>13</sup> The problem was that Bernstein understood realpolitik in the bourgeois sense of

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<sup>11</sup> Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 168.

<sup>12</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution and other Writings* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “Karl Marx,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), Nr. 62 vom 14. März 1903: <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/luxemburg/1903/03/marx1.htm>. Thanks to Sam Bagg for help with the translation.

determining what is realistic “from the standpoint of the material politics of the day,” whereas socialists had to adopt “the point of view of historical development.”<sup>14</sup> Marx had created what Luxemburg called a revolutionary “proletarian realpolitik,” which “through all its partial efforts, goes beyond the framework of the existing order” to make space for “the rule of the revolutionary proletariat.” By abandoning the end of goal of socialism, Bernstein lost touch with what was distinctive about Marx’s realism.

Bernstein readily granted that he was challenging some of Marx’s views on economics, but he maintained that his political argument followed from the positions Marx took during his life. For the epigraph to *Preconditions of Socialism*, Bernstein borrowed a line from Marx’s Inaugural Address to the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA) that reads, “hence the Ten Hours Bill was not only a great practical success; it was the victory of a principle.”<sup>15</sup> The Ten Hours Bill was one of the Factory Acts passed in England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to regulate working conditions in the emerging “factory system” of industrial production, and throughout the Revisionist debates Bernstein returned to these acts, and Marx’s support for them, to justify his position.<sup>16</sup> He noted that Marx “describes factory legislation as ‘that first conscious and methodical reaction of society against the spontaneously developed form of its production process,’ and, at the end of the same chapter, stresses the great significance of factory legislation for the process of radical change in society.”<sup>17</sup> This led Bernstein to conclude, in the sentence immediately before he disclaimed final goals, “there can be more socialism in a good factory act

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<sup>14</sup> Geuss has also taken pains to distance himself from “conservative realpolitik.” See especially “Moralism and Realpolitik,” *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 31-42.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the IWA address, see below.

<sup>16</sup> On the emergence of factories in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, see Joshua B. Freeman, *Behemoth: A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Norton, 2018). According to Freeman, “the ‘factory system’ generally referred to the whole new mode of production that came with the factory, including the workforce that had to be assembled, the conditions of labor and of life for those workers, and the impact of the factory on economic and social arrangements” (22).

<sup>17</sup> Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 168.

than in the nationalisation of a whole group of factories.”<sup>18</sup> This too drew Luxemburg’s ire. She mocked Bernstein for treating the reformist legislation of a bourgeois state, one without even the trappings of political democracy, as an example of socialism. His realism, she insisted, was pure “mystification.”<sup>19</sup>

We do not have to decide the issue between Bernstein and Luxemburg. But I want to insist that their debate brings into focus some the important contributions Marx can make to contemporary realism. In particular, it helps us see that Marx’s account of the Factory Acts and the popular struggle for their enactment, most famously presented in chapter ten of *Capital*, “The Working Day,” is one of the most important, though neglected, parts of his political thought. In it, Marx presents the campaign for the ten hour day as “an antinomy, of right against right,” in which workers and capitalists are forced into class conflict both politically and economically. “Between equal rights,” Marx tells us “force decides.”<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, even in a bourgeois, capitalist state, force turned out to be on the side of the working class. How did this happen? What sort of force was involved in the struggle for the ten hour day, and where did it come from? These are the questions Marx deals with in “The Working Day,” and his answers to them constitute a realist theory of working-class agency and organization under capitalism.

This is not how the chapter is normally read. In fact, “The Working Day” has rarely been taken seriously as an attempt to theorize working class political struggle in a historically specific way.<sup>21</sup> As William Clare Roberts tells us, “controversy about Marx’s arguments in the first

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<sup>18</sup> Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 214.

<sup>19</sup> Tudor and Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy* 262-3.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol. 1* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 344.

<sup>21</sup> Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas: Marx’s Lost Theory* (London: Verso, 2018), acknowledges that Marx wrote about class struggle in “The Working Day,” but maintains, “there is no canonical text from his ‘mature period’ that directly addresses agency at the level of concrete social formations” (18). He looks to Marx’s writings on the 1848 revolutions to adumbrate such a theory, whereas I use Marx’s journalism on the factory movement to read between the lines of what he says about class agency in *Capital*.

twenty-five chapters of *Capital* centers on the most abstract and theoretical parts of the text,” while “the history of struggles over the length of the working day, in chapter ten, is acknowledged but not much analyzed or argued over.”<sup>22</sup> Nor, upon reading the chapter, is it hard to see why. For all the vivid historical detail that has made it a central text for social historians, “The Working Day” is strikingly abstract in its treatment of politics, devoid of the familiar markers of political history that help us understand who did what and why. When compared with some of Marx’s more overtly political writings, like *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*, with their famous character sketches, detailed reconstructions of political maneuverings, and careful dissections of the motivations of all involved, “The Working Day” looks like thin gruel indeed.

As a result, “The Working Day” occupies a strange place in the secondary scholarship on *Capital*. Some of Marx’s most famous biographers, like Isaiah Berlin and Gareth Stedman Jones, have praised the “technique of social research” in the historical and empirical sections of *Capital* as “a new and important area of historical enquiry, the systematic study of social and economic history.”<sup>23</sup> However, they have largely used this sort of praise to bury Marx’s larger economic and political ideas. Meanwhile, the most influential expositor of Marxism today, David Harvey, opens his discussion of “The Working Day” with an anxious acknowledgement that “chapter 10 is constructed in a different way and written in a different style than are the preceding chapters. It is light on theory and laden with historical detail.”<sup>24</sup> Among scholars interested specifically in

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<sup>22</sup> William Clare Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 187.

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 183. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016), 430.

<sup>24</sup> David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital* (London: Verso, 2010). 135. He follows this with an even more explicit warning: “I have commented before on the complex interweaving of logical and historical argumentation in

Marx's politics, *Capital* as a whole is often neglected in favor of other, often earlier texts.<sup>25</sup>

When *Capital* is treated as an important part of Marx's political theory, "The Working Day" is rarely given serious attention.<sup>26</sup> And perhaps most tellingly, even when the legislation that limited the length of the working the day is discussed, the popular agitation that produced this law, known as the Ten Hour Movement, goes unmentioned or is referred to in only the vaguest of terms.<sup>27</sup> Too concrete for readers interested in Marx's philosophical critique of political economy and too abstract for readers interested in recovering Marx's politics, "The Working Day" is at once one of the most praised and most underexplored parts of Marx's corpus.

This chapter examines "The Working Day" not only as the tenth chapter of *Capital*, but also as the culmination of over a decade of Marx's writings on the movement for the ten hour day. From this perspective, we can see it is precisely Marx's method of abstraction that makes "The Working Day" an interesting account of the nature and form of working class political

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*Capital* and for the most part argued that we are on safer ground with the logical argument. But here it is the historical narrative that counts-though it is not bereft of theoretical significance."

<sup>25</sup> Two distinguished examples are Miguel Abensour, *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment* trans. Max Blechman and Martin Breugh (Cambridge: Polity, 2011) and Alan Gilbert, *Marx's Politics: Communists and Citizens* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981). Rather like Marx himself, Gilbert projected but never published a second volume of his book that would deal with the politics of *Capital*, though some of his articles provide a glimpse of what he had in mind (on which see below).

<sup>26</sup> Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Leeds, UK: AK Press, 2000) is primarily an exegesis of the first chapter of *Capital*. It does discuss the struggle over the working day (86-9), but with only a few references directly to chapter ten, and no references to the Ten Hour Act or Movement. Sheldon Wolin, who might be expected to be especially attentive to questions of popular agency, says nothing about the Ten Hour Movement in "On Reading Marx Politically," in *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 173-194. He is equally silent in his chapter on Marx in the revised edition of *Politics and Vision*. For a response to Wolin, see Gilbert, Alan, "The Storming of Heaven': Politics and Marx's *Capital*" *Nomos* 26 (1983): 119-168.

<sup>27</sup> See Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 159-162 and Alan Gilbert, "Social Theory and Revolutionary Activity in Marx," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (June 1979), 521-538. This omission seems to be less true in some recent scholarship on Marx. In addition to Roberts's book, see Terrell Carver, *Marx* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), and the brief but suggestive discussion in Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (New York: Verso, 2015), 80-2.

agency.<sup>28</sup> Earlier in their careers, both Marx and Engels had written about the struggle for a legally limited working day in more concrete and conventionally political terms, and, like most other commentators at the time, they tended to focus on questions of high politics. These articles demonstrate how fluent Marx was in the political history of the struggle over the working day, and they show us that the way in which he describes the politics of the working day in *Capital* is a deliberate theoretical choice.<sup>29</sup> By narrating the history of a political struggle in the same impersonal terms that he uses for the operation of capital, Marx turns our attention away from the politics of leadership and personality towards the problem of how the working class is “trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production.”<sup>30</sup>

“The Working Day” shows us how the disenfranchised working class became the agent of political and social transformation. The campaign for a ten hour day organized workers not around a monolithic identity, but around their heterogeneity and difference. Marx thought this furthered the development of solidary and class consciousness more effectively just trade unionism or efforts to politicize exchange relationships that often result in narrowly construed versions of class interest. The regulation of child labor and workers’ hours politicized the process of capitalist production itself, demonstrating both that the productive power of the working class was fundamentally social and that capitalist production was organized around exploiting that power. Marx also saw, in the “pressure from without” exercised by supporters of the working day, a powerful, new political force available to the whole of the working class, not simply those segments of it that might be enfranchised. Organized pressure politics of this sort were what

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<sup>28</sup> Raymond Geuss, “The Moral Legacy of Marxism,” *Reality and its Dreams*,” 91-116 is concerned primarily with the role of abstraction in theorizing morality. I am more concerned with the ways Marx uses narrative and empirical abstraction to reveal the continuities between economics and politics.

<sup>29</sup> The importance of Marx’s journalism, and its relative neglect in Marx scholarship, has recently been emphasized by authors like Gareth Stedman Jones, Terrell Carver, and Mike Davis.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977), 929.

Marx tried to develop through the IWA, and the length of the working day was one of its central issues. In sum, Marx used the campaign for the ten hour day to illustrate how working class organizing occurred through a dialectical movement between politics and production in which legislation that protected specific workers was generalized to other workers cooperating in the same production process, then broadened across other industries by the politics of pressure from without. The Ten Hour Movement, as Marx eventually came to see, was not simply a struggle over the length of the working day; it was an essential part of the self-constitution of the working class.

Unlike the English Civil War, the history of the Ten Hour Movement is not something most political theorists are familiar with, so I begin with a brief summary what the Factory Acts were and how they were enacted, highlighting some of the issues that were important to Marx. Next, I discuss how Marx and Engels dealt with the Factory Acts in some of their writings from the 1840s and 1850s, paying particular attention to Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. I argue that they understood the Ten Hour Movement as the social element of a wider struggle that also included Chartism and other radical movements, and their enthusiasm for the ten hour activism varied according to the success of this larger program. Then, I turn to "The Working Day," where Marx shows how the constraints created by capitalist production were translating into a successful program of working-class resistance to exploitation and domination. Finally, I place *Capital* alongside some of Marx's other writings from the same time to understand why he thought it was important to retell the story of the Ten Hour Movement in the specific context of the 1860s. On the whole, Marx shows us how organizing cannot be confined to the state the way Hobbes hoped it could be. The activity of the capitalist economy, and the classes that make it up, produces political organizations that the state cannot control. Though

Marx believed that the state form was historically limited and eventually had to be superseded, he also knew that the working class, at least under capitalism, had to be able to use the state, even if they could not control it. Thus, Marx used the Ten Hour Movement to understand how popular organizing is able to draw and take advantage of the very order it seeks to contest.

### “The Whole Bill & Nothing but the Bill:” A Brief History of the Factory Acts

The length of the working day in 19<sup>th</sup> century England was regulated by a series of laws known as the Factory Acts.<sup>31</sup> The first piece of legislation to be referred to as a factory act was the 1802 Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, which sought to regulate the abuse of apprentices in cotton mills but was never seriously enforced.<sup>32</sup> Most historians, therefore, date the emergence of a national movement for factory reform and regulation to 1830, when Richard Oastler published a series of articles on “Yorkshire Slavery” in the *Leeds Mercury*. Oastler, a Tory, argued that factory workers were “existing in a state of slavery, *more horrid* than are the victims of that hellish system *colonial slavery*,” though he focused most of his polemical fire on the overwork of children.<sup>33</sup> Oastler’s rhetoric energized a system of ‘short time committees’

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<sup>31</sup> My summary of the history of the Factory Acts is drawn primarily from Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). However, the Factory Acts have been a subject of historical interest almost since the moment they were passed. Their first history was Alfred, *The History of the Factory Movement, from the year 1802 to the enactment of the Ten Hours’ Bill in 1847* (London, 1857). “Alfred” was the pseudonym of Samuel Kydd, onetime Chartist spokesman turned personal secretary to Richard Oastler. A decade later, Manchester spinner and labor organizer Philip Grant wrote *The Ten Hours Bill, The History of Factory Legislation, Step by Step, Since Its Introduction to Parliament by the First Sir Robert Peel, in 1802, Till it was Finally Carried by Lord Ashley, in 1850* (Manchester, 1866).

<sup>32</sup> Joanna Innes, “Origins of the Factory Acts: The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, 1802,” Norma Landau ed. *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 230-254.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Oastler, “Yorkshire Slavery,” *Leeds Mercury*, 16 October 1830. Collected in *Class and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Patricia Hollis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 194 (Italics original here, as they are in all other quotations). The *Mercury* was, along with the *Manchester Guardian*, one of the leading newspapers of the Whig millocracy.

dedicated to shortening the length of the working day from twelve to ten hours (see figure 2.1).<sup>34</sup> Michael Sadler, a friend of Oastler's then serving in the House of Commons, introduced an act limiting children's labor to ten hours a day and organized a Parliamentary committee to investigate child labor practices in textile factories, thereby giving advocates for short time their first truly national platform.<sup>35</sup>

Oastler's comparison between slaves and English workers was by no means new. But earlier authors who made this comparison, like William Cobbett, were often vehement racists who saw the popularity of abolitionism among factory owners as evidence of their hypocrisy. Oastler, on the other hand, was an abolitionist.<sup>36</sup> Rather than framing abolitionism as hypocrisy, he extolled the principles of abolition and saw hypocrisy only in the failure of mill owners to apply those principles when their own interests were at stake. His joining of abolitionism and factory reform "associated the faltering movement to regulate the employment of young children in factories with the extraordinarily successful campaign to end transatlantic slavery," rather than setting them at odds with each other.<sup>37</sup> "The nation is now most resolutely determined that Negroes shall be free," Oastler wrote approvingly. "Let them, however, not forget that Briton's

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<sup>34</sup> On the theoretical and rhetorical connections between slavery and factory labor, see Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> The political and organization activities of the short time committees deserve much further study, but for a general overview of what short time activism was about, see Stewart Weaver, "The Political Ideology of Short Time: England 1820-1850," *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History* ed. Gary Cross (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 77-102, and for a local case study, see John A. Hargreaves and E.A. Hilary Haigh, eds., *Slavery in Yorkshire: Richard Oastler and the Campaign against Child Labour in the Industrial Revolution* (University of Huddersfield Press, 2012). It is worth noting that Oastler did not create the short-time committees, which existed in Yorkshire and Lancashire since the 1820s. But even short-time activists who preceded him, like Philip Grant, stressed the importance of Oastler's intervention.

<sup>36</sup> On racism among working class radicals, and Cobbett in particular, see Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), esp. 283-324.

<sup>37</sup> John A. Hargreaves, "Introduction: 'Victims of slavery even on the threshold of our homes': Richard Oastler and Yorkshire Slavery," *Slavery in Yorkshire*, 1-39, 5. On Oastler's politics as an example of popular anti-party sentiments in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Matthew Roberts, "Richard Oastler, Toryism, Radicalism and the Limitations of Party, 1807-46," *Parliamentary History* 37, no. 2 (June 2018): 250-73.

have common rights with Afric[a]’s sons.”<sup>38</sup> In Parliament debates over short time, Sadler dismissed “the arguments which the advocates of the present system advance in its favour,” as “precisely the same as those put forth by the planters in the crown colonies” against abolition.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the attack on “Yorkshire slavery” seemed to intensify antislavery sentiment among factory workers, and this early internationalism would later prove important to Marx.



Figure 2.1: Richard Oastler returning to Huddersfield after being released from debtors’ prison in 1844, c.o. Wikimedia Commons. The banner in front of him “Oastler and Protection to Labour,” does not mention child labor. Instead, it shows that Ten Hour Movement activists understood from the beginning of the campaign that the limiting child labor would mean the limiting the hours worked by adults, as well. The image also testifies to the diverse support Oastler drew.

<sup>38</sup> Hargreaves and Haigh, *Slavery in Yorkshire*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Thomas Sadler, *Speech in the House of Commons, March 16, 1832, on Moving the Second Reading of the Factories’ Regulation Bill* (London: Seeley & Sons, 1832), 40.

In 1833, a factory act was passed that limited children working in cotton mills to eight hours of work a day. However, the act was underfunded and hard to enforce because it permitted children to be worked in shifts that made violations of the act difficult to prove. According to John Fielden, who was both a mill-owner and one of the leaders of the Ten Hour Movement, “any Factory Bill, to be effective, must restrict the labor, not only of children, but of those older hands with whom they worked; for the work of both was so connected, that it could not be carried on by adult hands without the assistance of the younger.”<sup>40</sup> The ostensible purpose behind allowing shifts for children was that they allowed adults to work for as long as they chose and not have their hours limited by restrictions placed on child labor. According to early 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal political economy, legislation that limited the length of time worked by adults violated their rights as “free agents” to contract as they saw fit. But this was precisely what short time activists wanted to do. As an article in a Chartist newspaper sardonically put it, “ten hours per day in the heated atmosphere of a factory, is, I should imagine, more than enough even for adults.”<sup>41</sup> Nor were workers shy about admitting this connection. A handbill circulated prior to the passage of the “deceitful, cruel eight-hour bill” denounced it as “a bid of the Masters to cozen the Men out of the Ten-Hour Bill” (see figure 2.2). “Can you, or will you work from Six in

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<sup>40</sup> John Fielden, *The Curse of the Factory System* (1836). Collected in Hollis, *Class and Conflict*, 198-99.

<sup>41</sup> A Looker on, “To the Master Manufacturers of Manchester and its Neighbourhood,” *The Champion and Weekly Herald* vol.1 no. 19, September 18, 1837. Given the role that Ten Hour Act plays in Marx’s account of the mechanization and intensification of work as capital is forced to shift from extracting absolute to relative surplus value, it is worth quoting the *Champion’s* argument about the pace of labor before the Act was passed at length: “It is not to be forgotten that the labour of both adult and child in your factories depends on the action of the steam engine, or some other motive power. The machinery driven by that power never tires, it continues unceasingly to revolve, and heedless of human frailty, regardless of the human suffering, continues to cry with the horse-leach in Scripture, give, give. The attention must not be for a moment distracted, the labour a moment suspended; the thought must not wander; all reflection must be suppressed, and the body and mind wholly and devotedly given to the toil; for the machinery, whilst it revolves, both demands and expects unremitting diligence at the hands of the workman. Ten hours in every twenty-four of such devoted labour, both mental and bodily, and carried on daily for weeks, months, years, without intermission, without even one day in the year for relaxation, except when the blessed Sabbath arrives, is enough to wear out the energies of any man.” Simply put, the extraction of relative surplus value was a source of class conflict well before the Ten Hour Act limited working hours.

the morning to Ten at night,” it asked? “If you can, then try to get an Eight-hour bill and two sets.” This proved to be the major point of political contention. So long as factory legislation tried to shorten the length of children’s working days without also shortening the hours during which factories operated, the legislation was doomed to fail.

Alongside the Reform Act of 1832, which gave rise to Chartism when it extended the franchise to the middle class but continued to exclude almost all workers, and the new Poor Law of 1834, which tried to restrict relief for the unemployed only to those living in workhouses, the Factory of Act of 1833 was seen by workers as a betrayal. These three laws led to a decade of organized and mostly unified political opposition on the part of workers and their allies. “An organization has been thus formed,” Fielden wrote, because “the disappointment, on being denied the ten-hour bill, is not yet forgotten, and active measures are now on foot to obtain by unions such regulations, as to time of labour and amount of wages, as the working-people may think (and I agree with them) they are fairly entitled to.”<sup>42</sup> Or, in the words of a liberal critic, “the agitation becomes constantly more systematic and better organized, because there is a greater demand for it among the masses, and it is more profitable to the leaders.”<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, in the absence of legislative means for enforcing the 1833 Act, local short time committees increasingly pushed workers to take direct action so they could enforce the Factory Acts themselves.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Letter from Mr. Fielden to Mr. Cobbett,” *The Crisis*, No. 17 Vol. 3, December 21, 1833. The letter originally ran in Cobbett’s paper. That it was republished in *The Crisis*, a journal edited by Robert Owen, illustrates the interest a broad range of radical groups took in the Ten Hour Movement.

<sup>43</sup> James Kay-Shuttleworth, *Recent Measures for the Promotion of Education in England* (Ridgway, 1839), 40. Shuttleworth also draws on the rhetoric of disorder explored in the last chapter when he adds, “Chartism, an armed political monster, has at length sprung from the soil on which the struggle for the forcible repression of these evils has occurred.” On the relationship between Chartism and the Ten Hour Movement, see below.

<sup>44</sup> “The legislature is too slow for the people, and the working-people, as Sir R. Peel wished they would, must take their affairs into their own hands; and the adults in factories must, by unions amongst themselves, do what Lord Althorp told me and the short-time delegates (when we had our interview with him) he shall rather see done in that

The movement was not completely unified though, because the Ten Hour Movement had to rely on Tory spokesmen and officeholders, many of whom strongly opposed Chartism. One of them, Anthony Ashley Cooper (then Lord Ashley, later 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftsbury), took over Sadler's parliamentary efforts to get a new Factory Act passed and successfully brought women's working days under legislative protection in 1844, but progress on a real ten hour bill remained elusive.<sup>45</sup> The political stalemate over factory reform was only broken by the Whig-led repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. By resuming the importation of grain, the repeal of the Corn Laws was trumpeted as a response to the Irish Famine. But the Whigs had long advocated it as a measuring to lower the price of food for workers, thereby allowing manufacturers to cut their wages while reducing the income Tory landowners received from inflated grain prices. As a result, it has often been argued that Parliamentary support for factory legislation came from Tory landowners who wanted revenge on the Whig industrialists who had pushed for repeal of the Corn Laws. While this is somewhat exaggerated, it is undeniable that when the Ten Hour Act was taken up in 1847 under the leadership of Fielden, it won.<sup>46</sup>

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manner, than by legislative enactments, viz. — make a short-time bill for themselves" ("Letter from Mr. Fielden to Mr. Cobbett").

<sup>45</sup> Strictly, the 1844 law broadened the category of "young persons" to include women of all ages (Gray, *Factory Question*, 218). The question of how women came to be interpolated as minors in the Factory Acts, or the role of patriarchy in working class politics more broadly, is not seriously dealt with by Marx, but it is an important part of the now vast literature on gender and working class life in industrial England. See Gray, *passim*; Marianna Valverde, "'Giving the Female a Domestic Turn': The Social, Legal and Moral Regulation of Women's Work in British Cotton Mills, 1820-1850," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 21, No. 4 (Summer, 1988), pp. 619-634; and, paradigmatically, Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), esp. chapters 3 and 4. In my view, which mostly follows Valverde, short time activism in the 1830s upheld the importance of a ten hour day for all adult workers, and for children in particular, but did not make much of gender distinctions, typically addressing readers either as "operatives" or "parents of factory children." The growing emphasis on women as subjects of legislative intervention appears to be the result of a weak economy in the early 1840s and the need to coordinate with the activities of Tory Parliamentary leaders, especially the evangelical Shaftsbury, who were pursuing specific regulations for women in other parts of the economy at the same time.

<sup>46</sup> As many commentators have noted, the voting that led to the passage of the 1847 Act did not break down on party lines. It is indicative of the fluid political situation in the 1840s that the Whig goal of repealing the Corn Laws was passed under a Tory Ministry, and the supposedly Tory project of factory reform was passed under a Whig Ministry. As I argue below, Marx attributed this chaotic situation to heightened political activities of the working class.

THE

# Ten-Hour Bill

Passed the Second Reading in the House of Commons on Monday Night. Thus the Principle of that Bill is conceded, which it was said would be laughed out of the House; but

## OPERATIVES

Beware of the Snare which is laid for you; the Ministry, it is pretty well known, intend to bring in an

## EIGHT-HOUR BILL,

And have TWO SETS of CHILDREN. This would be to make the Adults labour

## Sixteen Hours a Day,

And the Ministerial Plan is to extend protection to Children only to the age of *Twelve* or *Fourteen* years, then our youth may be destroyed in its bloom.

This plan was recommended by the *Leeds Mercury* last Saturday!!! It is recommended by the Commissioners; probably it was concocted at Headingley at Mr. Marshall's Sunday Carousal, and not from any observation of the state of the Mills, made by these proud, idle, itinerant, Commissioning "Esquires," who are returning to hunger and poverty, and are waiting for another GOVERNMENT JOB—who have charged you so many thousands, to tell you that you may work SIXTEEN HOURS per Day. We call your attention to the conduct of the *Mercury* for the last few weeks. There were three articles in that paper to counteract the effect of a Penny Pamphlet, which proves that by employing the whole of the Operatives, which would be effected by a Ten-Hours Bill, Wages would be increased. The *Mercury* denied this, and said we might as well say Ten Hours were Twelve. But the next week he stated that the same wages could and would be given for *Eleven Hours* as for *Twelve*!! This was a bid of the Masters to cozen the Men out of the Ten-Hour Bill. Next he recommends *Eight Hours*; this was made up by Government, the Commissioners, the Mill-Owners, and their Agent!!

Can you, or will you, work from Six in the Morning to Ten at Night? If you can, then try to get an Eight-Hours Bill and Two Sets.

Can your Sons and your Daughters work from Six in the Morning till Ten at Night, besides going to and returning from work?

Will not avaricious Masters work your poor Children twice over. An eminent practical man says, "Unless there was an Inspector for every Child, there would be no adequate check on the system of Gangs and Relays."

**O! Covetousness what will satisfy thee?**

YOU MUST DEMAND THE

## TEN-HOUR BILL.

**The whole Bill, & nothing but the Bill.**

It is believed that immense pains will be taken to render the Ten-Hour Bill odious, to make way for this deceptive, cruel, EIGHT-HOUR BILL.

**"THE TENDER MERCIES of the WICKED ARE CRUEL."**

Signed by Order of the Short-Time Committee,  
Committee-Room, Union Inn, Leeds, June 18, 1833.

JOHN STUBBS, Chairman.  
W.M. RIDER, Secretary.

**Hernaman and Perring, Printers, 19, Commercial-Street, Leeds.**

Figure 2.2: Leeds Short Time Committee, "The Ten-Hour bill passed the second reading in the House of Commons on Monday night," (Leeds, 1833), c.o. *The Making of The Modern World*.

The Factory Act of 1847, as it is properly called, applied only to women and children, and only to some textile industries. But it fulfilled the short time movement's demand for a ten hour working day that prohibited shifts and relays, meaning that it effectively guaranteed a ten hour day to adult men, as well. However, many factory owners opposed the bill and exploited mistakes in its drafting relating to start and end times as a way to reinstitute shifts as much as they could. When the activities of the mill owners were upheld by the Court of the Exchequer, Ashley brought forward a revised bill that closed the 1847 Act's unintentional loopholes in exchange for adding half-an-hour to the working day, meaning that the Ten Hour Act ultimately produced a ten-and-a-half-hour workday (with an hour and half for meals and breaks).<sup>47</sup> The 1850 Factory Act provided a secure foundation for the legitimacy of Parliament's power to limit the working day, and a series of measures over the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century extended protections to industries and new classes of workers without encountering the same intensity of opposition that was offered in this initial phase of the factory movement.

### Tories and Workers: Engels and Marx on the Factory Acts

In the preceding summary, I have deliberately emphasized the “who did what” narrative of high politics rather than the on-the-ground experience of the struggle for a ten hour working day. This is because it was the high politics that Marx and Engels focused on in their writings on the working day from the 1840s and 1850s. These texts give us some insight into what Marx was abstracting away when he wrote about the Ten Hour Movement in *Capital*, and so it is worth

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<sup>47</sup> Under the 1847 Act, workers spent twelve hours a day at the factory Monday through Friday (but only worked ten and a half of those hours) and eight hours on Saturday (with a half hour taken out to eat). This means that the work week was 60 hours long, with 68 hours per week spent at or around the factory.

looking at them to see what parts of his later interpretation carry over from or are revisions of his earlier views.

In 1866, when Marx was writing “The Working Day,” he told Engels that the chapter “supplements your book (sketchily) up to 1865.”<sup>48</sup> The book Marx was referring to was Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, which was published in 1845 and had lifelong influence on Marx.<sup>49</sup> It describes the Ten Hour Movement as defensive response to the brutalization of the working class by capitalist overwork and exploitation.<sup>50</sup> As Marx would later do in *Capital*, Engel drew on published reports to detail the physical consequences of that exploitation at great length. “The ruinous influence of the factory system began at an early day to attract general attention,” he argued, but this attention led only to the toothless reforms of the first few decades of the century 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>51</sup> The post-1830 movement arose, on the other hand, because “the demand for a ten hours’ law had become lively among the operatives” themselves, at which point “the philanthropic section of the Tory party, then led by Michael Sadler, seized upon the plan, and brought it before Parliament.” Engels traced the efforts the Tory leadership to pass factory legislation up to 1845, correctly predicting that “in a very short time, the Ten Hours Bill will really be adopted.” By emphasizing the role of the Tory leadership,

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted on Alex Callanicos, *Deciphering Capital: Marx’s Capital and its Destiny* (London: Bookmarks, 2014), 43.

<sup>49</sup> It has also had a recent influence on long-run studies of capital accumulation and inequality, see Robert C. Allen, “Engels’ Pause: Technical Change, Capital Accumulation, and Inequality in the British Industrial Revolution,” *Explorations in Economic History* 46, no. 4 (October 2009): 418–35.

<sup>50</sup> There are a few references to the Ten Hour Act scattered in Marx’s other early writings (mostly in *The German Ideology*). In light of current doubts about the reliability of that text, and because these references are insubstantial, I pass over them here. On the difficulties involved in using *The German Ideology* see Terrell Carver, “*The German Ideology* Never Took Place,” *History of Political Thought*, Vol. XXXI. No. 1. Spring 2010, 107-127 and Terrell Carver and Daniel Black, *A Political History of the Editions of Marx and Engels’s “German Ideology Manuscripts”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 178-9. By beginning with Engels, I do not mean to imply that there are no differences between him and Marx on the Factory Acts. For a summary of those differences, see Paul Phillips, *Marx and Engels on Law and Laws* (Oxford; Martin Robertson, 1980), 86-109.

however, Engels also exaggerated the uniformity of the manufacturer's opposition, claiming, "there are perhaps not ten who are for it."<sup>52</sup> In fact, a fair number of the largest and most technologically advanced manufacturers supported factory reform as a way of driving smaller, more backwards competitors out of business.<sup>53</sup> More importantly for Engels, the manufacturer's opposition showed "that the industrial greatness of England can be maintained only through barbarous treatment of its operatives, the destruction of their health, the social, physical, and mental decay of whole generations." The political importance of the ten hour day was not so much in its ability to remedy these conditions as the belief that "it must inevitably bring with it other measures which must draw England into a path wholly different from that hitherto followed," from industrial capitalism to social democracy.<sup>54</sup>

Superficially, Engels's descriptions of the sufferings of factory workers resemble those of paternalistic reformers or Owenite socialists committed to the moral transformation of society. But Engels was not a reformer. He was, even by this point, a revolutionary socialist. In Neil Davidson's words, he looked "beyond the existential misery of the British working class—a subject that had already exercised such notably non-revolutionary figures as Thomas Carlyle—to the potential power it possessed, and in this he was in advance of Marx himself."<sup>55</sup> Engels believed that this potential power could only be realized in the combination of the Ten Hour Movement with other radical groups, a subject he dealt with in his chapter on English labor movements.

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<sup>52</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 184.

<sup>53</sup> Engels corrects this claim in the Preface to the 1892 English edition of *Condition*, where he notes almost offhandedly that factory reforms were "much against the spirit of Free Trade and unbridled competition, but quite as much in favor of the giant-capitalist in his competition with his less favored brother" (314).

<sup>54</sup> Engels, *Condition*. 185.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Davis, *Old Gods*, 14.

The guiding thread in Engel's discussion of working class movements, as in much of the book, was that, "the social war is avowedly ranging England; and that whereas it is in the interest of the bourgeoisie to conduct this war hypocritically under the disguise of peace and even philanthropy, the only help for the working men consists in laying bare the true state of things and destroying this hypocrisy."<sup>56</sup> Again, Engels was at pains to emphasize that the politics of the social war emerged from the basic struggle for survival. He wrote, "theirs is not a state in which a man or a whole class of men can think, feel, and live as human beings. The workers must therefore strive to escape from this brutalizing condition, to secure for themselves a better, more humane condition."<sup>57</sup> Trade unions, he argued, were the worker's defensive and educative institutions in the social war, "the military school of the working men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided."<sup>58</sup> The offensive component of the social war was Chartism. Unlike unions, in which "opposition always remained isolated" because "it was single working men or section who fought against a single bourgeois," in Chartism, "it was the whole working class which arises against the bourgeoisie," in a struggle for political power.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 220-1. With respect to both civil war and dictatorship, David Armitage remarks that "Marx's use of the Roman language of internal conflict would merit much further research" (*Civil Wars*, 256). Engels's use of the phrase "social war" also raises some interesting questions in that both *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* refer to a "more or less concealed civil war" (15, 412). As a trained classicist like Marx knew, the Roman Civil Wars and Social Wars were two very different conflicts. Social war, Armitage notes, described two allied peoples who "differed in their status and their rights" and were therefore "allies," but not "equal citizens." On the other hand, "the language of civil war implied much closer kinship among all parties, as well as the existence of a common polity" (139-40). Ross also discusses the importance of civil war to Marx, but her connection between "The Working Day" and *The Civil War in France* is unconvincing (*Communal Luxury*, 81-2). So far, I have found no clear pattern of meaning, authorship, or chronology that explains when Marx and Engels use "civil war" and when they use "social war."

<sup>57</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 220.

<sup>58</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 232.

<sup>59</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 235.

The importance of the ten-hour working day to the social war was that it anchored the political movement of Chartism in the economic conditions of the working class. Marx and Engels's criticisms of purely political democracy are well-known, and Engels argued that the radical bourgeoisie supporters of Chartism were mere political democrats who "espoused the cause of Free Trade, attacked the Ten hours Bill and all exclusively working-men's demands, and let their Radicalism as a whole fall rather into the background."<sup>60</sup> For the workers, on the other hand, Chartism was not simply about the suffrage and political representation. It was also about "the Ten Hours Bill, protection of the workers against the capitalist, good wages, a guaranteed position, repeal of the new Poor Laws." "Therein," Engels argued, "lies the difference between Chartist democracy and all previous political bourgeois democracy. Chartism is of an essentially social nature, a class movement."<sup>61</sup> Though the ten hour day made Chartism a form of social democracy, Engels was also clear that a legally limited working day was a rudimentary form of socialism, more important for the further reforms it pointed towards than for its specific consequences. Ten Hour Movement provided Chartism with a social content that, though theoretically underdeveloped, emerged out of working class's experience of social war in England. At the same time, Chartism's political commitments ensured that the Ten Hour Movement would not become a narrow defense of the interests of specific sectors of the working class, but develop towards a universal form of socialist politics.

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<sup>60</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 242.

<sup>61</sup> Engels, *Condition*, 242. Gareth Stedman Jones uses Engels, along with Thomas Carlyle, as exemplars of the "social interpretation" of Chartism he attacks in his famous essay, "Rethinking Chartism," *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 90-121. The interpretation of Engels I offer here suggests that his view was more complicated than a simple "social interpretation" because Engels was interested in the way Chartism's politics related to, borrowed elements from, and combined with campaigns like the Ten Hour Movement, which preceded the emergence of Chartism and was undeniably working class in both its rhetoric and program. But, as Engels's 1850s articles make clear, the fusion of Chartism with the Ten Hour Movement was a political project that could fail, not a definitional claim.

When severed from its connections to Chartism, Engels was far more critical of the Ten Hour Movement. We can see this in an article he wrote in 1850, just after the Exchequer upheld the legality of the mill-owners' efforts to undermine the 1847 Factory Act and before the revised act was passed. Reflecting a widespread sense of pessimism following the collapse of Chartism after 1848 and the failure of that year's European revolutions, Engels placed far greater emphasis on the movement's Tory spokesmen and Parliamentary leaders. He argued Chartists supported the Ten Hour Movement wholeheartedly, "the association of the workers with the most heterogeneous and reactionary elements of English society made it necessary for the Ten Hours Agitation to be pursued quite separately from the revolutionary agitation of the workers."<sup>62</sup> Rather than looking ahead to a future social democracy, "the working-class Toryism of these Ten Hour people was the echo of the first opposition of the workers to industrial progress which attempted to restore the old patriarchal situation and whose most energetic manifestations of life did not go beyond the smashing of machines." Rather than expanding the scope of working-class politics, "it gave the workers merely material, indeed exclusively physical advantages...it neither gave them political power nor altered their social position as wage-labourers." Overall, Engels charged that "the Ten Hours' Bill was advocated mainly by reactionaries and carried exclusively by the reactionary classes."<sup>63</sup>

This is not to say that Engels turned completely against his previous views on Ten Hour Movement. "The Ten Hours' Bill," he admitted, "is indispensable for the workers. It is a physical necessity for them. Without the Ten Hours' Bill this whole generation of English

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<sup>62</sup> Friedrich Engels, "The English Ten Hours' Bill" *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Politisch-Ökonomische Revue* No. 4, 1850. Collected in *Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW)* vol. 10, p. 288. Cited without page numbers from the online version available at <http://hiaw.org/defcon6/works/1850/03/10hours.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Alan Gilbert discusses these articles in *Marx's Politics*, 235-8.

workers will be physically ruined.”<sup>64</sup> But it was precisely because the ten hour day was about the basic survival of the workers that they had joined with the Tories. “The workers have learnt the value of an alliance with reaction from the brief existence of the Bill,” he wrote. “They have learnt the use of passing separate partial measure against the industrial bourgeoisie.” As a result, “The Ten Hours’ Bill demanded by the workers today is thus quite different from the one which has just been overruled by the Court of Exchequer.” Engels hoped that the Tory’s inability to defend their legislation would lead the workers to a more radical political program akin to what he had described five years before. This new Ten Hour Movement “is no longer an isolated attempt to cripple industrial development, it is a link in a long chain of measures which will revolutionise the whole of the present form of society and gradually destroy the class antagonisms which have hitherto existed; it is not a reactionary measure, but a revolutionary one.” In the end, Engels looked forward to a factory movement that would be free of the Tory leadership he thought divided the social content of the Ten Hour Movement from the political agenda of Chartism.

Taken together, Engels’ contemporaneous accounts of the Ten Hour Movement reveal an overarching interpretation. The ten hour day was a social demand emanating naturally and necessarily from the working classes’ experiences of social war, exploitation, and degradation. As an automatic, defensive response, its social content was not part of any larger socialist theory, and it had no inherent political dimensions. The politics of the ten hour day could be either radical, socialist, and democratic, as when incorporated into Chartism, or it could be reactionary

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<sup>64</sup> Engels, “The English Ten Hours’ Bill”, see above. It is possible that the critical attitude Engels takes towards the Ten Hour Act, and his omission of the support it received from some manufacturers, is partly the result of embarrassment over the fact that his own firm, Ermen and Engels, signed a petition against the Act in 1847 and was involved in case about it (Gray, *Factory Question*, 195 fn. 23). Of course, Engels did not have control of the firm at that point and would not have been able to determine its policy on the matter, so this in no way implies Engels was a hypocrite, only that he had personal reasons for portraying the act in a reactionary light.

and nostalgic, as it was under the direction of its Tory leadership. Only when the ten hour day was aligned with a political movement like Chartism did its demands transcend the realm of necessity and enter the truly political struggle over the freedom of the entire working class.

The problem of the relationship between working class and Tory interpretations of the Ten Hour Movement is also at the center of Marx's 1850s journalism on the Factory Acts, which focused specifically on the role of popular agency in the Ten Hour Act's passage. Earlier, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels used the Ten Hour Movement to demonstrate the increasing organizational and political capabilities of the working class. In their account of the emergence of the proletariat over the course of its struggle with the bourgeoisie, they wrote:

this organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the Ten Hours Bill in England was carried.<sup>65</sup>

The basis for this brief passage seems to be Engel's account of the Ten Hour Movement as part of the "social war" in the *Condition*, only here depicted on a far grander and more apocalyptic scale. It's important to note, however, that the *Manifesto* was written and published just a few months after passage of the 1847 Act, when it seemed like Chartism might also make a breakthrough and before the factory owners had begun their campaign of resistance to its terms. Once the optimism of 1848 receded, Marx's views on the political agency of the working class became noticeably more pessimistic.

Five years later, in an article on agitation to restore the original ten hour day after the 1850 Factory Act added half an hour, Marx provided not one, but two different histories of the Ten Hour Act. The first, which he called "the exoteric history," held that, "from 1802 there has

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<sup>65</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

been a continual strife on the part of the English working people for legislative interference with the duration of factory labor, until in 1847 the celebrated Ten-Hour Act of John Fielden was passed.”<sup>66</sup> Next, he described “its secret history,” which, following Engels, he framed as conflict within the ruling classes. “The landed aristocracy,” he wrote, “having received a deadly blow by the actual abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846, took their vengeance by forcing the Ten-Hours Bill of 1847 upon Parliament.” Agitation renewed in 1853, Marx argued, because the landed aristocracy “feel the approach of their final struggle with the men of the Manchester School,” and they were using the Anglican clergy, who feared that the bourgeoisie might disestablish the church and reduce tithes, to mobilize the working class. “The men of the Manchester School,” Marx concluded, “may infer from this diversion, that they will be unable to abstract the political power from the hands of the Aristocracy, unless they consent, with whatever reluctance, to give the people also their full share in it.” Aside from the regular substitution of “bourgeoisie” and “landed aristocracy” for “Whig” and “Tory,” a change that meant little given the way the voting on the Ten Hour Act occurred, Marx’s analysis of Ten Hour Movement is almost identical to Engels’s at this time in emphasizing elite politics over popular agency, and both are markedly different from the views of the *Manifesto* a few years before.

Marx’s skepticism, and his choice to distinguish between the apparent, exoteric history of working-class activism and the secret, true cause of the Factory Acts illustrates the new style of political analysis emerging among the disaffected revolutionaries of 1848. As Jonathan Sperber puts it, “Marx was developing a more realistic and power-oriented position, one dubbed by an old Paris émigré acquaintance, August Ludwig von Rochau, as *Realpolitik*.”<sup>67</sup> Rochau was an

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<sup>66</sup> Karl Marx, “Parliamentary Debates – The Clergy and the Struggle for the Ten Hour Day – Starvation,” *New York Daily Tribune* (15 March 1853). Cited without page numbers from the online version available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/02/25.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life* (New York: Liveright, 2013), 308-9.

exiled German liberal who argued in his 1853 book, *Foundations of Realpolitik*, that the liberal revolutionaries of 1848 failed to hold power because they neglected the question of how social and economic forces are transformed into political power and devoted themselves to abstractions about sovereignty and constitutions.<sup>68</sup> Although Marx and Rochau never addressed each other directly in their writings, Rochau borrows concepts like class consciousness from Marx, and Marx's writings from the 1850s deal with many of the same problems as Rochau. Both were deeply concerned with the difference between appearance and reality, between the hidden motivations of political actors and the justifications they gave for their actions.<sup>69</sup> The concerns of realpolitik analysis led Marx, both in his journalism and his classic 1852 text, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, to emphasize the extent to which working class political agency was called forth and manipulated by different segments of the ruling classes for their own ends. The true history of the Ten Hour Act, therefore, belonged not to the workers, who were described in the *Communist Manifesto* as actively taking advantage of the lack of unity among the ruling classes, but to the ongoing class struggle between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. If this was a realpolitik argument, it was still a long way from the revolutionary realpolitik Luxemburg invoked in her debate with Bernstein.

### Capital: Politics, Production, and the Organizing of the Working Class

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<sup>68</sup> John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). According to Bew, realpolitik attends to “the existing distribution of power within a state (*Herrschaft*); the socioeconomic structures of society; and the cultural and ideological setting of the time.” It “synthesized these to provide a general assessment of the specific historical context and the parameters for political action within it.” However, “*Realpolitik* was not a theology or a science of statecraft. It did not follow rules. Above all, it did ‘not entail the renunciation of individual judgment and it requires least of all an uncritical kind of submission,’ Rochau wrote. It was more ‘appropriate to think of it as a mere measuring and weighing and calculating of facts that need to be processed politically’” (300-1).

<sup>69</sup> On the similarities between Rochau and Marx, and Marx's contribution to realpolitik more generally, see Bew, *Realpolitik*, 26-9, 36-40. Bew cautions against the identification of 19<sup>th</sup> century realpolitik with reason of state, but the “secret history” genre bridged the two. Marx's largest secret history is his unfinished *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, published serially from 1856-7.

According to Gareth Stedman Jones, “the years between 1864 and 1869 were the most fruitful and successful years of Marx’s life. During this period he made an enduring contribution both to an understanding of the history and anatomy of capitalism, and to the development of the European Labor movement.” The defining events, of course, were the publication of *Capital* in 1867 and the founding of the IWA in 1864. “It was also in these years,” he adds, “that Karl initially became personally acquainted with a spectrum of British radicals at first hand.”<sup>70</sup>

Although *Capital* was not translated into English until 1886 and should not be read narrowly as an exclusive intervention into English working class politics in the 1860s, Marx’s experiences in the IWA appear throughout the book, and nowhere more prominently than in “The Working Day.” Reading this chapter alongside his 1864 Inaugural Address to the IWA and the “Value, Price, and Profit” lectures he delivered there in 1865 makes it clear that he thought *Capital* had some specific political implications for the time and place in which it was written.<sup>71</sup>

Consequently, although *Capital* was addressed to an educated European reading public and Marx’s lectures were delivered to London workers (mostly semi- or self-educated tradesmen), they share the same basic perspective on the Ten Hour Movement and can help us understand what Marx was doing politically when he discussed it in “The Working Day” chapter of *Capital*.

Marxist scholars generally interpret “The Working Day” in terms of its structural role in unfolding the larger argument of *Capital*. Mike Davis provides a useful summary of this reading.

He writes:

large-scale working-class militancy, whether successful or not, tended to “rationalize” capitalism by accelerating the introduction of new labor-saving technologies and

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<sup>70</sup> Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 433.

<sup>71</sup> On Marx’s relationship to working class politics in England, see Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International* (London: Macmillan, 1965); Eric Hobsbawm, “Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement,” *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (New York: Meridian Books, 1973), 95-108; and Gareth Stedman Jones, “Some Notes on Karl Marx and the English Labour Movement,” *History Workshop*, No. 18 (Autumn, 1984), pp. 124-137.

promoting the centralization of ownership and control. This is exactly the point of the tenth chapter of *Capital Volume I*, where Marx recounts how the victory of the English workers in forcing the legislation of a ten-hour workday was quickly countered by their employers' investment in a new generation of machines.<sup>72</sup>

This reading of the chapter presents it as a story of capital's transition from exploitation via the extraction of absolute surplus value through overwork to exploitation via the extraction of relative surplus value through the intensification of the labor process. "The increase in productivity that ensued" from this shift, "helped to set the stage for what Marx imagined as a new kind of freedom, a basic prerequisite of which would be the continued reduction of the working day."<sup>73</sup> Thus, the Ten Hour Movement's significance is that it shows how capital needs working-class activism to develop its full potential. Since "The Working Day" really is the tenth chapter of *Capital*, this reading is not wrong, but the increased productivity of capital does adequately explain the importance Marx attached to the Ten Hour Movement or the almost rapturous terms in which he describes it, both here and in his other writings from the mid-1860s. It was not simply the results of the legislation that were important to him, it was the process of organization by which factory legislation came about and the kinds of popular agency the movement created.

As mentioned before, the obviously political content of "The Working Day" is much more abstract than what Marx and Engels wrote in the 1850s. At the same time, it is much less abstract than the first nine chapters of *Capital*, which contain a wealth of historical information but do not proceed, as "The Working Day" does, by historical narrative. In order to understand why Marx's historical narrative works the way it does, it is useful to recall his famous statement in the preface, "individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of

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<sup>72</sup> Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, 118.

<sup>73</sup> Kathie Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 153.

economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests. My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains.”<sup>74</sup> For a long time, this claim about natural history was seen in terms of a relationship between Darwin’s theory of evolution and Marx’s critique of political economy, a relationship which has since been shown to be far less important than was previously assumed.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, what Marx’s reference to natural history helps us see is the role of abstraction in constructing a formal, almost algorithmic account of how a complex historical process emerges out of the repeated iteration of smaller, simpler processes. Specifically, *Capital* is about how the rise, operation, and (arguably) fall of the capitalist mode of production can be explained by the production and circulation of commodities, just as 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of the Earth explained geological history in terms of simpler forces like erosion, eruption, and deposition. In neither case did the perspective of natural history necessarily imply that these forces had to be operating in vacuum or that nothing else of causal importance happens in the world. But the emphasis on rendering the processes by which historical changes occurs in abstract terms is a fundamental methodological point that explains Marx’s famous comment on natural history.<sup>76</sup>

“The Working Day” applied the same method of abstraction to the political history of the Ten Hour Movement that Marx applied to the capitalist mode of production in the rest of *Capital*. This form of narration allowed Marx to consider the political struggle for the ten-hour

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<sup>74</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 92.

<sup>75</sup> For a critique of the claim that Marx was a Darwinian, see Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 72 and Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 566-8. Stedman Jones also quotes an 1868 letter to Engels in which Marx asserted, “The history of mankind is like paleontology” (576).

<sup>76</sup> Natural history briefly returns in chapter seven, “The Labour Process and the Valorization Process,” when Marx praises prehistorical periodizations based on “natural science” for their emphasis on “material production” as opposed to conventional forms of historical writing (286).

day without being caught up in questions of Tory control and Parliamentary intrigue, as he had been before. But, in portraying what the working class did for itself, Marx did not do the kind of “history from below” that makes the lives and actions of ordinary people more concrete. Instead, he depicted high politics just as abstractly as popular politics. This move makes sense within the framework of *Capital* because it makes the production of working-class politics as much a part of the capitalist mode of production as is the production of commodities. Individual leaders are no more responsible for political organization than they are for the organization of production. At the same time, the specifics of what working class politics will look like in a given place and time are as much a result of circumstances as are the specifics of what commodities will be produced and exchanged there. In other words, Marx thought that struggles over the length of a working day are inherent in the capitalist mode of production, but the organization of that struggle into something like the Ten Hour Movement and the Factory Acts was particular to English history. Why the English working class took that course, and what it meant for them to do so, is the subject of “The Working Day.”

The chapter begins with a set-piece argument between a capitalist and a worker about the exchange of labor-power that occurs when the capitalist hires the worker to perform a day’s work. “The capitalist,” Marx wrote, “maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and, when possible, to make two working days out of one.” Marx’s worker claims in response that “the peculiar nature of the commodity solid implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser,” and therefore “the worker maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length.” Marx’s famous encapsulation of this debate is worth quoting at length:

there is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of

capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class.”<sup>77</sup>

In this passage, a movement occurs from the individual worker and the individual capitalist, who are referred to in the singular in their set piece debate about the sale of labor-power, to a struggle between collective labor and collective capital as classes.<sup>78</sup> The distinction is crucial because, as Marx noted at the end of the chapter, “the isolated worker, the worker as a ‘free’ seller of his labour-power, succumbs without resistance once capitalist production has reached a certain stage of maturity.”<sup>79</sup> Individually, the worker does not have the power to force the capitalist to respect his rights as an owner and exchanger of labor-power. Only the workers acting as a class can do this, and first they need to become a class.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious solution to this antinomy is to empower workers as sellers of labor-power freely participating in the supposedly equal process of exchange. Marx’s problem with this was that exchange relations do not bring workers together as a class. As the prior quote suggests, the buying and selling of labor is typically an individual act. Trade unions try to increase the bargaining power of workers by having them bargain collectively. Marx worked

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<sup>77</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 344. It is worth noting that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century English writers from all classes used “working classes” in the plural far more often than they used “working class” in the singular. The same holds true for “upper classes” as opposed to “upper class.” Only the middle class was frequently described in the singular. Thus, Marx and Engels’s use of the singular “working class” must always be read as a political claim about solidarity, not as an analytically neutral category.

<sup>78</sup> In a footnote (343 ft. 6), Marx wrote that he adapted his version of the worker’s speech from a pamphlet published by the London building workers during a strike (Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 454 calls it a lockout) over a nine hour working day in 1859. As a literary trope, however, the set piece debate between classes stretches back through the history of English radical politics to the comte de Volney’s 1791 book, *The Ruins: A Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires*. I have found no direct link between Marx and Volney, but without a modern, scholarly edition of his work, something that would be of immense value to students of 19<sup>th</sup> century radical politics, the full extent of his influence remains hard to estimate.

<sup>79</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 412. I follow Marx in using the masculine singular “he” as my pronoun for workers only to avoid confusion when switching between Marx’s text and my own voice. Marx’s monolithically masculine working class is much more reflective of political aspirations in the 1860s than of the Ten Hour Movement itself.

<sup>80</sup> As Ross writes, “in his chapter on the working day, Marx narrates the self-constitution of the working class as revolutionary subject” (*Communal Luxury*, 82).

closely with trade union leaders in the IWA and was not opposed to collective bargaining, but he did have concerns about the unions' tendency to focus on wages and direct bargaining with employers.<sup>81</sup> However, empowerment via bargaining in the realm of exchange tends to work best for workers whose skills are already valued by the market, and this has a dangerous tendency to create divisions between skilled and unskilled workers. Better, he thought, to focus on what happens to the worker after labor-power has been sold. "When the transaction was concluded," Marx wrote, "it was discovered that he was no 'free agent,' that the period of time for which he is free to sell his labour-power is period of time for which he is forced to sell it."<sup>82</sup> The worker's experience of capitalist production reveals the freedom of the individual worker to be a fraud, an fictitious right to self-ownership he cannot enforce through want of power.<sup>83</sup> For this reason, in his lecture to the IWA, Marx argued that the ten hour day "was not to be attained by private settlement between the working men and the capitalists. This very necessity of general political action affords the proof that in its merely economical action capital is the stronger side."<sup>84</sup>

Marx begins his detailed history of the Ten Hour Movement with the 1833 Factory Act, rather than with Oastler's agitation. He held that, "the establishment of a normal working day is the result of centuries of struggle between the capitalist and the worker," and summarized the early modern legislation on labor and wages that workers often drew on when criticizing factory owners for overturning traditional ideas about work-time.<sup>85</sup> For most of this period, however,

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<sup>81</sup> See Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 471.

<sup>82</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 415. Marx put "free agency" in quotation marks because it was the language used in the 1830s and 1840s to argue over whether children (and sometimes even adults) could make labor contracts for themselves or whether the positions of owners and workers were so inherently unequal that legislative interference was required.

<sup>83</sup> On the role of fraud in the struggle over the working day, see Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 172-6.

<sup>84</sup> Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit* (New York: International Co., 1969), 28. Page numbers are given from the PDF version available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/value-price-profit.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 382. The classic statement on how work hours were experienced remains E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present*, No. 38 (Dec. 1967), pp. 56-97.

capital was on the offensive, and it was only around the turn of the century that the working class “began to offer resistance” of the kind that would lead to the 1833 Act.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the most important consequence of that act, from Marx’s perspective, was the creation of the factory inspectors because they, for the first time, brought the active agency of the state directly into the production process.<sup>87</sup> Earlier in *Capital*, when Marx entered “the hidden abode of production” to seek the source of the capitalist’s profits, he passed under a sign that read “no admittance except on business.”<sup>88</sup> In doing so, he followed in the footsteps of the factory inspectors, who were the first people able to enter the space of production without needing the permission of the capitalist.

The factory inspectors were both created by the involvement of state in the process of production and a vector for increasing state activity.<sup>89</sup> Though workers hardly needed to be told about the conditions of factory labor, the reports of the inspectorate contributed to public support for the protection of children. The relays, shifts, and other subterfuges with which capitalists responded to the 1833 Act were, in part, attempts to foil the work of the inspectors. As Marx wrote, “how could the factory inspectors, with this complex bookkeeping in respect of each individual child or your person, enforce the legally determined hours of work?”<sup>90</sup> By rearranging the production process to thwart the inspectors, factory owners all but admitted that capitalist production depended on the exploitation of the worker, even if that worker was a child. They

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<sup>86</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 390.

<sup>87</sup> Marx’s famous tribute to Leonard Horner, whom he dubs “Censor of the Factories” is on *Capital* 334 fn. 10. According to Gray, “the role of the factory inspectorate was initially conceived in rather broad and vague terms, as plenipotentiaries of the rational state,” and not all of them were anywhere near as effective or independent as Horner (*Factory Question*, 86). In fact, Horner was an unusually interesting character who was not only a factory inspector, but also a celebrated geologist and an almost obsessive student of the life of notorious Florentine friar Girolamo Savonarola, whose biography he translated into English.

<sup>88</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 279-80.

<sup>89</sup> David MacGregor, *Hegel, Marx, and the English State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 204-271 provides an account of the factory acts that uses the Marx’s affinity for the inspectorate to establish a point of commonality with Hegel’s ideas on the bureaucratic state.

<sup>90</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 393.

also made it clear that the organization of capitalist production was never simply a question of economic efficiency. It was also a system of for controlling workers and subverting laws that were opposed to the interests of capital.

This history of the consequences of the 1833 Act led Marx to a much more perceptive account of the politics of the 1844 and 1847 Acts than he had offered in the early 1850s. Alongside the workers who “had made the Ten Hours’ Bill their economic, as they had made the Charter their political, election cry,” there were also manufactures, “who had run their factories in conformity with the Act of 1833,” petitioning for legislation that would restrain their competitors. Meanwhile, the campaign for the repeal of the Corn laws led Whig party leaders to promise “not only that the loaf of bread we be twice its size, but also that the Ten Hour’s Bill would be enacted in the free trade millennium.” Only after covering all this did he return to the question of the Tory leadership, which he now described with easy sarcasm. “And finally,” he wrote, “the Tories, threatened in their most sacred interest, the rent of land, thundered with philanthropic indignation against the ‘nefarious practices’ of their foes.”<sup>91</sup> Marx now saw the Factory Acts of the 1840s not primarily as the result of Tory reaction, but as the result of the scrambling of the political order produced by both the capitalist mode of production and the agitations of the working class. When speaking to the IWA, he echoed the language of the *Manifesto*, reminding his listeners, “after a thirty years’ struggle, fought with most admirable perseverance, the English Working classes, improving a momentous split between the landlords and the money-lords, succeeded in carrying the Ten Hours’ Bill.”<sup>92</sup> This new narrative presented the activities of the Ten Hour Movement in terms that strongly resemble Luxemburg’s

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<sup>91</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 393.

<sup>92</sup> Karl Marx, “Inaugural Address of the International Workingmen’s Association,” *The First International and After* ed. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2010), 78.

“proletarian realpolitik,” while hinting that the working class might have its own secret history of the Factory Acts.<sup>93</sup>

Though they did not resolve the struggle for the ten hour day, the 1844 and 1847 Acts revealed what was perhaps the most important element of the formation of the working class through the Ten Hour Movement: that the production process itself could be used to turn particular legislative interventions into general industrial protections. The effective limitation of the working day for children necessarily limited of the working day for men because factories were unable to function without a labor force pulled from all parts of the working class. “The working day of adult males in factories became subject to the same limitations,” Marx wrote, “since in most processes of production the co-operation of children, young persons and women is indispensable.”<sup>94</sup> Factory production unified the working class because the factory system made it impossible to adequately protect its most vulnerable members, those seen as most deserving of philanthropic and humanitarian protection by the rest of society, without also protecting all the other workers with whom they cooperated. This, we should recall, was the opposite of Marx’s worry about the strategy of enhancing worker’s bargaining power, which was that bargaining helps most advantaged workers the most, thereby risking the possibility of class division rather than the creation of solidarity. Marx claimed that the rules for the regulation of the working day, “developed gradually out of circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production.”

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<sup>93</sup> In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, realpolitik writers, especially in Germany, frequently attacked British liberalism for cloaking self-interested motivations behind moralistic rhetoric (Bew, *Realpolitik*, passim). Their interest in unmasking liberalism to reveal its true face as a hypocritical form of power politics resembles the way Marx exposes the social realities underneath liberal economic discourse in *Capital*. One potentially useful feature of reading *Capital* as a kind of *realeconomic* treatise is that it explains Marx’s decision to end *Capital* with the history of primitive accumulation, which functions as a kind of secret history of the capitalist mode of production and connection to the state, on which see William Clare Roberts, “What Was Primitive Accumulation? Reconstructing the Origin of a Critical Concept,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, October 11, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 395.

“Their formulation, official recognition and proclamation by the state,” he added, “were the result of a long class struggle.”<sup>95</sup>

In sum, the Ten Hour Movement took advantage of the fact that factory production still required qualitatively distinct forms of labor that had not yet been abstracted to the point of being fully homogenous labor power and, therefore, could only be performed by specific types of workers, like children. It politicized the process of capitalist production by turning the heterogeneity of the working class into something around which workers could be organized.<sup>96</sup> This organizing was possible because the cooperative labor required by industrial production ensured that a legislative intervention designed to protect children would, by necessity, have to protect the adult workers they cooperated with, as well. What Marx documented in “The Working Day” was how the Ten Hour Movement used production to turn particular protections into general measures for the protection of all workers, and how this process led to the further recognition of shared class interests. By focusing on the length of the working day, Marx saw a strategy for transforming the seemingly reformist impulse of restricting child labor into “an all-powerful social barrier.”<sup>97</sup>

#### Pressure from Without and the Political Agency of the Working Class

If production itself offered a way to generalize limits on the working day across different types of workers cooperating in the same industry, Marx saw political action by the working class as the source of labor legislation and the way to extend it from one industry to another. And despite his anxieties about its historical content, Harvey rightly emphasizes that “The Working

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<sup>95</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 394-5

<sup>96</sup> For an insightful account of the role of internal division in Marx’s account of the formation of the working class, see James Martel, “Division is Common,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 113:4 (Fall 2014), 701-711.

<sup>97</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 416.

Day” is a study of “political force, the capacity to mobilize and to build political alliances and institutions (such as trade unions) to influence a state apparatus that has the power to legislate a ‘normal’ working day.”<sup>98</sup> At this point, however, is necessary to ask just what sort of force the working class had to bring this social barrier into being, what sort of political agency it was actually able to exercise? Of all the subjects covered in “The Working Day,” this is the one about which Marx was most maddeningly vague. Large numbers of working-class men were only enfranchised with the Reform Bill of 1867, so voting was not part of the working-class political activism that brought about factory reform. Instead, Marx often described the workers as offering “resistance,” “protesting,” and holding “threatening meetings.” In his lecture to the IWA, Marx brought these various activities together under the concept of “pressure from without.”<sup>99</sup> “As to the limitation of the working day in England,” he said, “as in all other countries, it has never been settled except by legislative interference. Without the working men's continuous pressure from without that interference would never have taken place.”<sup>100</sup> Understanding what Marx thought “pressure from without” was and how workers were able to use it sheds light not only on his views about the factory movement, but also on his ideas about the meaning of democracy under capitalism and the role of organizations like the IWA in working class politics.

Today, pressure politics can often seem obvious or uninteresting, and even by the time Marx wrote *Capital*, Gladstone was arguing that “agencies out of doors” were “the legitimate expression of the people, by which bad legislation is to be corrected.”<sup>101</sup> Consequently, it is worth recalling just how radically, even dangerously, democratic pressure from without appeared

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<sup>98</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 138.

<sup>99</sup> Marx's sole reference to “pressure from without” in “The Working Day” occurs on 392. On the importance of pressure from without to Marx, see Gareth Stedman Jones, “‘Pressure from Without’: Karl Marx and 1867,” *Parliamentary History*, Volume 36, Issue 1 (February 2017): 117–130.

<sup>100</sup> *Value, Price and Profit*, 28.

<sup>101</sup> Patricia Hollis ed. *Pressure from Without in early Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 5.

during the Ten Hour Movement. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, parliament was seen as a deliberative assembly that represented in itself all the legitimate corporate and national interests of England, and pressure groups were thought to be both “illegitimate, as they disturbed the deliberative role of parliament, and unnecessary as they spoke for no recognizable corporate or community interest.”<sup>102</sup> Such interests were invariably tied to property, which conferred a “permanent interest” in the nation that could be represented and consulted within parliament itself. Workers, lacking any such permanent interest, were therefore a particularly problematic pressure group, as their pressure came not simply from outside of Parliament, but from outside of the representative system altogether, from something that was not even representable in it: labor.<sup>103</sup>

Pressure politics were inseparable from the rise of political organizing that occurred in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. “The politicization of the language of pressure dates from the 1820s and 1830s,” writes Maartje Janse, “decades that saw progress in mechanization and subsequent social and economic transformation at a much faster pace than any previous change.”<sup>104</sup> The steam engine, in particular, made it possible to conceive of pressure as a kind of all-purpose force through which agitation and activism could produce change, and pressure rapidly came to be identified with the organized force of public opinion. “Reform organizations were thought to be expanding the political system by building channels and machines for change that they successfully welded onto the existing system,” Janse adds. “They generated and channeled pressure to change public opinion and thus ultimately bear upon government

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<sup>102</sup> Hollis, *Pressure*, viii.

<sup>103</sup> The “landed interest” was the paradigmatic form of a permanent interest, but the development of factories and large-scale industry made it increasingly clear that the “moneyed” or industrial interests of the English middle class were permanent, as well. On the other hand, the idea of a “laboring interest” had no currency in official politics, though the workers’ claim to have property in their own labor was perhaps the central theme of radical politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>104</sup> Maartje Janse, “‘Association Is a Mighty Engine’: Mass Organization and the Machine Metaphor, 1825–1840,” Henk te Velde and Maartje Janse, eds., *Organizing Democracy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 19–42, 20.

machinery.”<sup>105</sup> Cotton mills began using steam to power their looms in the 1810s, and the operatives who worked in those mills had an intuitive understanding of how pressure could give influence in a political system that was largely closed off to them.<sup>106</sup> Samuel Kydd, who wrote the first history of the Ten Hour Movement, argued that Parliament “is not disposed, readily, to concede any demand; it prides itself on a kind of stoical indifference to recently-organised movements, and waits for ‘the pressure from without.’”<sup>107</sup>

Patricia Hollis describes pressure from without as the strategy of “those more or less radical and mainly middle class pressure groups, pursuing specified goals and working for legislative change by putting pressure on parliament and on government; possessing a sophisticated organization over a defined period of time; and invoking a moral language, by claiming to speak for the People, the Nation or the Country.”<sup>108</sup> Pressure groups were larger and more diffuse than the corporate interests (like guilds and towns) whose right to petition parliament in times of need was a well-established part of English political culture. They also had specific legislative goals, like Catholic emancipation, abolition, parliamentary reform, the repeal of the Corn Laws, or (Hollis’s exclusion of working-class groups notwithstanding) the ten hour day. “Classic pressure from without,” Hollis explains, “generally developed by two stages. The first of these was primarily educational, the creation of an enlightened public opinion which, without too much scrutiny of ways and means, was supposed to bear on government.”<sup>109</sup> This often involved the spread of information through the creation of newspapers, reports, and public lecture tours. “The next requirement,” writes Hollis, “was evidence of a national voice,” and this

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<sup>105</sup> Janse, “Association,” *Organizing Democracy*, 23. Janse connects the mechanical understanding of mass organizations with vision of the “technological sublime” emerging in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>106</sup> Freeman, *Behemoth*, 4-8.

<sup>107</sup> Kydd, 138.

<sup>108</sup> Hollis, *Pressure*, viii.

<sup>109</sup> Hollis, *Pressure*, 16.

meant the creation of an extended network of committees, unions, and associations that could coordinate political activities across large swaths of the country.<sup>110</sup> So organized, pressure groups could try to extract pledges from members of Parliament, put forward new candidates, enroll new voters (sometimes using complicated loan arrangements to bring them above the property qualification threshold), or engage in strategies of noncompliance and direct action.

Though Hollis conspicuously omits class from the list of collective identities on whose behalf a pressure group might try to speak, Marx was adamant that the Ten Hour Movement made extensive use of pressure from without. We can get a clear sense of why Marx thought pressure from without was so important from an article written by Paul Hargreaves, chairman of the Lancashire Central Short Time Committee, in 1846 (see figure 2.3). Hargreaves claimed that over his eighteen years in the Ten Hour Movement, “the agitation had assumed almost as many different shapes” as there had been years.<sup>111</sup> “At one time,” he wrote, “it was necessary to hold public meetings in order to draw public attention to the sufferings of the children.” Once public opinion had been courted, “it was necessary to petition parliament and make representation to the Government of the necessity of such a measure.” Then, the short time committees had to rebut the capitalists’ claim that “trade would be ruined, and England’s greatness for ever gone, unless the factory girls of Lancashire worked twelve hours a day.” To do this, “the committee had applied the whole of their study...and had condensed the whole in a cheap pamphlet, and distributed it amongst the people and the members of Parliament.” The similarities between

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<sup>110</sup> Hollis, *Pressure*, 16.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Hargreaves, “The Politics of Short Time” *Northern Star* (31 January 1846.) Collected in Hollis, *Class and Conflict*, 205. Hollis’s justification for omitting working class movements, in particular Chartism and the anti-Poor Law Movement, is that they were “too diffuse” (viii). However, her edited volume contains a chapter on Shaftsbury by Geoffrey B.A.M. Finlayson that discusses the Ten Hour Movement at length. This seems to suggest that she does not think of the Ten Hour Movement as working class because of its Tory leaders. Ironically, Hargreaves’s letter, which shows the extent of working-class activity in the Ten Hour Movement, is also from a volume she edited.

Hollis's list and Hargreaves's provide overwhelming evidence for Marx's view of Ten Hour Movement as a working class form of pressure from without.



Figure 2.3: *The Lancashire Central Short Time Committee for Obtaining the Ten Hours Bill, 1850, c.o. The National Portrait Gallery (NPG x27501). Paul Hargreaves is seated second from left and Philip Grant, one of the early historians of the Ten Hour Movement, is standing in the middle with a paper in his right hand. The male leadership of the Lancashire committee provide a comforting image of the respectable, male working class that did not match the reality of much short time activism.*

This is not to say that kind of pressure exercised by the Ten Hour Movement was identical to the pressure exercised by middle class reform groups. Workers combined political pressure with economic pressure caused by disruptive action and organizing within the factories themselves.” Hargreaves’s list, no doubt deliberately, omitted all mentions of strikes, riots, and other forms of legally dubious or highly confrontational political action that also went on in the period, and “The Working Day” refers to them only obliquely. But we catch a glimpse of the

kinds of threats and pressure used by the Ten Hour Movement in Richard Oastler's notorious pamphlet, *The Law or the Needle*, which was written in 1836 in response to mill owners' efforts at repealing the 1833 Factory Act. Oastler threatened that if the law was repealed, "I would *then* teach the factory children, to defend themselves, to prevent themselves from being murdered, contrary to Law."<sup>112</sup> Specifically, Oastler proposed teaching children to carry out industrial sabotage. "I will, in that event, print a little card about Needles, and Sand and Rusty-nails, with proper and very explicit directions," he wrote. "I will take care to have every factory child well instructed in the art of self-defense." We have no evidence that this even happened, and Marx did not mention Oastler's argument for industrial sabotage by children, which may have been too much even for him. But it was within the realm of possibility, which shows us how the fight to restrict children's hours could lead to dramatic calls for coordinated action by the working class that went far beyond the accepted bounds of Victorian politics into the production process itself.

Marx's interest in pressure from without began shortly after his arrival in England and continued for much of his politically active life. In an 1852 article on the role of corruption in English elections, he explained that even those who have the franchise are apathetic about its use because they "feel instinctively that the decision lies no longer either with Parliament, or with the making of Parliament...but only and exclusively the pressure from without."<sup>113</sup> "In this pressure from without," he continued, "in other means of influencing Parliament than by voting, a great portion even of the electors now believe." This is not to say that Marx was opposed to the expansion of the franchise, particularly since the Reform Bill of 1867 was itself the product of a campaign of mass meetings that ended with the occupation of Hyde Park, which members of the

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<sup>112</sup> Richard Oastler, *The Law or the Needle* (183). Collected in Higgins, 203-4.

<sup>113</sup> Karl Marx, "Corruption at Elections" *Dispatches from the New York Tribune: Selected Journalism of Karl Marx* ed. James Ledbetter (New York: Penguin, 2007), 110

working class had not previously been allowed to enter. But he did not think that suffrage was a substitute for pressure from without. As late as 1871, in a letter to a friend, Marx still held:

Every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes and tries to coerce them by PRESSURE FROM WITHOUT is a POLITICAL MOVEMENT. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory, or even in a particular trade, to force a shorter working day out of the individual capitalists by STRIKES etc. is a purely economic movement. The movement to force through an eight hour law etc., however, is a political movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a political movement, that is to say a movement of the class with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially binding force.<sup>114</sup>

Pressure from without was important because it brought forth a political orientation aimed at generalizing the powers and organization of the working class as a whole, one that emphasized cooperation and interdependence rather than the particular advantages the most privileged workers. Working class agency, in other words, is the product of a conjoined economic and political movement consisting of direct economic action and organized pressure from without.

As the institutional embodiment of workers' interdependence, the IWA made extensive use of organized political pressure on behalf of working-class causes. Though Marx is often read as a theorist of the party form, the IWA was probably the most important political organization he was actively involved with during his life.<sup>115</sup> It was neither a political party in the quasi-

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<sup>114</sup> Letter quoted at Stedman Jones, "Pressure," 130.

<sup>115</sup> Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (New York: Verso, 2016) argues for the value of a Leninist understanding of the party, provided that the party's authority is grounded in the emotional experience of mass crowd politics. Dean positions her argument against what she calls a "left realism" that "offers up diversity, plurality, and multiplicity" instead of the supposedly "undesirable collectivity" of the traditional communist party (45). Answering for a kind of left realism, Paul Raekstad, "Democracy, the Party, and Self-Emancipation," *Critique* 45, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 599–611 faults Dean for ignoring "21st century socialism's commitment to combining the seizure of capitalist state power with strong extra-parliamentary social movements not controlled by the state or party, of using the state to help grow and develop popular power in free and egalitarian counter-institutions like non-market cooperatives and communal councils, and the aim of these new forms of popular power to gradually transform both the state and the economy and transition to a socialism without either" (608). My argument puts Marx, at least in the 1860s, closer to Raekstad than to Dean.

conspiratorial sense of the *Communist Manifesto*—which Carver describes as “a loose association of like-minded risk-takers”—nor in the new sense of a political party as a mass membership organization that emerged after the Reform Bill of 1867.<sup>116</sup> Nor was it simply a labor union. Having begun with the modest idea for a correspondence society between English and French workers, the IWA evolved to become a working-class pressure group with an international scope.<sup>117</sup> Its constituent bodies took a variety of forms, from the “new model unions” of England to the secret societies of Italy and Spain. These groups engaged in class struggle through either political or economic means, and the IWA supported them both materially and through organized pressure campaigns from abroad. By using *Capital* and his IWA speeches to draw attention to importance of pressure from without to winning the ten hour day, Marx emphasized the new possibilities for pressure politics created by the international organization of the working class.

The last section of “The Working Day,” on the “impact of the English factory legislation on other countries,” takes up this international approach.<sup>118</sup> Echoing his language from the 1840s, Marx reminds his readers that “the establishment of a normal working day is therefore the product of a protracted and more or less concealed civil war between the capitalist class and the working class.” In the first, more concealed phrase of the conflict, “the English factory workers were the champions, not only of the English working class, but of the modern working class in general, just as their theorists were the first to throw down the gauntlet to the theory of the

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<sup>116</sup> Carver, *Marx*, 44. On the Marxist idea of the party as compared to the mass membership model, see Peter Mair, “Politics as Language: Some Notes on the Marxist Theory of the Revolutionary Party,” *Langage et Politique Language and Politics* Maurice Cranston & Peter Mair eds. (Florence: European University Institute, 1982), 183-198. On the importance of not assimilating the range of 19<sup>th</sup> century political organizations into a linear story about the development of the modern political party, see Velde and Janse, *Organizing Democracy*.

<sup>117</sup> On the formation of the IWA and its operations in the 1860s, see Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 432-475.

<sup>118</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 411.

capitalists.” As the campaign to limit the working day spread, however, the civil war became more open. First, it spread to France, where the “twelve hours’ law needed the February revolution to bring it into the world.” Then, in the United States, where “every independent worker’s movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic,” the demand for the eight hour day emerged as “the first fruit of the American civil war.”<sup>119</sup> Though Marx never makes the point explicitly, his choice to make the American Civil War and Reconstruction the final example of class struggle in “The Working Day” draws on the extended antislavery politics of the Ten Hour Movement. It must be remembered that Marx’s IWA speeches were given several years into the Lancashire Cotton Famine caused by the interruption of cotton shipments from the Confederacy, and *Capital* was published just two years after the famine ended. Even at the time, many onlookers were surprised that unemployed and sometimes starving cotton workers overwhelmingly sided with the Union on antislavery grounds. But the workers had spent decades fighting their own campaign against factory slavery on the abolitionist grounds laid down by Oastler and other 1830s radicals.<sup>120</sup> Thus, the Ten Hour Movement produced a form of solidarity that extended beyond the heterogeneity of English working class and made it possible for the them support the struggles of black and white workers in America, as well.

This line of argument helps us understand the organizational point Marx was trying to make with “The Working Day” chapter of *Capital* and in his speeches to the IWA from around the same time. According to Stedman Jones, “as a result of a growing preoccupation with the suffrage and a parallel need to defend the legality of trade union actions in industrial disputes,

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<sup>119</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 412-414.

<sup>120</sup> Marx would not have been alone in making this connection. Grant’s *The Ten Hours Bill* concludes with an 1866 speech by Shaftsbury to that factory workers of Manchester in which he also attributes the workers’ fortitude during the cotton famine to the success of the Ten Hour Act.

union leaders now devoting most of their time to the reform league and parliamentary lobbying.”<sup>121</sup> Against this background, Marx sought to remind English members of the IWA that they owed the success of the Ten Hour Movement not to the Whigs, or the Tories, or Parliament, or even to the efforts of organized trade unions. Their success was a result of having used their pressure from without to reorganize capitalist production itself. He reminded them in his lecture that the Ten Hour Day was “one of the greatest economical changes we have witnessed. It was a sudden and compulsory rise of wages, not in some local trades, but in the leading industrial branches by which England sways the markets of the world.”<sup>122</sup> And at the end of “The Working Day,” Marx reproduces the IWA’s September 1866 resolution: “We declare that the limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive....the Congress proposes eight hours as the legal limit of the working day.” Crucially, Marx said the working class must “put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law,” to limit the working day, meaning he did not expect them to be able to pass the law mandating an eight hour day as ordinary participants in the system of electoral politics.<sup>123</sup> With pressure from without as the means and the eight hour day as the end, Marx sought a way forward for the English working class as something other than the “appendage of the great Liberal Party” he feared it ultimately became.<sup>124</sup> Instead, he wanted them to focus their energies on turning the IWA into a global engine of working class political organizing.

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<sup>121</sup> Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 474-5.

<sup>122</sup> *Value, Price and Profit* 8. Roberts makes the same point, “that the workers movement ought to focus its agitation on this question of the length of the working day,” but not in the specific historical context of the 1860s (*Marx’s Inferno*, 173).

<sup>123</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 415-416.

<sup>124</sup> Quoted at Stedman Jones, “Pressure,” 129.

Conclusion: “The First Utopia is a Factory Act”

By putting the demand for an eight-hour day at the center of his international program for working class pressure politics, Marx demonstrated the heightened appreciation he had acquired for what the Ten Hour Movement of the 1830s and 1840s had meant to working people. It was not, as he and Engels had earlier thought, a simple struggle for survival. As Marx said (and Bernstein quoted) in the IWA Inaugural Address, “the Ten hours Bill was not only a great practical success; it was the victory of a principle; it was the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class.”<sup>125</sup> The force that resolved the antinomy of exchange was not that of an animal fighting to survive, it was the force of the working class’s political and economic ideas as they themselves put them into practice; the struggle for the working day was the critique of a political economy in action. In their campaign, they developed a broadly inclusive understanding of working-class identity and an extended notion of pressure politics that combined both conventionally political and specifically economic actions into a dynamic organizing campaign. When compared with his views on the Ten Hour Movement from the 1850s, the quotation with which he ends “The Working Day” could be applied just as well to the trajectory of his own thought. “*Quantum mutatus ab illo!*”<sup>126</sup>

Looking back on Marx’s enthusiasm in the mid-1860s, we might make the same remark, though far less triumphally. Even by the early 1870s, conflicts over Irish home rule and the Paris Commune led Marx to reconsider his views on the revolutionary potential of the English working class and abandon the IWA. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialization produced a working class that was more masculine, more nationalistic, and more dependent on political parties and

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<sup>125</sup> Marx, “Inaugural Address,” 79.

<sup>126</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 416.

unions as its primary forms of organization, though it was also far less poor than workers of the Ten Hour Movement had been. And though most European and American workers won the eight hour day in a cascade of international actions after the First World War, the drive to shorten working hours stalled in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>127</sup> The factory system, meanwhile, has largely relocated to Asia, where workers have faced problems and conditions that would have been disturbingly familiar to their English predecessors a century and a half before.

Lately, however, there have been signs that the length of the working day may again become a live political question. Kathi Weeks advocates “a six-hour day with no decrease in pay,” and, unlike earlier Marxists, includes domestic other forms of nonwage labor in her analysis of what work is and how it should be reduced.<sup>128</sup> Writing in a more popular vein, Rutger Bregman has argued for a fifteen-hour workweek as an essential part of his *Utopia for Realists*.<sup>129</sup> Bregman refers neither to contemporary realist debates in political theory nor to Marx’s account of the Ten Hour Movement, but his felicitous title points to the arguments of Geuss, Raekstad, and other Marx-influenced realists who stress that not all utopias are equally unrealistic.<sup>130</sup> As Marx himself wrote in “The Working Day,” when the ten hour day was first implemented by Robert Owen, it was “laughed at as communist utopia,” along with Owen’s other proposals. “Today,” Marx added, “the first utopia is a factory act.”<sup>131</sup>

As to the meaning and value of this utopia, the content of “the political economy of the working class” as Marx put it, we could do worse than to revisit to the ideas of an ordinary short-time committee. In 1836, when the factory owners trying to subvert the 1832 Act, the short time

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<sup>127</sup> Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, 126.

<sup>128</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 152.

<sup>129</sup> Rutger Bregman, *Utopia for Realists*, ch. 6.

<sup>130</sup> See also Sam Gindin, “Socialism for Realists,” *Catalyst* vol. 2 is. 3 (Fall 2018), <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol2/no3/socialism-for-realists>.

<sup>131</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 413. In context, Marx means that it was the first of Owen’s three utopian reforms to be realized, but given the IWA’s resolution on reducing the length of the working day, it can also be considered first in priority.

committee in the town of Pudsey posted a call for a meeting. “The object of the meeting,” they wrote, “is to secure TIME for REST, and for play— (yes, for play) —for Fire side Improvement—or Domestic Improvement—for Literary Advancement by Evening Schools, and, above all, for Religious instruction of all Factory Workers.”<sup>132</sup> The inclusion of play in an otherwise earnest list of forms of self-improvement is very different from publications written by or targeted at middle class audiences, who typically read and wrote about the sufferings of the workers. Similarly, though working-class movements have often been faulted for their commitments to paternalism and patriarchal values, the Pudsey Committee’s poster lists a wide range of different groups of people and gives each of them reasons to be committed to short time. The poster appeals to parents (not mothers and fathers) to support factory children (not necessarily their own), workers, overseers, employers of different stripes, ministers, men, and women (as women, not as mothers). At the end, it invites the factory children themselves to come to the meeting. The Pudsey flier shows us that many in the Ten Hour Movement saw the struggle to limit the working day as an inherently political and broadly-inclusive struggle to create a better, freer world according to their own ideas about what a just political economy should look like. If shortening the working day is to become a useful strategy for organizing popular movements today, we will have attend to the strategic questions of realpolitik explored by Marx, Engels, Bernstein, Luxemburg, and contemporary realists. But we will also have to make room for the imagination—utopian or otherwise—of the Pudsey Short Time Committee.

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<sup>132</sup> “Pudsey Short Time Committee Poster” in *The Factory System, vol. 2, Birth and Growth* ed. J.T. Ward (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), 129-131. This poster is an example of what Weeks calls the antiwork imaginary.

A Splendid Failure?  
Black Reconstruction and the Tragic Realism of W.E.B. Du Bois

*To accept one's past—one's history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressure of life like clay in a season of doubt. How can the American Negro's past be used? The unprecedented price demanded—and at this embattled hour of the world's history—is the transcendence of the realities of color.<sup>1</sup>*  
-James Baldwin

“How far in a State can a recognized moral wrong safely be compromised,” asked W.E.B. Du Bois the end of his first book, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America*. He knew this was not a question that could be given a “definite answer suited to the ever-varying aspects of political life.” In the case of slavery, however, “there never was a time in the history of America when the system had slighter economic, political, and moral justification than in 1787,” and it ought to have been done away with then. Instead, slavery was allowed to grow through “carelessness and cupidity” until the Civil War, when it threatened to destroy the country that had lacked the courage to destroy it. “One cannot,” he admitted, “demand of whole nations exceptional moral foresight and heroism; but a certain hard common-sense in facing the complicated phenomena of political life must be excepted in every progressive people.” Lacking this hard common-sense, the United States “preferred promises to straightforward action,” and the result was the most destructive war in the nation’s history. So, Du Bois to put forward a simple maxim, one that combined his commitment to progress with the classically Machiavellian concept of *occasione*: “From this we may conclude that it behooves nations as well as men to do things at the very moment when they ought to be done.”<sup>2</sup>

Du Bois’s maxim reveals his interest in what might be called a progressive realpolitik. Realpolitik is not normally a word we use to describe Du Bois, who is more often thought of, in

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<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, “Down at the Cross,” *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 333.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870*, in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 196-198.

Manning Marable's terms, as a "black radical democrat" of one form or another.<sup>3</sup> With a few honorable exceptions, contemporary realists have had little to say about Du Bois, African American political thought, or with the political ideas of nonwhite thinkers in general.<sup>4</sup> In an of itself, this narrowness should lead us to doubt realism's claim to be in touch with "real politics," at least in its current form.<sup>5</sup> But, more importantly, Du Bois's maxim should lead us to take a closer look at the realist tradition, and the thinkers who form that tradition, to see if it is actually as narrow as the research interests of today's realists would suggest.

In Du Bois's case, there are both conceptual and historical reasons to examine his ideas in a realist light. He knew many important scholars in the realist tradition and had an abiding interest in some of the major figures of 19<sup>th</sup> century realpolitik. Upon graduating from Fisk, he delivered a commencement speech on Otto von Bismarck, the most famous of all realpolitik statesmen.<sup>6</sup> While a graduate student in Germany, he attended the lectures of Henrich von Treitschke, Germany's leading scholar of realpolitik and a notorious racist whom Du Bois always remembered with odd fondness.<sup>7</sup> As a young professor at Atlanta University, Du Bois met and corresponded with Max Weber, whose celebrated account of politics as a productive

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<sup>3</sup> Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Stears, *Demanding Democracy*, 145-173, discusses the Civil Rights Movement, as does Philp, *Political Conduct*, 169-172. Alexander Livingston, *Damn Great Empires! William James and the Politics of Pragmatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142-152, argues that Du Bois combined the meliorist pragmatism of William James with a healthy dose of the realism more commonly associated with Reinhold Niebuhr. Colin Koopman, "Contesting Injustice: Why Pragmatist Political Thought Needs Du Bois," *Pragmatism and Justice* Susan Dieleman, David Rondel, and Christopher Voparil eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 179-196 makes a similar argument.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the term "race realism" is often used to affirm the biological reality of racial differences and classifications (for a summary of and rebuttal to this kind of racial realism, see Lawrie Balfour, "Unthinking Racial Realism: A Future for Reparations?," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 11, no. 01 (2014): 43-56. On the other hand, Derrick Bell, "Racial Realism," *Connecticut Law Review* Vol. 24 No. 2 (Winter 1992), 363-379, draws on the American legal realist tradition to make an argument against legalistic notions of equality that resembles the position Du Bois held in the 1930s.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> On Treitschke's influence, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

conflict between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility can be read as extended reflection on the same problem Du Bois dealt with in the conclusion of *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade* twenty years earlier.<sup>8</sup>

But Du Bois should be interesting to realists for reasons that go beyond the question of his intellectual influences. Many of the concerns that drove his writing and activism-- question of conflict, power, agency, and meaning of political order—are central to realist scholarship today. As Melvin Rogers points out, “for Du Bois contestation is at the core of democracy.”<sup>9</sup> Du Bois both studied contestation and engaged in it. His “actionistic analytics,” in Colin Koopman’s words, “historied and problematized,” political agency, and, as a result, his books have become central to the study of how agency is exercised by oppressed groups.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Du Bois’s focus on agency led to him to do what many realists point towards but few actually do; he abandoned an early interest in philosophy for history and the social sciences. Inspired by William James’s “realist pragmatism” and the historical scholarship of A.B. Hart, Du Bois shifted “from the lovely but sterile land of philosophic speculation to the social sciences as the field for gathering and interpreting that body of fact which would apply to my program for the Negro.”<sup>11</sup> This is not say that he gave up on the questions of political philosophy, but he understood that posing those questions in a realist way, one that understood importance of

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<sup>8</sup> For the relationship between Du Bois and Weber, and the scholarly desire to see the former as a student of the later, see Aldon D Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), ch. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Melvin Rogers, “The People, Rhetoric, and Affect: On the Political Force of Du Bois’s ‘The Souls of Black Folk,’” *American Political Science Review* 106, no.1 (2012): 188-203.

<sup>10</sup> Koopman, “Contesting Injustice,” 190. Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1, (2003): 113–24 complains that it has “become impossible to read W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*,” and similar texts, “apart from a discussion about “agency,” which overcodes their complex discussions of human subjectivity and political organization and presses them into the background of a persistently mis-posed question: African-American slaves: agents or of their own destiny or not” (114)? In this chapter, I try to move beyond this binary approach to agency and focus on the different forms Du Bois thought agency could take and how it could be democratically organized.

<sup>11</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “A Negro Student at Harvard at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Holt, 1995), 271-286, 272.

power, agency, and *occasione* to any possible answer, meant going beyond philosophy's minimalist tool-kit.

No moment of *occasione*, however, was more important to Du Bois than Reconstruction. On the centenary of the Civil War, Du Bois wrote in his *Autobiography*, “the year of my birth was the year that the freedmen of the South were enfranchised and for the first time as a mass took part in government. Conventions with black delegates voted new constitutions all over the South; and two groups of laborers—freed slaves and poor whites—dominated the former states. It was an extraordinary experiment in democracy.”<sup>12</sup> By the time he wrote those words, Du Bois had been engaged in controversies over the meaning of Reconstruction for well over half a century. According to Craig Stutman, “from his teenage years in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, as a correspondent for T. Thomas Fortune's *New York Age* until the last days of his life in Ghana in the early 1960's, he would brood over the subject of Reconstruction with a never-ending sense of urgency.”<sup>13</sup> The possibilities seemingly opened up by the long-overdue abolition of slavery, and the brutality used to close them off, shaped the way he thought about the struggle against white supremacy at every stage of his life.

The text in which Du Bois examined the possibilities and limitations of the Reconstruction era most carefully is his 1935 masterpiece, *Black Reconstruction in America*. Though controversial when it first appeared, *Black Reconstruction* is today probably second in popularity only to *The Souls of Black Folk* among his books. Many of Du Bois's key ideas have been resurrected for service in contemporary political debates, from Angela Davis's appropriation of the concept of “abolition-democracy” as a name for her program of resistance to

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted at Craig Michael Stutman, *Reconstruction in the Mind of W.E.B. Du Bois: Myth, Memory, and the Meaning of American Democracy*, PhD. Diss, (Temple University, 2008), 5. I have drawn freely on Stutman's valuable research, though I do not share all his judgements.

<sup>13</sup> Stutman, 7.

the carceral state, to Gayatri Spivak's interest in his account of the general strike as a way of rethinking the Eurocentric biases of classical Marxism.<sup>14</sup> In the *Atlantic*, where Du Bois published his first article on the Freedmen's Bureau in 1901, prominent public intellectuals like Annette Gordon-Reed, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Adam Serwer have written about *Black Reconstruction* and what it can still teach us about race in America. Coates even invoked *Black Reconstruction* for the opening vignette and title of his most recent book, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*.<sup>15</sup> Among political theorists, a renewed interest in Du Bois's political thought and advocacy has produced a number of works that treat *Black Reconstruction* as an important theoretical text. Thanks to Adolph Reed, Lawrie Balfour, Nikhil Pal Singh, Joel Olson and others, Du Bois's work from the 1930s no longer suffers from scholarly neglect as compared to *The Souls of Black Folk* and his other writings from the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

But Reconstruction was not just a historical event for Du Bois, not simply a moment of lost opportunity. It was also an enduring political force, both a source of possibility and an impediment to progress. In his writing, reconstruction came to describe a kind of political agency situated between reform and revolution, one that built on the old republican trope of renewing a

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<sup>14</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories, 2005); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "General Strike," *Rethinking Marxism* 26, no. 1 (2014): 9–14.

<sup>15</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed, "What If Reconstruction Hadn't Failed?" *Atlantic*, (October 26, 2015), [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/what-if-reconstruction-hadnt-failed/412219/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/what-if-reconstruction-hadnt-failed/412219/); Ta-Nehisi Coates, "But This Latter Person, I Am Not Trying to Convince," *Atlantic*, (June 23, 2016), [www.theatlantic.com/notes/2016/06/but-this-latter-person-i-am-not-trying-to-convince/488408/](http://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2016/06/but-this-latter-person-i-am-not-trying-to-convince/488408/); Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), xiii–xvii; Adam Serwer, "The Nationalist's Delusion," *Atlantic*, (November 20, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 2; Adolph L. Reed, *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), chap. 2. Whereas these authors treat Du Bois's work from the 1930s quite sympathetically, the most important recent book that has been critical of Du Bois's politics, Robert Gooding-Williams's *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, focuses on Du Bois's early work, particularly *Souls*.

polity by returning it to its foundational truths. But where the old idea of refounding was often backward-looking, reflecting classical republicanism's understanding of time as cyclical and corrosive, reconstruction held out the promise of correcting foundational injustices of the sort that Du Bois's highlighted in *Suppression*. Reconstruction meant organizing a new political order when the old one had failed.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the political order that emerged from Reconstruction's failure—the redemption of white supremacy and the rise of Jim Crow—reconstructed the very injustices it was meant to overcome. What's more, the popular understanding of Reconstruction that was dominant in the United States for most of Du Bois's life portrayed it as a carnival of racial misrule, an inversion of the natural order of society identical to what royalist John Taylor lambasted in his 1647 broadside *The World Turned Upside Down*. As Du Bois knew, this myth of Reconstruction as disorder, or as a corrupt order, was as much an obstacle to racial justice as the coercive institutions of the Jim Crow south. In this sense, the battle to control the meaning and memory of Reconstruction was an essential part of the larger reconstruction of American democracy that was his life's work.

In this chapter, I describe the ways Du Bois used Reconstruction—from the publication of *Souls* in 1903 to that of *Dusk of Dawn* in 1940—to think and rethink his ideas about the organizational form and programmatic content of black politics.<sup>18</sup> Over the course of these years,

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<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the Civil War, the term 'reconstruction' typically meant the reconstruction of the antebellum United States on terms that would protect slavery and southern state's rights, so Confederate authors wrote sympathetically about it. By the end of the war, and particularly after the Emancipation Proclamation, southern opposition to reconstruction hardened as it became clear that it was not the national union that would be reconstructed, but the states of the defeated Confederacy. Thus, the semantics of reconstruction shifted from national reunion to sectional reorganization. Thanks to David Bateman for help here.

<sup>18</sup> I focus on *Souls*, "Reconstruction and its Benefits," *The Gift of Black Folk*, and *Black Reconstruction*. As Stutman shows, these are far from the only places Du Bois wrote about Reconstruction. I have two main reasons for focusing on the texts I have chosen. First, in a 1931 letter to Edwin Embree, Du Bois recommended the first three as his most important contributions while he worked on *Black Reconstruction* (see Stutman, 289). Second, these texts allow me to take stock of how Du Bois's approach to Reconstruction changed in relation to his political activities and the major events of his life.

his reflections on Reconstruction returned again and again to a set of fundamental problems. How could African Americans build durable political institutions out of the fragmented and loosely-organized forms of collective agency available to them after centuries of slavery and white supremacy? What should the relationship be between those institutions, white society, and the American state? And what role can African Americans play—what can they expect or hope for—as an oppressed minority in a supposedly democratic country? Du Bois’s answer to these questions moved from an emphasis on internal racial uplift and external political agitation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to a strategic embrace of economic segregation in order to create a “group economy” made up of African American consumers’ cooperatives in the 1930s.<sup>19</sup> This shift in his thinking was driven by his growing appreciation of possibilities for political agency exercised outside the official realm of state institutions and electoral politics, particularly in decentralized forms of black economic power that could use segregation as a weapon against white capitalism. In other words, just as Marx saw the role of the capitalist mode of production in organizing and empowering the very workers it exploited, Du Bois came to see how segregation had to be used as tool to organize its own undoing. His changing understanding of the role of slaves and freedmen in the Civil War and Reconstruction both informed and was informed by this realization.

The arc from *Souls* to *Black Reconstruction* and *Dusk of Dawn* also reveals Du Bois’s increasingly tragic vision of American democracy and the form that black politics must take in it. It is almost a cliché to describe Du Bois as a tragic thinker, but this is often a label scholars affix

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<sup>19</sup> All attempts to strictly periodize Du Bois’s thought come to grief on the sheer quantity of his writing and the restlessness of his intellect, his own retrospective efforts included. Du Bois often put forward ideas in articles that he would not elaborate on until years later, and his ideas would move forward on different subjects at different times. My schematic presentation of his political activities in relation to his views on Reconstruction is intended as a useful heuristic for realists interested in how history can be used to think about political organizing. I do not mean it to apply to all aspects or ways of reading his work.

to him rather than a category they derive from his writing or interpret according to his usage.<sup>20</sup> In *Black Reconstruction*, however, the language of tragedy is extremely prominent, perhaps surprising so, given that the racist narrative of Reconstruction it was challenged was frequently cast in tragic terms. Du Bois's insistence on reclaiming not just the history of Reconstruction, but specifically the tragedy of Reconstruction, is perhaps his most important point of contact with contemporary realist scholarship, which often is said to emerge from a tragic vision of politics.<sup>21</sup> "Tragedy," notes Alison McQueen, "emphasizes the ease with which virtuous actions can produce terrible consequences, insists on the limits to effective political action, and warns of the impossibility of final and enduring political settlements."<sup>22</sup> It is not always clear, however, what realists think follows from this. How does a recognition of the tragic shape our approach to agency, or order, or to other things that realists care about? After all, tragedy has often been seen as a conservative discourse, one that either opposes efforts radical political change or calls on us to chasten our ideals and aspirations for the world in which we want to live. For Du Bois, this conservative interpretation of tragedy misses its real political value.<sup>23</sup> The point of tragedy is not

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<sup>20</sup> For an influential and characteristically thoughtful account of Du Bois as a tragic thinker, see David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams, "The Strange Meaning of Being Black: Du Bois's American Tragedy," Introduction to W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 1–30. More recently, see Paul E. Kirkland, "Sorrow Songs and Self-Knowledge: The Politics of Recognition and Tragedy in W. E. B. Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*," *American Political Thought* 4, no. 3 (June 2015): 412–37. For an example of enduring importance of tragedy in thinking about race in America, see the essays in "Ferguson and the Tragic Presence of the Past," *Theory and Event*, Supplement, 17.3 (October 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) is the most sophisticated account of realism as a "tragic vision" in international relations.

<sup>22</sup> McQueen, *Political Realism*, 13–14. See also Philp, *Political Conduct*, 77–96; and Raymond Geuss, "Thucydides, Nietzsche, and Williams," *Outside Ethics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 219–233. For most realists, Weber's "Politics as a Vocation," is the canonical text for thinking through the tragic nature of political action. I discuss it at greater length in chapter four.

<sup>23</sup> Tragedy is associated with what Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 02 (May 2012): 455–70, refers to "moderating realism," which "works through a broadly negative ethical horizon, orienting itself toward the prevention of civil breakdown, violence, cruelty, and domination over and against positive attempts to transform or perfect citizens and polities" (219). Mantena's essay, which is probably the most influential piece of realist scholarship on a nonwhite thinker, argues that Gandhi accepts the force of the moderating position, but not its purely negative limits. I think the same thing can be said of Du Bois.

to alter our ideals but to remind us of the importance of the how. An awareness of the tragic, Du Bois believed, is indispensable for learning to think strategically about politics.

Thus, rather than providing a final and definitive answer to the question of how realism relates to the tragic—as if such a thing were possible—Du Bois presents us with highly detailed programs for how radical political organizing can respond to tragic situations and the choices they force. By emphasizing the tragedy of Reconstruction, he tried to show his readers how they could learn from past efforts at social transformation. When he advocated for parallel institutions that took segregation as a given, even on purely strategic terms, Du Bois was accused of abandoning his life-long commitment to integration as the *sine qua non* of racial equality.<sup>24</sup> Although his position was never as simple as this characterization would suggest, it is nevertheless true that Du Bois's turn away from a political strategy of pursuing integration mirrored a change in how he viewed the history of African American political struggles from Reconstruction to his own day. Seen against this changing historical vision, the group economy served a dual role as both a kind of economic marronage that weakened capitalism and white supremacy in America, as well as a positive, institution-building method for developing new forms of power and collective identity among African Americans. But most of all, the group economy was meant to provide African Americans with long-term safety and security as a minority group living in a county where the majority still lacked the “hard common-sense” to see that democracy and white supremacy were incompatible. The group economy challenged racism while also recognizing the tragic limitations placed on black politics by the failure of

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<sup>24</sup> For a characteristic example, see Kelly Miller, “The Renunciation of Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, Part II,” (January 4, 1938). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Reconstruction. It was Du Bois's plan for organizing after the *occasione*, for moving forward after the moment when things that ought to have been done were left unfinished.

### Reconstruction and the Problem of Black Politics in Early Du Bois

Du Bois's 1901 *Atlantic Monthly* article, originally titled "The Freedman's Bureau," is better known today as "Of the Dawn of Freedom," the second chapter of *The Souls of Black Folks*. It was originally published as part of a ten-article series on Reconstruction that also included contributions from Woodrow Wilson and William Archibald Dunning, two of the countries most distinguished historians.<sup>25</sup> In that context, Du Bois's defense of Reconstruction stood out as a rebuke to the criticisms leveled against it in the other nine articles, all of which were written by white men. In *Souls*, however, it serves an additional purpose, as the opening salvo in his attack on the political program of Booker T. Washington. In many ways, Washington's political statements resemble those of contemporary realists.<sup>26</sup> He argued that African Americans in the South should temporarily abandon the goal of political equality to focus on economic uplift. By moderating their pursuit of rights and justice, they could attain the more fundamental goods of peace and order between the races. However, his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address, which Du Bois famously called as the Atlanta Compromise, marked the beginning of a period in which not only disenfranchisement and segregation, but also lynching, dramatically increased throughout the South. For Du Bois, this was not a coincidence, and the realism of his early in his career was formed in explicit opposition to Washington's.

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<sup>25</sup> On the articles in this issue, see Stutman, 69-93.

<sup>26</sup> My characterization of Washington as a realist is indebted to Desmond Jagmohan, "Making Bricks Without Straw: Booker T. Washington and the Politics of the Disenfranchised," PhD diss. (Cornell University, 2015), though I do not think he would agree with how I use it.

In the Atlanta Compromise speech, Washington took a dim view of the Reconstruction era. As the freedmen were “ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill.”<sup>27</sup> In *Up from Slavery*, which was published in 1901, Washington devoted an entire chapter to the errors of Reconstruction, one in which he largely upheld the views of the white historians who argued against Du Bois. “It seemed to me,” he wrote “that the ignorance of my race was being used as a tool with which to help white men into office, and that there was an element in the North which wanted to punish the Southern white men by forcing the Negro into positions over the heads of the Southern whites. I felt that the Negro would be the one to suffer for this in the end.”<sup>28</sup> The need to rebut Washington, and the historical consensus he appealed to, determined how Du Bois approached Reconstruction at this phase of his career. By putting forward his own interpretation, he could critique Washington’s leadership and advance his own plan for organizing African Americans in the struggle against white supremacy.

*Souls* spends little time on life during slavery, a subject that would only have reminded readers of Washington’s personal experience of slavery and the authority he drew from it. Instead, by anchoring his story of the meaning of life behind the veil in the Civil War, Du Bois figured Reconstruction as a founding moment for black politics and the source of the political and educational program for which he argued throughout the book. However, “Of the Dawn of Freedom” is not a general survey of Reconstruction or even a specific history of the role slaves

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<sup>27</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (Auckland, N.Z.: Floating Press, 2009), 233-4. Du Bois’s decision to call the chapter “Of the Dawn of Freedom” also appears to have been a swipe at Washington, who declared that the Atlanta Exposition “will do more to cement the friendship of the two races than any occurrence since the dawn of our freedom” (233). By showing what made that dawn possible, Du Bois is also showing how Washington’s Atlanta Compromise betrayed its spirit.

<sup>28</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 101.

and freedmen played in the period. Instead, “this tale of the dawn of Freedom is an account of that government of men called the Freedmen’s Bureau,” Du Bois wrote, “one of the most singular and interesting of the attempts made by a great nation to grapple with the vast problems of race and social condition.”<sup>29</sup> The article concentrated on the years from 1861 to 1872, which was the lifespan of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and dealt only briefly with the last six years of Reconstruction, when a few states actually had black-majority legislatures. By focusing on the Freedmen’s Bureau, Du Bois seems to have implicitly agreed with other Reconstruction historians that the freedmen themselves were not the main political protagonists of the period. Thus, the overall historical trajectory that Du Bois traced from emancipation to his present day was largely set by the actions of a white-led political institution, not the strivings of the freedmen themselves.

Moreover, when “Of the Dawn of Freedom” does discuss the actions of slaves and freedmen, it does so in naturalistic terms, rendering them more as a force of nature than as deliberate or conscious political agents. Thirty years later, Du Bois would see the movement of slaves to the Union army as a something much more intentional and purposive, but here he emphasizes the pathetic condition of the “steady stream” of human misery as “fugitive slaves appeared within their lines,” particularly after the Emancipation Proclamation, when “the stream of fugitives swelled to a flood.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, he describes the slaves who accompanied Sherman on his march to the sea as a “dark cloud that clung like remorse on the rear of those swift columns, swelling at times to half their size, almost engulfing and choking them. In vain were they ordered back, in vain were bridges hewn from beneath their feet; on the trudged and writhed

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<sup>29</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Writings*, 373.

<sup>30</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 373-4.

and surged, until they rolled into Savannah, a starved and naked horde of tens of thousands.”<sup>31</sup> Rather like Engels’s early descriptions of the English factory workers, Du Bois focuses on images of suffering and the struggle to survive dehumanizing conditions, much as many white observers did at the time (see figure 3.1). This is not to say that Du Bois denied their agency, only that he saw the agency of fugitive slaves primarily in terms of their ability to make themselves a problem to which the government had to organize a response.



Figure 3.1: *Stampede of slaves from Hampton to Fortress Monroe*, *Harper's Weekly*, v. 5, no. 242 (1861 August 17), p. 52 c.o. Library of Congress. Though Du Bois does not use the dehumanizing term “stampede,” which was often applied to the movement of fugitive slaves during the war, his descriptions in *Souls* are quite similar to the image shown here.

The most important response the freedmen produced was the creation of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Du Bois argued that the Bureau was far more than an administrative agency. Instead,

<sup>31</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 377.

“the Freedmen’s Bureau became a full-fledged government of men. It made laws, executed them and interpreted them; it laid and collected taxes, defined and punished crime, maintained and used military force, and dictated such measures as it thought necessary and proper for the accomplishment of its ends.”<sup>32</sup> At the heart of Reconstruction was the exercise of sovereign power by the Bureau. It took care of the freedmen and organized their relief, starting from “a heterogeneous and confused but already existing system of relief and control” that Du Bois describes as a “curious mess” of “little despotisms, communistic experiments, slavery, peonage, business speculations, organized charity, almsgiving—all reeling on under the guise of helping the freedmen.”<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Bureau had to create new social and political order after the Emancipation Proclamation and the Fourteenth Amendment abolished slavery, which had previously been the Confederacy’s foundational institution. Du Bois argued that both of these goals could have been accomplished had there been “a permanent Freedmen’s Bureau, with a national system of Negro schools; a carefully supervised employment and labor office; a system of impartial protection before the regular courts; and such institutions for social betterment as savings-banks, land and building associations, and social settlements.”<sup>34</sup> Note that Du Bois describes these as institutions created by the state for the social betterment of the freedmen, not for their political or economic power and not under their control. In any case, the actual Freedmen’s Bureau was conceived as a temporary expedient and never had the financial or political support it needed to carry out either of its main tasks, let alone both.

Du Bois identified the legacies of the Bureau as the guiding threads in the subsequent history of black politics. Most importantly, he held that “the greatest success of the Freedmen’s

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<sup>32</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 382.

<sup>33</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 379-80.

<sup>34</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 390.

Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negroes, and the idea of free elementary education among all classes in the South.”<sup>35</sup> The chapter immediately after “Of the Dawn of Freedom” in *Souls* is “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” his famous attack on Washington’s educational program, and the sequence of the chapters makes it clear that Du Bois viewed his program as the rightful heir to the work of the Freedmen’s Bureau. The second of the Bureau’s legacies also pertains to his critique of Washington’s program, namely the suffrage guarantees of the Fifteenth Amendment. According to Washington, “it would have been wiser if some plan could have been put in operation which would have made the possession of a certain amount of education or property, or both, a test for the exercise of the franchise, and a way provided by which this test should be made to apply honestly and squarely to both the white and black races”<sup>36</sup> Du Bois partially agreed, holding that universal manhood suffrage was an inferior replacement for his preferred program of a permanent Freedmen’s Bureau backed up by a limited suffrage. “Between full and restricted negro suffrage,” he admitted, “every sensible man, black and white, would easily have chosen the latter.”<sup>37</sup> However, without the Freedman’s Bureau to act as a reforming quasi-state, the freedmen needed the ballot to compel the state’s protection through electoral means. This was not how events worked out, but Du Bois did not examine or try to defend the subsequent record of African American voters and legislators in *Souls*. Instead, he worked to rehabilitate the reputation of the Freedmen’s Bureau as a statist and white-led agent for black emancipation. This led him to describe the project of black politics, “the heavy heritage of this generation,” as that of finding a way to convince the US government to complete “the large legacy of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the work it did not do because it could not.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 385.

<sup>36</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 101.

<sup>37</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 389.

<sup>38</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 391.

But how? By the time he wrote about his 1910 article, “Reconstruction and its Benefits,” Du Bois had become one of the most prominent African Americans in the country, founding first the Niagara movement in 1905 and then the NAACP in 1909. He also wrote more extensively on African American resistance to slavery prior to Civil War, most importantly in his 1909 biography of John Brown.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, his views in 1910 showed a growing awareness in the possibilities of political agency being exercised directly by blacks, as well as deeper understanding of the strategies that could force federal action against segregation. This is reflected in his work on Reconstruction, as well. Although the Freedmen’s Bureau still played the leading role in trying to reconstruct the Confederacy, it was no longer the sole creative force behind other Reconstruction-era institutions. “Three agencies undertook the solution of this problem at first and their influence is apt to be forgotten,” he wrote. “Without them the problems of Reconstruction would have been far graver than they were. These agencies were: (a) the negro church, (b) the negro school, and (c) the Freedmen’s Bureau.”<sup>40</sup> Along with his recognition of the importance of black churches as “the most powerful negro institutions in the world” and “the first institution fully controlled by black men in America,” Du Bois now interpreted the demand for education as something that came from the freedmen themselves. “The movement started with the negroes themselves,” he wrote, “and they continued to form the dynamic force behind it.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> On *John Brown*, see Alexander Livingston, “The Cost of Liberty: Sacrifice and Survival in Du Bois’s *John Brown*,” *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois* Nick Bromell ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 207-241 and Balfour, *Democracy’s Reconstruction*, 47-70. Du Bois connects his work on antebellum black political agency to the Civil War itself in William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, “The Economics of Negro Emancipation in the United States,” *The Sociological Review* 4, no. 4 (1911): 303–313, but he does not extend this argument into Reconstruction. However, both in its views on agency and on the importance of economic foundations to political struggle, this piece, which comes out only a year after “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” anticipates many later texts and is an example of the messiness of periodizing Du Bois.

<sup>40</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” *American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (July 1910): 781-799. I follow the original text in not capitalizing “negro,” though Du Bois strenuously objected to this. “Reconstruction

<sup>41</sup> Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” 782.

Du Bois claimed that “negro churches and schools stood as conservative educative forces” in the unstable world of Reconstruction.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the Freedmen’s Bureau, they were not sources of wider social transformation and political action so much as centers for internal uplift that sought to prepare the freedmen for the role they would have to play in the political life of the nation. He still wished that the Bureau had been made permanent, but now he mounted a defense of the conduct of black voters and officeholders as acting mostly honorably based on the preparation they had been given by the churches and schools. “The theory of democratic government,” he argued, “is not that the will of the people is always right, but rather that normal human beings of average intelligence will, if given a chance, learn the right and best course by bitter experience.”<sup>43</sup> When judged by this standard, “the negro governments in the South accomplished much positive good.” Specifically, “we may recognize three things which negro rule gave to the South: 1. Democratic Government. 2. Free public schools. 3. New social legislation.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Du Bois defended the contribution of black-led institutions, like schools and churches, by way of the legislative accomplishments of black politicians. This strategy reveals both the importance Du Bois attached to leadership in thinking about political agency and his continued emphasis on the state as the central agent in modern politics.

Another notable consequence of Du Bois’s focus on the state was his careful examination of the state constitutions created during Reconstruction. He was “surprised at the comparatively small amount of change in law and government which the overthrown of negro rule brought about,” noting that the Reconstruction constitution of South Carolina, the state where freedmen had the most legislative power, remained in force for twenty-seven years and was revised

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<sup>42</sup> Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” 782.

<sup>43</sup> Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” 792-3.

<sup>44</sup> Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” 795.

primarily to prevent blacks from voting.<sup>45</sup> By focusing on the durability of state constitutions and lesser forms of legislation passed during Reconstruction, Du Bois demonstrated that even the governments that overthrew them found the constitutional framework created by the freedmen and their allies to be acceptable on matters other than white supremacy. As Du Bois put it at the end of his paper, “practically the whole new growth of the South has been accomplished under laws which black men helped to frame thirty years ago. I know of no greater compliment to negro suffrage.”<sup>46</sup>

Du Bois’s use of state constitutions to make this argument had a surprising source in the work of William Archibald Dunning, professor of political science and history at Columbia University and mentor to the generation of Reconstruction historians often referred to as the Dunning School. Dunning was on the panel where Du Bois presented “Reconstruction and Its Benefits” at the 1909 meeting of the American Historical Association, and it is quite possible that this argument was directed specifically to him. Dunning studied Reconstruction in order to heal the still-sharp divisions between North and South, writing consensus-building histories that tried to acknowledge the legitimate points raised by northern and southern partisan alike.<sup>47</sup> The underlying problem of Reconstruction, Dunning argued in “The Undoing of Reconstruction,” his article from the 1901 *Atlantic Monthly* series, was that of creating in the southern states “a new political people” after the Civil War, and the central question of whether the freedmen would be included in that people.<sup>48</sup> He admired the political skill shown by the North in carrying out the

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<sup>45</sup> Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” 795.

<sup>46</sup> Du Bois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” 799.

<sup>47</sup> On the Dunning School, see A. A. Taylor, “Historians of the Reconstruction,” *Journal of Negro History* 23, no. 1 (January 1938): 16–34; and John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013). The wider impulse toward reconciliation to which Dunning’s work belonged is the subject of David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> William A. Dunning, “The Undoing of Reconstruction,” in *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 354. This was a perceptive argument, if not a novel one. At the end of the war, E. P.

work of Reconstruction, and he defended the conduct of military governors against southern critics of martial law. However, Dunning deplored the ends of Reconstruction as much as he commended the means, and the price of his fair-mindedness on sectionalism was an utter disregard for the freedmen and a blank dismissal of their right to be part of the political people. “The negroes exercised an influence in political affairs out of all relation to their intelligence or property,” he lamented, adding that “the ultimate root of the trouble in the South had been, not the institution of slavery, but the coexistence in one society of two races so distinct in characters as to render coalescence impossible.”<sup>49</sup> Du Bois’s direct challenge to this argument in “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” was built on his willingness to reinterpret arguments and data taken from Dunning and his students, something he would continue to do even in *Black Reconstruction*—its celebrated critique of the Dunning School in “The Propaganda of History” notwithstanding.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Du Bois was simply tailoring his argument to a Dunning-ite audience when he depicted the state as the primary political actor in Reconstruction. Abstracting a bit from both “Of the Dawn of Freedom” and “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” we can see that these were some of the central assumptions of Du Bois’s early model of black political organizing. Put schematically, the strategy for overcoming white supremacy was for blacks to force the state, primarily the federal government, to resume the

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Whipple, “Reconstruction and Negro Suffrage,” *The Atlantic*, (August 1, 1865), argued that as a result of the Confederate rebellion, “the people are an unorganized mass, to be reorganized under the lead of the Federal government; and of this mass of people—literally, in this case, ‘the masses’—the free blacks are as much a part as the free whites.” Whipple’s view, in which the Southern states were no different than the unorganized territories of the West, horrified Dunning, both because of his racism and because, as a president of the American Political Science Association and author of an important three-volume history of political thought, he could clearly see how government having the power to constitute the people inverted the typical theory of constitutional government, in which the people come together to constitute it. Only by keeping “the people” in something like their antebellum form could this tyrannical inversion be avoided.

<sup>49</sup> Dunning, “The Undoing of Reconstruction,” 384.

work of the Freedmen's Bureau. The ballot was essential to making the condition of black people in the United States a problem to which the government must respond, but because most blacks were disenfranchised, they would also have to rely on other means. Du Bois looked to some of the same organized pressure tactics that had interested Marx decades earlier, though he preferred the term 'agitation' to pressure.<sup>50</sup> In the inaugural issue of the *Crisis*, Du Bois said, "agitation is a necessary evil to tell of the ills of the Suffering. Without it many a nation has been lulled to false security and preened itself with virtues it did not possess."<sup>51</sup> Rather than reproducing the formless and undirected mass activity of fugitive slaves during the Civil War, leaders from the dominant black institutions (primarily schools and churches, but eventually including the NAACP) had to channel popular activity into campaigns of information, agitation, and, when necessary, protest. While the leadership worked externally to spur the state to action, it also worked internally upon the black masses by using their educative institutions to make the masses ready for citizenship. The problem of black politics was therefore one of finding a way for African Americans to influence and, eventually, be incorporated into a state that refused to acknowledge them. This diagnosis was presented as an extension of the problem of Reconstruction, which Du Bois depicted as an admittedly imperfect moment of foundation, but one to which black politics, and black political leaders, needed to stay faithful if they wanted to establish racial equality.

### World War I, the Great Migration, and the Changing Idea of Reconstruction

Following the widespread destruction and social dislocation of the First World War, governments and intellectuals embraced the term 'reconstruction' as a way of talking about how

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<sup>50</sup> On the importance of agitation to Du Bois in this period, see Livingston, "The Cost of Liberty," 214.

<sup>51</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Agitation," *Crisis*, November 1910, *Writings*, 1132.

to respond to the war's shattering changes. According to historian Daniel T. Rodgers, "from its origins in France in discussions of the physical reconstruction of the war devastated northeast, it soon swelled into a general term for postwar planning," particularly for Progressives who wanted "to secure for the peace the collectivist spirit and institutions of the war."<sup>52</sup> Du Bois was actively involved in conversations about the meaning and scope of reconstruction in the postwar years, and it is hardly surprising that they reshaped the way he thought about the Civil War and Reconstruction. In his 1924 book, *The Gift of Black Folk*, we can see Du Bois attempting to assimilate these changes into his existing ideas. What emerges from this period is less a fully articulated model of black politics and more a portrait of a mind in transition, being pulled in new directions toward ideas that would not be fully worked out until *Black Reconstruction* was finished a decade later.

Far and away the most important influence on Du Bois's ideas in this period was the experience of the war itself. Du Bois supported US involvement in war, which he saw largely as a product of European imperial competition in Africa, and he devoted himself to chronicling the role African Americans played in the war effort. Of particular importance was the question of whether the US military would exclude blacks from higher levels of service entirely or create

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 290. One possible transatlantic connection between Reconstruction after the Civil War and post-World War I Reconstruction that Rodgers does not explore is the career of French prime minister Georges Clemenceau, who covered Reconstruction as a journalist while exiled from France in the late 1860s. Clemenceau wrote favorably on the efforts of Radical Republican leaders like Stevens and Sumner to bring the South to heel, and his articles were republished in the United States in book form shortly before his death in 1929: see Georges Clemenceau, *American Reconstruction 1865-1870* trans: Margaret Mac Veagh (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969). Unsurprisingly, he and Wilson clashed at Versailles over the same questions that divided them about American reconstruction: what the postwar order should be and how to strike the balance between punishment for German aggression and the humiliation of the vanquished side. See Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York: Penguin, 2014) and Samuel L. Schaffer, "'A Bitter Memory Upon Which Terms of Peace Would Rest: Woodrow Wilson, the Reconstruction of the South, and the Reconstruction of Europe,'" Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker eds. *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's Most Turbulent Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 203-224. Du Bois draws on Clemenceau's book throughout *Black Reconstruction*.

segregated facilities, like a training camp for black officers in Des Moines and a military hospital for black soldiers in Tuskegee. Though it was highly controversial to do so, the NAACP supported these segregated institutions as the best way to provide fair treatment to African American soldiers. In the 1930s, Du Bois referred to this decision constantly when he was accused of betraying his previous ideals by advocating for economic separatism. At the time, however, he was far from sure that it was the right thing to do. “You cannot build up a logical scheme of a self-sufficing, separate Negro American inside America or a Negro world with no close relations to the white world,” he argued in a 1919 *Crisis* article. At the same time, “unless we had welcomed the segregation of Fort Des Moines, we would have had no officers in the National Army.” Du Bois offered no solution to this dilemma. Instead he called for “thought and forbearance” because “not every builder of racial co-operation and solidarity is a ‘Jim Crow’ advocate,” and “not every Negro who fights prejudice and segregation is ashamed of his race.”<sup>53</sup>

This was also the period in which Du Bois began to examine cooperative economic institutions more carefully. Du Bois had been writing about the idea of an African American “group economy” since his 1907 Atlanta University study, *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans*, but his early writing on cooperation focused on farmers, tradesmen, and small for-profit businesses.<sup>54</sup> Starting in 1918, he began studying and writing about cooperatively-owned organizations in the *Crisis* and corresponding with experts on the Rochdale Principles, a framework for running co-ops created in the nineteenth century by the Rochdale Society of

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<sup>53</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Jim Crow,” *Crisis*, January 1919, *Writings*, 1177–78.

<sup>54</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Economic Co-Operation among Negro Americans* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1907). See also the discussion of rural agricultural cooperatives in W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Economic Future of the Negro,” *Publications of the American Economic Association*, 3rd Series, 7, no. 1 (1906): 219-42, neither of which rely on the idea of collective ownership or cooperative management.

Equitable Pioneers in England.<sup>55</sup> In “Reconstruction,” a *Crisis* article from 1919, Du Bois placed co-ops in a larger program for black politics. Though he continued to insist on the importance of fighting segregation in educational institutions, he argued that the most autonomous black institutions, the churches, should engage in “character building through economic co-operation.” The black church “can easily begin co-operative buying of coal, bread, and meat” to “extend its economic functions” and “organize the Negro laborer so that his entire wage will not go in rent and supporting [white] storekeepers who despise and cheat him.”<sup>56</sup> A year later, he wrote another article arguing that cooperatives were the only way blacks could compete against white businesses, though he also criticized businessmen who embraced the label of cooperative without its substance. “Don’t be afraid,” he implored his readers. “Try the whole co operative program. Write us.”<sup>57</sup>

Du Bois’s interest in cooperative economics for blacks was driven by his disillusionment with the white working class for its persistent racism. In “The Class Struggle,” he admitted, “theoretically we are a part of the world proletariat in the sense that we are mainly an exploited class of cheap laborers; but practically we are not part of the white proletariat and are not recognized by that proletariat to any great extent. We are the victims of their physical

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<sup>55</sup> On Rochdale, see Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 206-7. On the history of African American cooperatives, and the difference between Du Bois’s early and later uses of the term, see Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Reconstruction,” *Crisis*, July 1919, 130–31.

<sup>57</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Cooperation,” *Crisis*, February 1920, 171–72. Marx had also been interested in cooperatives. In the IWA Inaugural Address, he called them “greater victory of the political economy of labor over the political economy of property” than even the Ten Hour Act. “By deed instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labor need not be monopolized as a means of dominion over, and of extortion against, the laboring man himself; and that, like slave labor, like serf labor, hired labor is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear before associated labor plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind, and a joyous heart.” By the time *Capital* was published, however, his views had started to sour. At the end of “The Working Day,” he wrote that cooperatives were “already being used as a cloak for reactionary swindles” (412).

oppression, social ostracism, economic exclusion and personal hatred.”<sup>58</sup> Demobilization at the end of World War I produced a new bout of racial violence in American cities, which Du Bois later called “the worst experience of mob law and race hate the United States had seen since Reconstruction.”<sup>59</sup> He attributed this violence to “the competition of emigrating Negro workers, pouring into Northern industry out of the South and leaving Southern plantations with a shortage of their customary cheap labor,” and “the resentment of American soldiers, especially those from the South, at the recognition and kudos which Negroes received in the World War.”<sup>60</sup> Though Du Bois had been socialist for over a decade, the violence of the white working class and the segregation of American labor unions made him doubt that an interracial proletarian politics would be possible in the foreseeable future.<sup>61</sup>

One of the driving forces behind postwar racial conflict was the Great Migration, which began during World War I when wartime industries in the North were experiencing severe labor shortages. The passage of the Immigration Act of 1917 meant that there were not enough new immigrants entering the United States to provide an adequate labor supply. Southern blacks took the opportunity to flee Jim Crow in search of higher wages and greater freedom in northern and western cities, often in spite of restrictions on migration and violent efforts by southern whites to keep them in their place. Isabel Wilkerson describes the migrants of World War I as “the first volley of a leaderless revolution” that “crept along so many thousands of currents over so long a stretch of time as to be difficult for the press truly to capture while it was under way.”<sup>62</sup> Many

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<sup>58</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Class Struggle,” *Crisis*, June 1921, *Reader* 555.

<sup>59</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 734.

<sup>60</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 747.

<sup>61</sup> This argument is made most forcefully in W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro and Radical Thought,” *Crisis*, July 1921, *Reader*, 531–37.

<sup>62</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*. (New York: Random House, 2010), 42, 9. The most comprehensive scholarly treatment of the Great Migration is James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

black leaders, including Booker T. Washington, actively opposed the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North, but their warnings were easily ignored by people hoping for a better life. Du Bois, on the other hand, became an enthusiastic supporter of the Great Migration early on, providing detailed documentation of how many people were leaving and what the general migratory patterns were in a 1917 issue of the *Crisis*. In 1920, he wrote, “the migration of Negroes from South to North continues and ought to continue.”<sup>63</sup>

Some observers, like Howard University economist Abram Harris, tended to downplay the political importance of the migration. “The underlying causes are economic and specifically those connected with the growth of large-scale machine production,” he wrote. “For that reason the movement must not be considered as exclusively racial.”<sup>64</sup> Given that more whites left the south during this era than blacks, Harris was correct that the Great Migration was not “exclusively racial,” but that was a straw man. No one denied the economic character of migration, but Du Bois also insisted that it was a rebellion against the racial order of the Jim Crow South and its most notorious practice, lynching (see fig. 3.1). Although he sometimes expressed anxiety at the disorderly character of mass migration and the immorality of urban life, Du Bois saw that migration had benefits that were both economic and political.<sup>65</sup> A 1925 letter of his specifically mentions “better schools...the right to vote...better wages and more diversified work...better treatment by the police and at the hands of the court [and] better treatment of the

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<sup>63</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Migration of the Negroes,” *Crisis*, June 1917, 63–66; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Brothers, Come North,” *Crisis*, January 1920, *Reader*, 529.

<sup>64</sup> Abram Harris, “Negro Migration to the North,” *Current History*, vol. 20 is. 6 (September 1924), 921–5.

<sup>65</sup> For a more cautious view of the Great Migration, see W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Hosts of Black Labor,” *The Nation* (May 9, 1923). It is important to be aware of when Du Bois was writing for a black audience and when he was writing, as in *The Nation*, for a white one. In this case, Du Bois did not want whites to think that migration would solve the race problem for them. As he insisted, “the South must reform its attitude toward the Negro. The North must reform its attitude toward common labor. The unions must give up monopoly and aristocracy as methods of social uplift. The Negro must develop democracy within as well as without the race.”

Negroes who remained behind because of the fear of further migration.”<sup>66</sup> Of all the ideas and events that shaped Du Bois’s thought in this period, the influence of the Great Migration has been least appreciated, but it was crucial in showing him a form of mass political action that exceeded the confines of institutional politics.

In fact, Du Bois had been studying migration since well before the war. He had written about the effects of migration on Northern black communities in *The Philadelphia Negro*, and migration from the country to the city was an important theme in *Souls*.<sup>67</sup> Thus, by the time the Great Migration was underway, he already given thought to how migration might be organized and used as a self-conscious political tool, as shown in a 1923 memorandum he wrote to Franz Hugo Krebs.<sup>68</sup> Krebs had written to Du Bois to argue that southern blacks should migrate in response to lynchings. Du Bois pointed out that “there is already a great deal of such migration but it is done quietly and is unknown to most people North and South.” Migration could not be done in a “quick wholesale” fashion because African Americans lacked sufficient resources to move on their own or to support that many new migrants once they arrived, and a highly visible campaign for migration would only attract more violence and repression from white southerners. Du Bois suggested, however, that a press campaign threatening organized migrations after lynchings could be valuable, provided enough funds were raised for this not to be an idle threat. That Du Bois did not pursue this plan suggest that he saw the logistical problems involved as difficult, but not insurmountable if Northern whites like Krebs put real money behind it. This did not happen either, and probably Du Bois did not think it would. Nevertheless, it shows us that he was seriously interested how migration created new possibilities for mass politics and shifted the

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<sup>66</sup> Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Dr. T. S. Jones, (May 13, 1926). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

<sup>67</sup> See chapter eight of *Souls*, “Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece.” Du Bois, “The Economic Future of the Negro,” also discusses the history of internal migration by African Americans.

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum to Mr. Krebs, (May 29, 1923). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

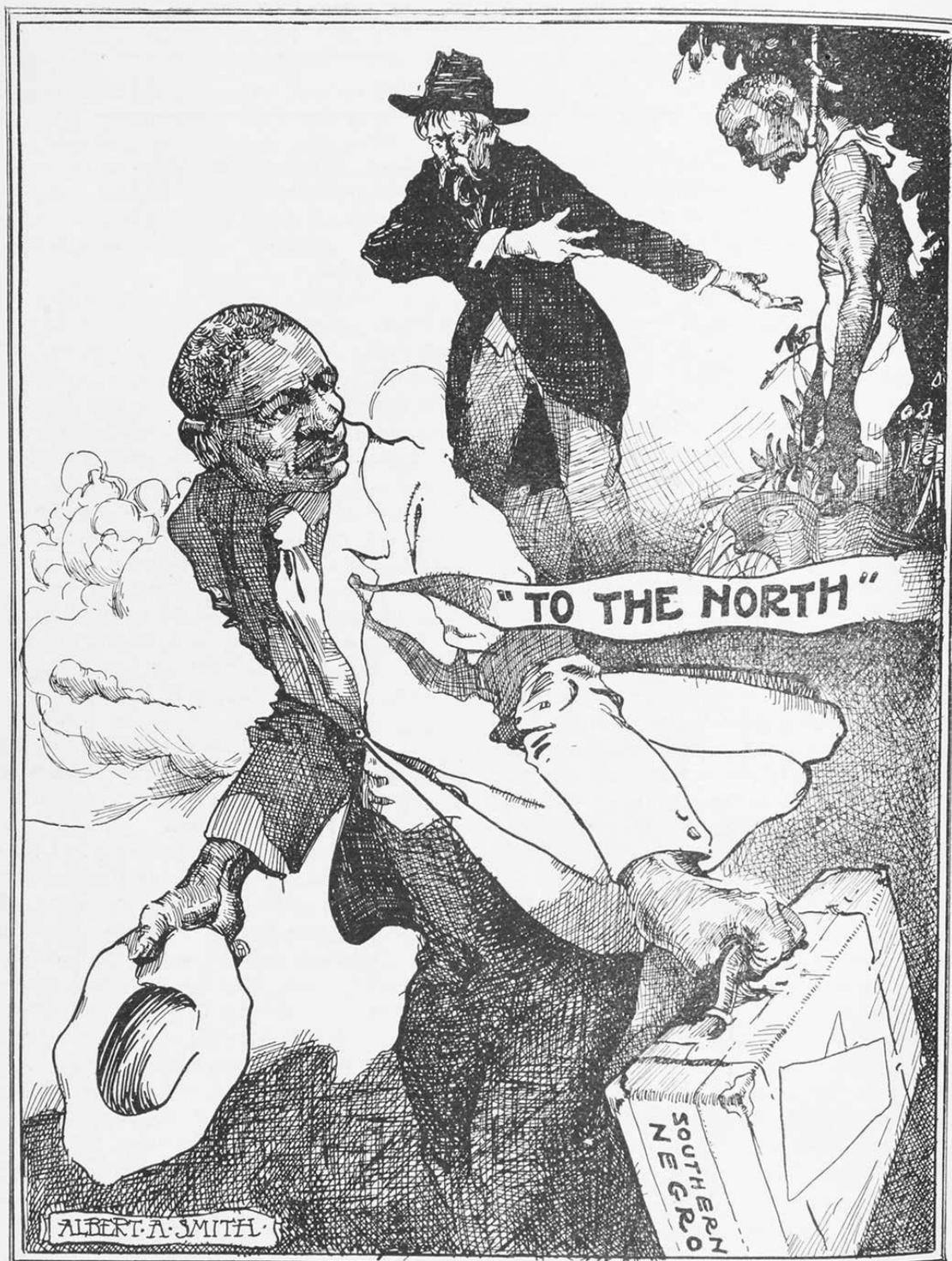
balance of racial power in the South slightly more towards African Americans than it had been in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We can see the effects the Great Migration and the other forces of postwar Reconstruction were having on Du Bois's political thought in 1924's *The Gift of Black Folks*. In it, Du Bois proudly repudiated the some of the more elitist interpretations of his earlier Talented Tenth argument. "The glory of the world is the possibilities of the commonplace and America is America even because it shows, as never before, the power of the common, ordinary, unlovely man," he insisted. "This is real democracy and not that vain and eternal striving to regard the world as the abiding place of exceptional genius with great black wastes of hereditary idiots."<sup>69</sup> Though the book's title came from the "Aforethought" of *Souls*, *Gift* narrated black politics in a very different way, beginning not with Reconstruction but with the role of black people in the exploration of the Americas. From there, Du Bois turned to consider life under slavery as he examined the contribution of black labor to the building of America in chapter two. He also jumped ahead in time to highlight the power of black labor by way of the Great Migration, pointing out how "in a few short months 500,000 black laborers came North to fill the void made by the stoppage of immigration at the rush of white workingmen into the munitions industry."<sup>70</sup> In the next chapter, Du Bois chronicled the participation of black soldiers in US wars, paying particular attention to the Civil War and ending with World War I.

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<sup>69</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (New York: Washington Square, 1970), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Du Bois, *Gift*, 20.



THE REASON

Figure 3.2: Albert A. Smith, "The Reason," *The Crisis*, March 1920, c.o. New York Public Library.

Chapter four of *Gift* addressed the “more indefinite” question of “how the black slave by his incessant struggle to be free has broadened the basis of democracy in America and in the world.” He pointed out that “the democracy established in American in the eighteenth century was not, and was not designed to be, a democracy of the masses of men.” He argued that the labor movement was not the major agent of democratization in America because it “sought to raise the white servant and laborer on the backs of the black servant and slave.” Instead, “it was the rise and growth among the slaves of a determination to be free and an active part of American democracy that forced American democracy continually to look into the depths” of its original sin.<sup>71</sup> Drawing on the work he had been doing since *John Brown* on antebellum slave resistance, Du Bois provided a catalogue of the different forms of resistance slaves used to force white Americans to institute mass democracy, most notably insurrection, appeals to reason, marronage, and bargaining over the conditions of slave labor.<sup>72</sup> In keeping with his views on the Great Migration, Du Bois treated fugitive slaves as agents of democratization, moving beyond his purely naturalistic depiction in *Souls* and toward the idea of the general strike in *Black Reconstruction*. But the general strike is not invoked in *Gift*, and Du Bois had no other overarching concept for relating different kinds of slave resistance, giving the chapter an unorganized feel. Still, his insistence that “the motive force of democracy has nearly always been a push from below rather than the aristocratic pull from above” marked an increasing appreciation for assertive forms of mass politics.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Du Bois, *Gift*, 56-7.

<sup>72</sup> The importance of marronage is explored in Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), and, most famously, Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Du Bois, *Gift*, 93.

In chapter five, Du Bois returns to Reconstruction itself. Given the novelty of his arguments in chapter five, it is somewhat surprising that his history of Reconstruction is largely the same as it was in “Reconstruction and Its Benefits.” However, this consistency makes it easier to see just how Du Bois’s thoughts were shifting in this period, particularly on questions of political agency. In contrast to what he had written in the previous chapter, Du Bois maintained here that “the Negro was not freed by edict or sentiment but by the Abolitionists backed by the persistent action of the slave himself as fugitive, soldier and voter,” thereby continuing to cast slaves in a supporting role in their own emancipation.<sup>74</sup> He did, however, emphasize the extent to which Reconstruction government was a form of economic self-emancipation. “The North being unable to free the slave,” he wrote, “let him try to free himself. And he did, and this was his greatest gift to the nation.”<sup>75</sup> By this, Du Bois meant that Reconstruction government accomplished enough to ensure that even after it was overthrown, the full reenslavement of blacks was no longer possible—an accomplishment achieved despite half-hearted and inconsistent federal support.<sup>76</sup> He also saluted his old rival when he reminded his readers that it was a freedman, “the late Booker T. Washington[,] who planned the beginning of industrial democracy in the South.”<sup>77</sup> The language of industrial democracy was a staple of post–World War I reconstruction discourse, and through Washington, Du Bois linked the achievements of Reconstruction to the guiding political problems of his own day. The way forward, however, remained elusive.

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<sup>74</sup> Du Bois, *Gift*, 95.

<sup>75</sup> Du Bois, *Gift*, 112. On self-emancipation, see David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African American Struggle for Freedom in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> As Sven Beckert writes, “the spread of sharecropping as the dominant system of labor in the cotton - growing regions of the United States testified to the collective strength of freedpeople, allowing them to escape a far worse system of gang labor for wages on plantations. See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2015), 286.

<sup>77</sup> Du Bois, *Gift*, 140.

*Black Reconstruction and the Politics of Tragedy*

Near the end of *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois paused to mock the genre of historical writing that Kenneth Stampp would later call “the tragic legend of Reconstruction.” As Du Bois described it, the legend held that “Reconstruction was ‘tragic,’ ‘terrible,’ a ‘great mistake,’ and a ‘humiliation,’ not because of what actually happened... No, the ‘tragedy’ of Reconstruction was because here an attempt was initiated to make American democracy and the tenets of the Declaration of Independence apply not only to white men, but to black men.”<sup>78</sup> Given Du Bois’s scorn for this “tragic legend” in *Dusk of Dawn*, it is surprising that he leaned heavily on the language of tragedy in his 1935 magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction in America*. There, he called Reconstruction “a tragedy that beggared the Greeks; it was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution.”<sup>79</sup> “The unending tragedy of Reconstruction is the utter inability of the American mind to grasp its real significance,” he argued. At the end of the book’s penultimate chapter, “its national and worldwide implications.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, for all his anger about the way white historians used the language of tragedy to discredit Reconstruction and the role African Americans played in it, Du Bois did not disavow the view that Reconstruction was a political tragedy. Instead, he used *Black Reconstruction* to invert the tragic legend, showing how the real harm done to American democracy was not the rule of “black Republicanism” but the reimposition of white supremacy, which both stymied the practical possibility of political progress and closed white Americans off to the historical self-understanding they needed to make sense of their own condition. This inversion allowed Du Bois to rethink the political

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<sup>78</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 787. On the “Tragic Legend,” see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction 1865-1877* (New York: Vintage, 1967), chap. 1.

<sup>79</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 727.

<sup>80</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 708.

implications of the tragic and to derive from them a radical political and economic program for black politics in America.

Though the tragic legend described much of the work done on Reconstruction by white scholars in this period, the target of Du Bois's rancor in this particular passage was undoubtedly Claude Bowers's *The Tragic Era*, an immensely popular history of Reconstruction published in 1929. Bowers wrote that the purpose of his book was "to recreate the black and bloody drama of those years, to show the leaders of the fighting factions at close range, to picture the moving masses, both whites and blacks, in North and South, surging crazily under the influence of the poisonous propaganda on which they were fed."<sup>81</sup> But Bowers, unlike the Dunning school, was a political operative, not a professional historian. He invoked the tragic legend to shore up the fracturing coalition of the Democratic Party following its disastrous defeat in the election of 1928, in which five southern states voted for Republican Herbert Hoover over Al Smith, the Catholic governor of New York and Democratic presidential candidate. Bowers had been temporary chairman of the Democratic National Convention that year, where he gave a celebrated keynote address that attacked Republican corruption. As he told the assembled delegates, "we battle for the honor of the nation besmirched and bedraggled by the most brazen and shameless carnival of corruption that ever blackened the reputation of a decent and self-respecting people."<sup>82</sup> *The Tragic Era* was written to remind white southerners of the corruption and indignities of "black Republican" rule after the Civil War and alert them to the dangers of siding with the Republicans in the future. Reconstruction's "prevailing note was one of tragedy,"

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<sup>81</sup> Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), preface. On the motivation behind Bowers's book and the political stakes of Reconstruction historiography in the period, see Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) and Jason Morgan Ward, "Causes Lost and Found: Remembering and Refighting Reconstruction in the Roosevelt Era," *Remembering Reconstruction*, 35-58.

<sup>82</sup> Bowers's speech can be found in William Safire ed., *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* (New York: Norton, 2004), 932-936. He went to serve in prominent diplomatic positions during the Roosevelt administration.

he wrote, because “the Southern people literally were put to the torture” for the political and economic gains of “daring and unscrupulous men.”<sup>83</sup>

Why did Du Bois continue to describe reconstruction as tragic after Bowers’s book? Other black scholars felt no need to do so. The unsigned review of *The Tragic Era* in Carter Woodson’s *Journal of Negro History* was every bit as scathing as Du Bois’s comments in *Dusk*. It called the book, “downright propaganda in the interest of the defeated opponents of Congressional reconstruction,” but it made no effort to rescue the language of tragedy.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, when a *Crisis* subscriber asked Bois for his views on the book shortly after it was released, he wrote back, “*The Tragic Era* is simply a part a great story of which all has not yet been told...the story of Reconstruction from the point of view of the Negro is yet to be written.” “When it is written,” he added, “one may read its tragedy and get to the truth.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, Du Bois believed it was necessary to refute Bowers both on history of Reconstruction and on the nature of tragedy.

Du Bois had already established the connection between Reconstruction and tragedy in chapter eight of *Souls*, “Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece,” where he criticized, “this happy-go-lucky nation which goes blundering along with its Reconstruction tragedies, its Spanish war interludes and Philippine matinees, just as though God really were dead.”<sup>86</sup> But *Souls* generally uses tragic language and images to draw attention to the interpersonal alienation created by the color line and the ultimate need for racial reconciliation.<sup>87</sup> “Herein lies the tragedy of the age,”

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<sup>83</sup> Bowers, *The Tragic Era*, preface

<sup>84</sup> “Review: *The Tragic Era* by Claude G. Bowers,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan. 1930), 117-119.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Edgar H. Webster, November 10, 1930. *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers*.

<sup>86</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 466.

<sup>87</sup> Annie Menzel, “‘Awful Gladness’: The Dual Political Rhetorics of Du Bois’s ‘Of the Passing of the First-Born,’” *Political Theory*, February 22, 2018, argues that the death of Burghardt, perhaps the most famous tragic moment in the text, is more complicated than the racial reconciliation story would suggest. But Du Bois does not use the language of tragedy in “Of the Passing of the First-Born,” which is my narrower point here.

he wrote in “Of Alexander Crummell,” “that men know so little of men.”<sup>88</sup> The next chapter, “Of the Coming of John,” with its invocations of Wagnerian tragedy, presents the destructive effects of Jim Crow through a domestic drama. Meanwhile, the tragic image at the heart of “Of the Dawn of Freedom” is that of a former plantation owner and the slave woman he owned and raped, each grieving over the sons they lost, his legitimate son in the war and his illegitimate son with her to the Ku Klux Klan. “These were the saddest sights of that woeful day,” wrote Du Bois, “and no man clasped the hands of these two passing figures of the present-past; but, hating, they went to their long home, and, hating, their children's children live today.”<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that that Du Bois saw the color line as a personal problem, rather than a social one. But his unfortunate choice to present the tragic failure of the Freedman’s Bureau as its inability to reconcile rapist/owner and victim/slave points to the inequalities of power sometimes obscured by his domestic use of tragic tropes and images in *Souls*.

In 1894, after the failure of the Pullman Strike, Jane Addams, Du Bois’s friend and a co-founder of the NAACP, wrote an essay in which she distinguished between two different forms of tragedy: domestic and industrial. “A Modern Lear,” which was finally published in 1912, captures the difference between the way Du Bois invoked the tragic in *Souls* as compared to *Black Reconstruction*. According to Addams, “older tragedy implied mal-adjustment between individuals; the forces of the tragedy were personal and passionate. This modern tragedy in its inception is a mal-adjustment between two large bodies of men, an employing company and a mass of employees. It deals not with personal relationships, but with industrial relationships.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 520.

<sup>89</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 282.

<sup>90</sup> Jane Addams, “A Modern Lear,” *Survey* 29, no. 5 (November 2, 1912): 131-37. On Du Bois and Addams, see Dorcas Davis Boles, June Gary Hopps, Obie Clayton Jr. and Shena Leverett Brown, “The Dance Between Addams and Du Bois: Collaboration and Controversy in a Consequential 20th Century Relationship,” *Phylon*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Winter 2016), 34-53.

The domestic tragedy is defined by “one will asserting its authority through all the entanglement of wounded affection, and insisting upon its selfish ends at all costs,” while the industrial tragedy comes from, “one will directing the energies of many others, without regard to their desires, and having in view in the last analysis only commercial results.” To be sure, neither Du Bois nor Addams believed that the two types of tragedy were entirely separable, but industrial tragedy’s emphasis on relations of domination in large-scale economic systems matches *Black Reconstruction*’s Marxist approach and its reconfiguration of the privatizing literary devices so important to *Souls*.

In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois argued that most white Americans resisted interpretations of Reconstruction that presented its tragic character truthfully and not through the manipulative racism of Bowers or the Dunning School. For this reason, “one reads the truer deeper facts of Reconstruction with a great despair. It is at once so simple and so human, and yet so futile. There is no villain, no idiot, no saint. There are just men.”<sup>91</sup> *Black Reconstruction* does not offer anything that might be called a theory of the tragic. However, the way he uses the term “tragedy” makes it clear that he agreed with many theorists of the tragic that the redeeming feature of tragedy is that one can learn from it. Only when its possible lessons are ignored does tragedy give way to despair. As Hayden White argues in *Metahistory*, “the fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits” give rise to “a gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest. And this gain is thought to consist in the epiphany of the law governing human existence which the protagonist’s exertions against the world have brought to pass.”<sup>92</sup> It was precisely the fact that white Americans were so resistant to this gain in consciousness that

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<sup>91</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 728.

<sup>92</sup> Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 9.

provoked Du Bois's previously mentioned insistence that "the unending tragedy of Reconstruction is the utter inability of the American mind to grasp its real significance."

Thus, *Black Reconstruction* must be read as complex, multilayered tragedy. First, it documents the tragic events of Reconstruction itself, namely the failure of emancipation to turn into real racial equality and the eventual rise of Jim Crow as a successor to slavery. Second, it works to expose the unending tragedy of thwarted historical memory, and it is in this second tragedy that much of the political force of *Black Reconstruction* is to be found.<sup>93</sup> The linkage between the two illuminates the way Du Bois used historical inquiry to make political arguments. According to Lawrie Balfour, "he dedicated himself to the presentation of a past that was not just known but creatively reworked to sustain a critique of the present ... to craft a usable past from unspeakable loss."<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Nikhil Pal Singh draws on Jacques Rancière to argue that Du Bois "rejected the separation of literature and truth" in order to "dramatize a social movement of black people into the new symbolic space of democratic history-making."<sup>95</sup> For Du Bois, however, a past was usable only if it was also factual. At the end of *Black Reconstruction*, he excoriated historians and political leaders "who would compromise with truth in the past in order to make peace in the present and guide policy in the future," which is what, in their differing ways, white-supremacist historians like Dunning and Bowers tried to do.<sup>96</sup> Learning from Reconstruction, he believed, required learning the truth about Reconstruction, however painful that truth turned out to be. So long as white Americans were unable to recognize the truth

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<sup>93</sup> See David W. Blight, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Struggle for American Historical Memory," *Beyond the Battlefield: Race Memory, & the American Civil War* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 223-257.

<sup>94</sup> Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction*, 6.

<sup>95</sup> Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 93.

<sup>96</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 727.

of Reconstruction, they would be unreliable allies in the struggle for democracy and racial equality.

Du Bois begins to build this argument at the start of *Black Reconstruction*, which opens with a history of “the black worker” in the United States that moves from the origins of the slave trade through the institutionalization of slavery and the resulting practices of slave resistance, especially marronage.<sup>97</sup> “The White Worker” is the subject of the next chapter, which contains a stinging critique of the American labor movement’s refusal to embrace abolitionism. Du Bois argued there were “two labor movements: the movement to give the black worker a minimum legal status which would enable him to sell his own labor, and another movement which proposed to increase the wage and better the condition of the working class in America.”<sup>98</sup> Anticipating later arguments about whiteness, he presented a litany of immigrant labor agitators coming to America and gradually embracing white supremacy, even when it conflicted with their earlier views and was still denounced by activists abroad. “Thus the majority of the world’s laborers,” he wrote, “by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. And this book seeks to tell that story.”<sup>99</sup>

Following a summary of the political dominance of the planter class in the antebellum United States, Du Bois turned to examine “how the Civil War meant emancipation and how the black worker won the war by a general strike which transferred his labor from the Confederate

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<sup>97</sup> For general summaries of how Du Bois narrates the book in terms of class dynamics, see Cedric Robinson, “A Critique of W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*,” *The Black Scholar* 8, no. 7, (1977): 44–50 and Olson, *Abolition*, 1-15.

<sup>98</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 20.

<sup>99</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 30. The international dimension of Reconstruction is repeatedly mentioned but not strongly developed in the book. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 10 provides the best account of “Global Reconstruction.”

planter to the Northern invader.”<sup>100</sup> He positioned his argument against two opposed stories about the conduct of slaves during the Civil War, “one that the Negro did nothing but faithfully serve his master until emancipation was thrust upon him; the other that the Negro immediately, just as quickly as the presence of Northern soldiers made possible, left serfdom and took his stand with the army of freedom.”<sup>101</sup> What both these stories missed was the importance of careful waiting and calculated hesitation on the part of the slaves, who acted not automatically but deliberately in choosing sides. “What the Negro did,” he argued, “was to wait, look and listen and try to see where his interest lay.”<sup>102</sup> However, “as soon as it became clear that the Union armies would not or could not return fugitive slaves, and that the masters with all their fume and fury were uncertain of victory, the slave entered upon a general strike against slavery by the same methods he had used in the period of the fugitive slave. He ran away to the first place of safety and offered his services to the federal army.”<sup>103</sup> Though Du Bois continued to use some the same naturalistic metaphors he deployed in *Souls*, he now placed them alongside clear statements of strategic intentionality. Now, “the swarming of the slaves” showed their “quiet but unswerving determination,” and “this whole move was not dramatic or hysterical, rather it was like the great unbroken swell of the ocean before it dashed on the reefs.”<sup>104</sup> The appearance of slave defection as a sudden, spontaneous, uncontrollable force was an illusion created by the

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<sup>100</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 55.

<sup>101</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 57.

<sup>102</sup> Du Bois’s emphasis on the strategic importance of waiting in his 1930s writings may be connected to the debates on “revolutionary waiting” that took place in Germany’s Social Democratic Party around the time Du Bois was living in Germany. Like Du Bois, the SPD leadership emphasized a program of building parallel institutions to provide workers with an alternative to bourgeois political and social life. On revolutionary waiting, see Kloppenber, *Uncertain Victory*, 207–37. Though Du Bois later portrayed himself as taking scant interest in socialism during his early life, papers published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reveal that this was another instance of Du Bois reshaping his past for narrative purposes. In particular, see W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, “The Socialism of German Socialists,” *Central European History* 31, no. 3 (1998): 189–96. For an extensively cited discussion of Du Bois’s evolving views on socialism, see Reiland Rabaka, *Du Bois's Dialectics: Black Radical Politics and the Reconstruction of Critical Social Theory* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 27–29.

<sup>103</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 57.

<sup>104</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 65.

necessary invisibility, to the white world, of the forms of deliberation and communication that existed among slaves before emancipation.<sup>105</sup>

The idea of the general strike united the various sorts of slave resistance that Du Bois had described earlier in *Gift* but was unable to put together. The general strike was a loosely coordinated intensification of the ways slaves had always resisted slavery, one that became something vastly more powerful in the context of the Civil War.<sup>106</sup> Slaves who ran away withdrew their labor power and weakened the southern economy, while those who stayed were able to use the resulting labor shortage to challenge the conditions of their work in ways that all but destroyed slavery in many parts of the South well before the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>107</sup> “Simply by stopping work,” Du Bois wrote, “they could threaten the Confederacy with starvation. By walking into the Federal camps, they showed to doubting Northerners the easy possibility of using them as workers and as servants, as farmers, and as spies, and finally, as fighting soldiers.”<sup>108</sup> In this limited sense, the general strike was able to transition from the negative act of slaves removing their labor power to the positive projects of joining the army or

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<sup>105</sup> On patterns of slave communication and resistance, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>106</sup> It is worth pointing out that neither the general strike nor the dictatorship of the proletariat occurs often in Du Bois’s writings on Reconstruction outside of this book. There are a few references in his other writings from the 1930s, but he does not repeat these arguments in “The Negro and Social Reconstruction,” *Dusk of Dawn*, or W. E. B. Du Bois, “Reconstruction, Seventy-Five Years After,” *Phylon* 4, no. 3 (1943): 205-212. He seems to have abandoned them, at least in their Marxist forms, after the negative reactions they received. I focus on the general strike and ignore the dictatorship of the proletariat for two reasons. First, general strike has been immensely influential on subsequent historians, who still may not accept the term, but largely agree with the substance of his argument. This is not true of his description of Reconstruction government as a dictatorship of the proletariat. Second, the general strike seems to inform his ideas about black political organizing in the 1930s in a way that, given his doubts about the Roosevelt administration, the dictatorship of the proletariat does not.

<sup>107</sup> The use of exit as a political strategy is most famously discussed in Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). Hirschman’s account of the interplay between exit and voice provides a useful way to think about strategies southern blacks used to resist white supremacy from Reconstruction through the civil rights movement. See also Jennet Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit: On Resistance and Quitting Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017) on how fugitive slaves used exit, though she does not refer to the Great Migration.

<sup>108</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 121.

creating new communities and institutions of their own. Thus, Du Bois reverses his earlier judgment about priority of different groups in bringing about emancipation. Though he continued to esteem the abolitionists and emphasized their important role, he now wrote, “it was the fugitive slave who made the slaveholders face the alternative of surrendering to the North, or the Negroes.”<sup>109</sup>

When it was published, the general strike argument was one of the most frequently criticized parts of *Black Reconstruction*. Communists aligned with the Third International were unhappy with Du Bois’s unorthodox use of the term, while other leftists were content to point out that Du Bois did not seem to understand what a general strike was. Even his most sympathetic readers, like Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, who was one of the only black scholars to have published extensively on Reconstruction during the 1920s, remained unconvinced. “The work is hardly persuasive when it interprets the wholesale abandonment of plantations by Negroes as a general strike against the slave-regime,” he wrote in the *Journal of Negro History*: “It does not show that this movement constituted an organized breaking away from work on the plantations with a view to forcing immediate economic or political concessions either from the planters or from the government of the Confederacy.”<sup>110</sup> Du Bois might have agreed, for he had not argued that the general strike was the result of an agreed-upon plan, an authorized decision, a general will, or any of the other concepts we ordinarily use to guide our thinking about the prerequisites for collective action.<sup>111</sup> Instead, Du Bois’s inspiration for the general strike was the leaderless revolution of the Great Migration. Like the Great Migration, it was a variation on the

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<sup>109</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 121.

<sup>110</sup> Taylor “Historians of the Reconstruction,” 33.

<sup>111</sup> To put the question in the terms that Collingwood gave us in the introduction, Du Bois is asking whether it is necessary for people to know that they share the same plan for something to count as a collective action or whether it is enough that, unbeknownst to each other, they have the same plan and are carrying it out? The two situations are not identical, but Du Bois pushes us towards the view that the latter is also a kind of collective action.

old slave practice of marronage, a form of agency born of the limitations placed on opportunities for black political organizing by the structures of white supremacy as they existed at the time. It used hesitation, exit, and other practices rarely seen as political, and turned them into a source of power that that was accessible to slaves across the South, whether they understood themselves to be engaged in large scale coordination or not.<sup>112</sup>

As effective as the general strike was in ending the Civil War, however, it was unable to provide for real freedom after the Civil War. Insofar as slaves and freedmen were forced to join with the federal government, especially the Union army, in building their positive program, they were dependent on the continued support of northern whites. The freedmen needed to have the land of the slave owners confiscated and redistributed to them because “beneath all theoretical freedom and political right must lie the economic foundation.”<sup>113</sup> The North was unwilling to do this, and the freedmen did not have preexisting organizations, institutions, or resources that would enable them to press their case or act autonomously on a sufficiently large scale. Furthermore, both the freedmen and their sympathizers had to contend with a rebellion against emancipation that was carried on by southern whites through both legal and extralegal means well after the war had officially ended. The power of the freedmen “could only be shown by refusal to work under the old conditions, and it had neither permanent organization nor savings to sustain it in such a fight.”<sup>114</sup> Reconstruction required the end of the general strike because it required that blacks reenter capitalist economy as a condition of white alliance, foreclosing the possibility of independent subsistence farming outside the national economy, which had been the objective of so many of the freedmen. But without either the economic basis for autonomy or the

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<sup>112</sup> Spivak is one of the few authors to note the importance of hesitation in the general strike, but for a similar argument with respect to William James, see Livingston, *Damn Great Empires!*, ch. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 197.

<sup>114</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 586.

sustained support of the federal government and northern public, the freedmen were powerless to prevent the tragic demise of Reconstruction government and the redemption of white supremacy in the South.

This is not to say that seeing Reconstruction as a tragedy requires seeing its failure as inevitable. In tragedy, Raymond Williams writes, “limits on human action are discovered in real actions, rather than known in advance or in general.”<sup>115</sup> What is important about these limits is that they are not defined by abstract necessity but instead created by human interactions in specific historical situations. In Du Bois’s telling, the tragic flaw that doomed Reconstruction was not that the natural social order was inverted or that freedmen were inferior, but that whites refused to recognize them as human. This is the subject of *Black Reconstruction*’s longest chapter, “The Transubstantiation of a Poor White.” Ostensibly an account of Andrew Johnson’s presidency, Du Bois used Johnson as a representative figure for the white working class as whole. During Reconstruction, Thomas Nast drew Johnson in the role of Iago, a dishonest villain cozening a black Union veteran standing in for Othello (see figure 3.3). Although he has often been criticized for being unsympathetic to poor whites in the South, Du Bois’s account of how Johnson was led to choose race over class is more sympathetic than Nast’s. Du Bois figures Johnson not simply as a villain, but as another tragic victim of America’s distorted ideals, hence the chapter is bookend by invocations of tragedy. “Like Nemesis of Greek tragedy,” it begins, “the central problem of America after the Civil War, as before, was the black man” and it ends with an account of how Johnson personified the contradiction between white supremacy and

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<sup>115</sup> Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 18. David Roediger, *Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All* (New York: Verso, 2014) helpfully suggests *Black Reconstruction* is what Williams called a “social tragedy.” Though neither of them cites it, Williams’s understanding of social tragedy is quite close to Addams’s industrial tragedy.

economic democracy.<sup>116</sup> “Because he could not conceive of Negroes as men,” Du Bois wrote, “he refused to advocate universal democracy, of which, in his young manhood, he had been the fiercest advocate.” This change “did not come by deliberate thought or conscious desire to hurt—it was rather the tragedy of American prejudice made flesh; so that the man born to narrow circumstances, a rebel against economic privilege, died with the conventional ambition of a poor white to be the associate and benefactor of monopolists, planters and slave drivers.”<sup>117</sup> Du Bois argued that Johnson was transformed not only by the blandishments of the planters, but also by the self-interested designs of northern politicians like Seward and the class snobbery of northern elites. Although the poor Southern whites he represented might have chosen a different path for Reconstruction, they, like the freedmen, were confronted by tragic limitations on the exercise of their political power and agency.

In sum, *Black Reconstruction* maps both the historic victories and the unsolved problems of black politics. On the one hand, slaves were able to destroy slavery by way of general strike that redeployed long-established forms of slave resistance in the context of the Civil War. On the other hand, without an economic and institutional basis that blacks themselves could control, the general strike could not avoid its eventual reincorporation into the American capitalist order, nor could the freedmen prevent the return of white supremacy once the North lost interest in Reconstruction. The problem that Reconstruction could not solve was that of developing an organizational form of black politics that could further the cause of economic democracy while providing security and safe harbor against changing white sentiments.<sup>118</sup> Thus, Reconstruction

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<sup>116</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 237.

<sup>117</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 322.

<sup>118</sup> Livingston, “The Cost of Liberty,” calls this “the paradox of sacrifice and survival,” and argues it “migrates from the margins to the center of Du Bois’s political thought in *John Brown*” (219). It is not, therefore, a problem that is new to Du Bois’s politics in the 1930s, though its resolution through economic institution-building is new.

was a failure, but it was splendid failure. “It did not fail where it was expected to fail,” Du Bois wrote, not with the incompetence of the freedmen, but in a valiant, doomed struggle against the forces of an unjust political order, “the massed hirelings of Religion, Science, Education, Law, and brute force.”<sup>119</sup> Du Bois used this tragic story to frame a program for black politics in the New Deal that began by acknowledging the existential vulnerability of racial minorities and the compulsory character of segregation as a precondition for organizing a positive form of collective agency that would institutionalize black economic power and provide the material basis for freedom that was impossible during Reconstruction.

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<sup>119</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 708.

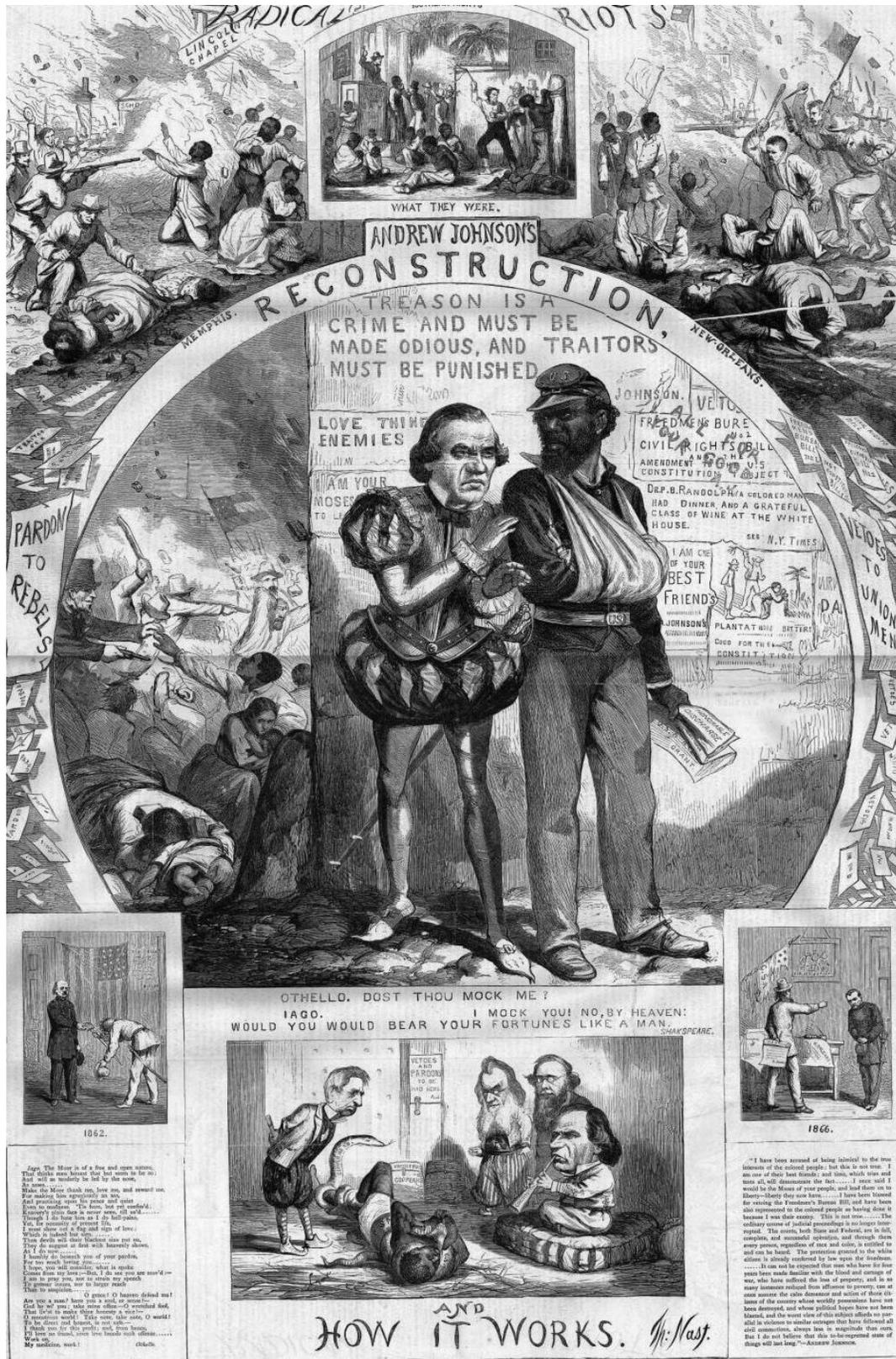


Figure 3.3: Thomas Nast, "Andrew Johnson's reconstruction and how it works," The Nation, (September 1, 1866), c.o. Library of Congress.

### The Group Economy and the Lessons of Reconstruction

Like many of the leftists who reviewed *Black Reconstruction*, Abram Harris did not think Du Bois understood Marx. According to the orthodoxy of the Third International, the Civil War was the completion of America's bourgeois revolution, not a premature anticipation of the proletarian class struggle.<sup>120</sup> Du Bois did not understand this because "he is a racialist whose discovery of Marxism as a critical instrument has been too recent and sudden for it to discipline his mental processes or basically to change his social philosophy," or so Harris wrote in *The New Republic*. But the real target of his review was not Du Bois's history, it was his political program. Harris argued that since the Great Depression, "the preeminence of Dr. Du Bois's leadership has been on the wane," because of "his program of civil liberty and Negro suffrage rights did not touch the basic realities of Negro life." To regain his standing, "he now advocates the organization of the black masses in producers' and consumers' cooperatives within the confines of segregation" as "the only way Negro workingmen can survive unemployment and poverty until white workers are sufficiently class-conscious to include them in their industrial organizations and political struggles." In order to understand *Black Reconstruction*, Harris insisted, one has to understand "the contradictions and the ideological confusion that have of necessity accompanied Dr. Du Bois' changed position."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Andrew Zimmerman, "From the Second American Revolution to the First International and Back Again: Marxism, the Popular Front, and the American Civil War," Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur eds. *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 304-336 correctly argues that this was not Marx's view. Marx saw the Civil War as a slaveholder's rebellion, like the factory owners' rebellion against the Ten Hour Act, but on a vastly larger and more destructive scale. Du Bois had read Marx's original writings on the Civil War, and his belief that "what ensued in the South after emancipation was not at all the classical bourgeoisie revolution but something far more complicated and reactionary," was probably closer to Marx's own. See W. E. B. Du Bois, "Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 110-125.

<sup>121</sup> Abram L. Harris, "Reconstruction and the Negro," *New Republic* (Aug 7, 1935), 367-8.

Du Bois might have hoped for a kinder hearing from Harris, whose major study of racial discrimination in American labor unions, *The Black Worker*, co-authored with Sterling Spero, had been an inspiration for *Black Reconstruction*. But Harris was correct that Du Bois's reinterpretation of Reconstruction was deeply connected to his program for a cooperatively-based African American group economy. Though he never detailed the connections he saw between Reconstruction and the politics of the 1930s, Du Bois's political writings from the period implicitly draw the connection through their narration of the tragic history of black politics. In *Dusk of Dawn*, he wrote that after finishing *Black Reconstruction* and describing its splendid failure, "I naturally turned my thought toward putting into permanent form that economic program of the Negro which I believed should succeed, and implement the long fight for political and civil rights and social equality."<sup>122</sup> That more permanent form was meant to be a short book entitled "The Negro and Social Reconstruction," in which he would chart the history of black politics from enslavement, emancipation, and Reconstruction through to the New Deal, ending with one his most developed accounts of his plan for a black cooperative economy.<sup>123</sup> The book was to be published in a series edited by Alain Locke, but Locke ultimately rejected the manuscript for fear that it would antagonize the white foundations that were supporting the series, principally the Carnegie Corporation. Bits and pieces of the book found their way into the articles Du Bois wrote in support of the group economy, and the major arguments are restated in *Dusk of Dawn*. Between these texts, we can see why Du Bois hoped that building a segregated black economy out of consumers' cooperatives could avoid the failures of Reconstruction. For

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<sup>122</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 787.

<sup>123</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro and Social Reconstruction*, in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887–1961* ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 102–57.

though Reconstruction's failure may have been splendid the first time, repeating its mistakes in the 1930s would have turned its tragedy, as Marx famously put it, into a farce.

The importance Du Bois placed on the idea of the group economy can be best be appreciated by looking at what it cost him to promote it. Du Bois's advocacy for this plan in the years following the onset of the Great Depression brought him into a series of conflicts with other leaders in the NAACP, culminating in June 1934 with his resigning the editorship of the *Crisis*, which he had run for a quarter century, and his complete withdrawal from the organization.<sup>124</sup> In his resignation letter he wrote, "I have since the beginning of the Great Depression, tried to work inside the organization for its realignment and readjustment," but "my program for economic readjustment has been totally ignored." Du Bois charged that the NAACP, "which has been great and effective for nearly a quarter of a century, finds itself in a time of crisis and change, without a program, without effective organization, without executive officers, who have either the ability or the disposition to guide the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the right direction."<sup>125</sup> As emphatic as he was in cutting his ties with the organization he had helped create, he found few allies among the NAACP's radical young critics because his economic program struck them as outdated and dangerously naïve. Ironically, his vision of black political organization forced him to renounce his existing organizational ties, leaving him more politically isolated than he had been at any time since the founding of the Niagara movement in 1905.

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<sup>124</sup> Megan Ming Francis, "The Price of Civil Rights: Black Lives, White Funding, and Movement Capture: Price of Civil Rights," *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 1 (March 2019): 275–309, argues that the NAACP was driven towards an increasing focus on combatting segregation in education as a result of its growing dependence on grants from white foundations in the 1920s and 1930s. Though Francis is primarily interested in why the NAACP deemphasized anti-lynching legislation in this period, she also discusses how this funding conflict contributed to his marginalization in a period when he was increasingly focused on building up segregated institutions. On the early history of the NAACP more broadly, see Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009).

<sup>125</sup> "Dr. Du Bois Resigns," *Crisis*, August 1934, *Writings*, 1260–61.

Though Du Bois disagreed with both the NAACP and many of its most strident critics, he did not position his alternative program as a middle ground between the two. Instead, he faulted both sides for being too dependent on forms of political agency beyond the control of African Americans and, therefore, unable to articulate plausible visions of black politics in the face of white intransigence. The NAACP, Du Bois felt, was stuck on the protest and uplift model of black politics he had articulated in the first decade of the twentieth century. In his resignation letter, he said the NAACP was “founded in a day when a negative program of protest was imperative and effective[;] it succeeded so well that the program seemed perfect and unlimited.” However, “by World War and chaos, we are called to formulate a positive program of construction and inspiration. We have this far been unable to comply.”<sup>126</sup> In one of his last articles in the *Crisis*, Du Bois rejected the claim that strategic segregation was a “counsel of despair” and scorned those who thought that “the fight against segregation consists merely of one damned protest after another. That the technique is to protest and wait and protest again, to keep this thing up until the gates of public opinion and the walls of segregation fall down.” Not that he believed protest was unnecessary and should be given up, but it was insufficient. After all, there were many ways in which segregation had increased during the years in which the NAACP had been active, and the severe economic effects of the Great Depression on African Americans meant black politics had new priorities and required new methods. “This program,” he argued, “must be modified by adding to it a positive side. Make the protest, and keep making it, systematically and thoughtfully. Perhaps now and then even hysterically and theatrically; but at the same time, go to work to prepare methods and institutions which will supply those things and those opportunities which we lack because of segregation.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> “Dr. Du Bois Resigns,” 1260.

<sup>127</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Counsels of Despair,” *Crisis*, June 1934, *Writings*, 1257.

The nature of this positive program preoccupied Du Bois and divided him from other critics of the NAACP. He saw the choice of positive strategy in tragic terms defined by the limits placed on black agency by the various manifestations of white supremacy in American society and government as they emerged out of the failure of Reconstruction. Though Du Bois praised the New Deal for having “entered for good into the social and economic organization of life,” he also knew that southern Democrats were able to ensure segregation in nearly all its activities. “We could wish, we could pray, that this entrance could absolutely ignore lines of race and color,” he wrote in the *Crisis*, “but we know perfectly well it does not and will not, and with the present American opinion, it cannot.”<sup>128</sup> With the New Deal under the thumb of the Jim Crow South, younger radicals like Harris, Ralph Bunche, and E. Franklin Frazier, all at Howard University, and George Streater, Du Bois’s former assistant at the *Crisis*, advocated an alliance with the left wing of the American labor movement, particularly the Socialist and Communist Parties.<sup>129</sup> But Du Bois did not believe that white workers were generally willing to work with blacks, and he distrusted the American Communist Party for parroting the Soviet Union’s call for national self-determination in the Black Belt.<sup>130</sup> “We cannot use the power of the state because we do not form a state,” he wrote. “We cannot dictate as a proletariat, because we are in a minority, and not as Marxism and Socialism usually assume an overwhelming majority with

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<sup>128</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Segregation in the North” *Crisis*, April 1934, *Writings*, 1243. The impact of southern congressional power on the New Deal is treated extensively in Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013). On black politics in the period, see Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983) and Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932–1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>129</sup> Much of this debate took place in the *Journal of Negro Education*. In particular, see the special issue “The Present and Future Position of the Negro in the American Social Order,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 8, No. 3, (Jul. 1939). The best guide is Singh, *Black Is a Country*, ch. 2. For a more critical assessment of Communist responses to *Black Reconstruction*, see Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 389–90. The larger context is explored by Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks in and out of the Left* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>130</sup> The most powerful defense of the role communist activists played in the struggle against white supremacy is Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York: Norton, 2008).

power in the reach of its outstretched arms.”<sup>131</sup> With the power of the state out of reach and interracial alliance not forthcoming, Du Bois looked to creation of a group economy out of networks of cooperatives that would trade directly with each other, sell to black consumers, and hire black workers as the most promising strategy for organizing the power that blacks in the United States already had.<sup>132</sup>

It may seem odd to suggest that *Black Reconstruction*, with its re-description of slaves as black workers and of marronage as a general strike, is of a piece with Du Bois’s emphasis on consumption and consumer organizing in the 1930s. In arguing for consumers’ cooperatives as the driving institutions for organizing a separate black economy, Du Bois was not simply reapplying the analytical framework he used in *Black Reconstruction*. Instead he drew on its underlying organizational theory of moving from social roles and identities to the forms of collective agency they enabled and the institutions that could be used to sustain them. In *Black Reconstruction*, that meant emphasizing the importance of the slave’s identity as a worker engaging in a general strike. In the 1930s, however, Du Bois argued that the most important economic identity African Americans had was as consumers, and it was specifically as consumers that their power could be organized. “As a consumer the Negro approaches economic equality much more nearly than he ever has as a producer,” he wrote. “Organizing then and conserving and using intelligently the power which twelve million people have through what they buy, it is possible for the American Negro to help in the rebuilding of the economic state.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Right to Work” *Crisis*, April 1933, *Writings*, 1236–37.

<sup>132</sup> Du Bois, *Negro and Social Reconstruction*, 145.

<sup>133</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 707.

According to Frank Trentman, “the 1930s were the golden years of consumer activism,” and consumer citizenship served as a particularly useful identity around which to organize African Americans.<sup>134</sup> Federal legislation like the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act defined labor in narrow terms that were designed to exclude southern blacks by leaving out categories like agricultural and domestic workers, thereby making it harder for them to claim the legal rights to which white workers had access. Focusing on consumption also provided a greater role for women, whose contributions as workers were often devalued by both the state and the labor movement. Ella Baker, for example, began her political career as an organizer for the Young Negroes’ Co-operative League (YNCL), and many of the groups she organized were led by women. A program that offered a variety of forms of participation to many different segments of the black population was important because, as Du Bois argued in *Black Reconstruction*, “the rise of a group of a people is not a simultaneous shift of the whole mass; it is a continuous differentiation of individuals with inner strife and differences of opinion, so that individuals, groups and classes begin to appear seeking higher levels, groping for better ways, uniting with other like-minded bodies and movements.”<sup>135</sup> Consumption, therefore, offered a more encompassing identity around which to organize the country’s black population.

The increased consumer power African Americans possessed in the 1930s was a result of the social and economic changes brought about by the Great Migration. Unlike the general strike, however, the Great Migration was in no way anticapitalist. By leaving the South, with its system of sharecropping and debt peonage, for industrial jobs in urban areas, African Americans entered further into the cash economy, creating a larger and more varied workforce than existed in the past. While migration increased purchasing power and broadened the scope of the black

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<sup>134</sup> Trentman, *Empire of Things*, 274.

<sup>135</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 411

economy, urbanization led to the development of a thicker institutional life among migrants. As Du Bois wrote, “groups of Negroes in their own clubs and organizations, in their own neighborhoods and schools, were formed, and were not so much the result of deliberate planning as the rationalization of the segregation into which they were forced by racial prejudice.”<sup>136</sup> Alongside black churches and schools, the two major institutional legacies of Reconstruction, these new organizations provided an economic and social foundation for the development of consumers’ cooperatives, precisely what the freedmen lacked during Reconstruction.

Just as consumer identity was becoming increasingly important during the Depression, so too was the idea of organizing consumption around cooperative rather than capitalistic lines. New Deal administrators traveled the globe to study how cooperatives worked in other countries, and Marquis Childs’s 1936 book on the role of cooperatives in the Swedish economy became a surprise best seller.<sup>137</sup> The growth of cooperatives in African American communities started somewhat earlier, when George Schuyler founded the YNCL in 1930. As economic historian Jessica Gordon Nembhard argues, “the Great Depression probably saw the rise of more African American–owned cooperatives than any other period in U.S. history.”<sup>138</sup> It is clear that Du Bois was aware of this wider trend because, at the end of *The Negro and Social Reconstruction*, he cited Childs directly and obliquely referenced some of the campaigns of the YNCL.<sup>139</sup> In calling for a more coordinated approach to developing cooperatives, Du Bois was trying to organize something that African Americans in many parts of the country were already doing.

Cooperatives made it possible to transform to the disorganized, mass activity of Great Migration

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<sup>136</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 697.

<sup>137</sup> On the international spread of interest in consumers’ cooperatives, and Childs’s book in particular, see Kiran Claus Patel, *The New Deal: A Global History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 222–33.

<sup>138</sup> Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 146.

<sup>139</sup> Du Bois, *Negro and Social Reconstruction*, 157, 147.

into a new form of economic marronage in which blacks could leave the white, capitalist economy without having to go anywhere, thereby uniting the negative power of the general strike with the positive, institution-building program with which Du Bois was so concerned.

This turn toward consumer citizenship angered Du Bois's Marxist critics, who were primarily interested in organizing at the site of production. Frazier believed that a strategy "where Negro workers forced their political leader to displace white workers," as in "the present program of boycotting stores where Negroes are not permitted to work," was counterproductive. He was hopeful that "the Negro workers are acquiring an understanding of their place in the economic order and an appreciation of the necessity of their cooperation with white workers."<sup>140</sup> Du Bois's plan was often criticized as little more than a return to Booker T. Washington's strategy of "economic segregation" with a middle-class, socialist veneer.<sup>141</sup> In fact, it was the radicals who were closer to Washington's brand of realism. They believed that it was essential to avoid antagonizing white workers and to develop a non-racial class consciousness, just as Washington believed it was essential not to antagonize white capital and embrace the capitalist economy. Neither Washington nor the radicals doubted that racism existed among whites of all classes, which is why it was so important for blacks not to undermine the interests of their natural allies. But, in Du Bois's view, "it is not enough for us to prove that our rise, development and equality, will not hurt the whites; we are required to convince them that our survival and success are bound up with theirs."<sup>142</sup> Merely avoiding antagonism would not be enough to do this. Ending racism was a long-term challenge; racial organizing, even conflict, would

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<sup>140</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "The Status of the Negro in the American Social Order," *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935): 293-307, 307.

<sup>141</sup> Ralph J. Bunche, "A Critical Analysis of the Tactics and Programs of Minority Groups," *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935): 308-20.

<sup>142</sup> W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "The Position of the Negro in the American Social Order: Where Do We Go From Here?," *The Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 3 (July 1939): 551-70, 551.

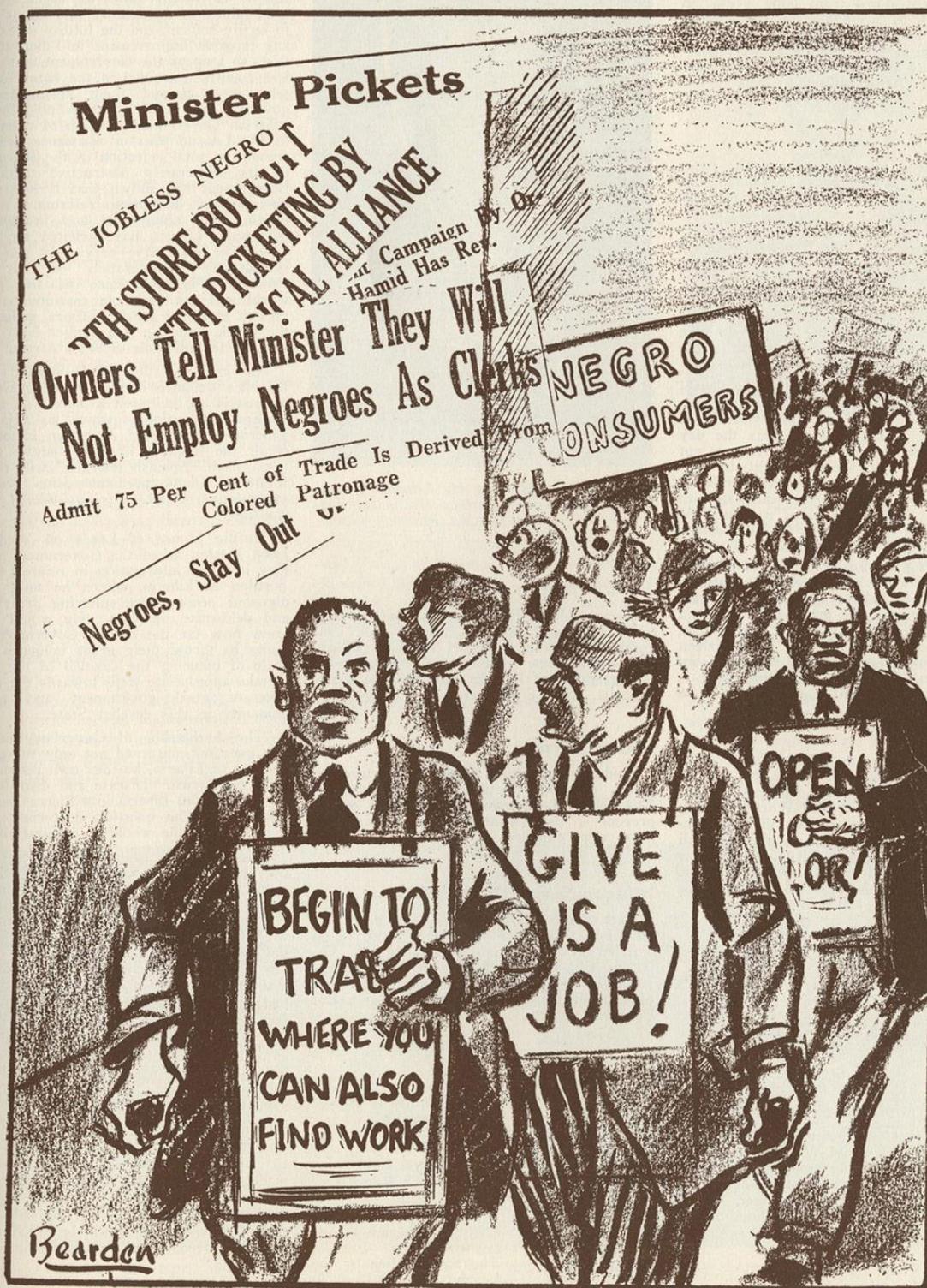
sometimes be required. “The one thing that we are bound to do in self-defense,” he wrote, “is to see that in the midst of all this whirlpool we make sure of such beginnings of economic security that in the future we shall have power to work out our destiny.”<sup>143</sup>

We can see the way in which Du Bois thought consumers’ co-ops could organize African Americans by looking at cartoon Romare Bearden drew for him in the July 1934 issue of the *Crisis*, the second-to-last published while Du Bois was editor. Bearden would become one of America’s most famous black artists, and Du Bois, who had been a frequent guest at Bearden’s childhood home in Harlem, was both a political mentor and early patron to him.<sup>144</sup> In “The Picket Line,” we see a group of protesters carrying signs typical of a “don’t buy where you can’t work” protest (see figure 3.4). A large picket sign overhead proclaims the shared identity of “Negro consumers,” but another man carries a “Give us a job” sign in the foreground, indicating the close connection between labor and consumer interests. The newspaper headlines collaged in the upper-left corner indicate that the well-dressed men in the front of the picket line are probably ministers, emphasizing the important role that churches and other black-led institutions must play. And though most of the recognizable people in the image are men, the fifth back is a woman, which recognizes, though understates, their role in consumer movements. What Bearden’s cartoon makes clear is that organizing a group economy did not mean an end to agitation or labor activism. For Du Bois, the group economy was intended to provide an institutional framework and economic foundation for political actions carried on by different groups of African Americans around the country.

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<sup>143</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 110-125, 122.

<sup>144</sup> Amy Kirschke, “Romare Bearden: The Making of a Black Political Cartoonist,” Claire Parfait ed. *Writing History from the Margins: African Americans and the Quest for Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 143-158.



THE PICKET LINE, 1934

Figure 3.4: Romare Bearden, "The Picket Line," *Crisis*, July 1934, c.o. Museum of Modern Art.

A month before Bearden's cartoon ran, Du Bois had described the kind of struggle he was envisioning in terms strikingly similar to those Antonio Gramsci was then using in his Italian prison cell, half a world away. "When an army moves to attack," Du Bois told his readers, "there are two methods which it may pursue." What he called "the older method" was what Gramsci called the war of maneuver, while his "modern method of fighting" was Gramsci's war of position. It emphasized "careful planning" and "slow, calculated forward mass movements." The modern method of fighting recognized that mass political action requires long and careful organizing if it is to bear fruit. Like the slaves of the general strike, practitioners of the modern method of fighting knew the value of waiting, hesitating, and recognizing the limits of what was possible in a world where being on the right side of history is no protection against the crushing indifference of social reality.<sup>145</sup> Whereas the NAACP looked to the New Deal state, and communists looked to the white-dominated labor movement, Du Bois saw in the seemingly bourgeois cooperative movement something far more radical: a way for African Americans to develop their political and economic agency through autonomous institutions that could also provide them with material security. "This is the kind of method," Du Bois insisted, "which we must use to solve the Negro problem and to win our fight against segregation."<sup>146</sup>

Du Bois's distinction allows us to better appreciate the ways in which the group economy responds to the tragic impasse of black politics in the Great Depression. The group economy begins with the reality of compulsory segregation and, in the near term, abandons some

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<sup>145</sup> As Bernard Williams puts it, tragedy shows us "that social reality can act to crush a worthwhile, significant, character or project without displaying either the lively individual purpose of a pagan god or the world-historical significance of a Judaic, a Christian, or a Marxist teleology." See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 165. Bernard Williams, "The Women of Trachis: Fictions, Pessimism, Ethics," *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* Myles Burnyeat ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 49-59 gives an even bleaker view.

<sup>146</sup> Du Bois, "Counsels of Despair," *Writings*, 1258-59.

cherished ideals of integration. At the end of *The Negro and Social Reconstruction*, he admitted, “momentarily the greater plans of the Niagara Movement and the N.A.A.C.P. for the emancipation of the American Negro cannot be realized because of the depression, and especially because white America is not ready to have them realized.”<sup>147</sup> Du Bois did not reject integration as a good; he rejected it as a good political program for the moment in which he was living. “What I propose,” he wrote, “is that into the interstices of this collapse of the industrial machine, the Negro shall search intelligently and carefully and farsightedly plan for his entrance into the new economic world.”<sup>148</sup> In pulling back from the capitalist world, the group economy was also a prefigurative effort to make a place for African Americans in an eventually post capitalist future, though Du Bois did not pretend to know what that world would look like in detail. “We are not called upon to be dogmatic as to just what the end of this change will be and what form the new organization will take,” he insisted.<sup>149</sup> As a form of marronage, the group economy was less a vision of a just society and more what Neil Roberts calls a “liminal and transitional social space *between* slavery and freedom.”<sup>150</sup> Du Bois’s tragic realism allowed him to see, against the protestations of both the liberal NAACP and leftist radicals, that creating such a space sometimes requires acting and organizing in ways that cut against values in which you deeply believe but do not have the power to attain.

### Conclusion – Towards a Permanent Reconstruction

Du Bois never lost sight of the difficulty of his plan for the group economy. “It has to be admitted this will be a real battle,” he granted at the end of *Dusk of Dawn*. Echoing his

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<sup>147</sup> Du Bois, *Negro and Social Reconstruction*, 157.

<sup>148</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 707.

<sup>149</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 699.

<sup>150</sup> Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 4.

assessment of Reconstruction as a “splendid failure,” he then added, “there are chances of failure, but there are also splendid chances of success.”<sup>151</sup> However, the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into the Second World War dramatically changed the political and economic situation in the United States. Wartime industry created demand for African American workers that surpassed even the levels reached during World War I. Patriotic sentiment made Du Bois’s strategic embrace of segregation and separatism seem disloyal to many progressives, even bordering on treasonous. Meanwhile, the Roosevelt administration’s efforts to position itself against the racism of Nazi Germany created new opportunities for civil rights groups, like the NAACP, and labor groups, like A. Philip Randolph’s Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to challenge racism in the United States. If there was moment of *occasione* in the 1930s for the creation of an African American group economy, that window was effectively closed by World War II.

Why, then, should we concern ourselves with a political program whose window of opportunity closed before it could be seriously attempted? The answer lies less in the specifics of Du Bois’s proposals for the group economy, though many of these have had an enduring influence on black political thought. Instead, Du Bois’s thought from this period matters because it helps us see how an awareness of the tragic nature of politics can contribute to and even strengthen our commitment to radical forms of democratic agency. As Cornel West writes, “a sense of the tragic is an attempt to keep alive some sense of possibility. Some sense of hope, some sense of agency. Some sense of resistance in a moment of defeat and disillusionment and a moment of discouragement.”<sup>152</sup> The failure of Reconstruction was such a moment of defeat, and

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<sup>151</sup> Du Bois, *Dusk*, 714.

<sup>152</sup> Cornel West, “Pragmatism and the Tragic,” *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times: Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993), 32.

over the course of his long life, Du Bois saw many others. But while many of his radical critics in the Depression later drifted towards Cold War liberalism, and some, like Harris, gave up writing about racial politics altogether, Du Bois's tragic realism enabled him to keep fighting, and to keep thinking about how the fight should be carried on. His activism was premised on the kind of hope that can only come from an unflinching sense of the tragic, what he elsewhere called "a hope not hopeless but unhopeful."<sup>153</sup> The core of this tragic hope is not to be found in the belief that our ideals will eventually be realized but in the conviction that, if we think and act carefully, we have it in ourselves to go on fighting for those ideals indefinitely. In other words, Du Bois used tragedy to teach his readers to hope wisely by using history to hold the balance between transformative moral vision and realistic political strategy.

So, what does that tell us about the question Du Bois asked at the beginning of scholarly career: "how far in a State can a recognized moral wrong safely be compromised?" At first, the answer does not seem encouraging for those who believe that an unjust order cannot endure. The capitalist collapse that Du Bois believed was inevitable has not occurred, and white supremacy is, if not stronger, more assertive today than it has been in years. The tragic failure of Reconstruction still defines our politics. But, the second tragedy of Reconstruction—the unending tragedy of thwarted historical memory—seems to be coming to an end. Few authors defend old tragic legend, and when modern politicians endorses its dangerous platitudes, as Hillary Clinton did in the 2016 election, they are widely condemned.<sup>154</sup> Reconstruction is still a tragedy, but for Du Bois's reasons, not Dunning's.

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<sup>153</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 507.

<sup>154</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Hillary Clinton Goes Back to the Dunning School," *Atlantic*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/hillary-clinton-reconstruction/427095/>. For one of the few recent attempts to define the tragedy of Reconstruction in terms of the vengeful policies of the radical Republicans, see Kirkpatrick Sale, *Emancipation Hell: The Tragedy Wrought by Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation* (Columbia, SC: Shotwell, 2015). Sale's bibliography includes Bowers (though he erroneously gives the book's title as *The Tragic Error*) but not Du Bois.

This change has gone hand-in-hand with calls for the completion of Reconstruction as what Eric Foner famously called “America’s unfinished revolution.” As early as 1956, C. Vann Woodward could see in the battle over school desegregation a “New Reconstruction.”<sup>155</sup> The description of the Civil Rights Movement as a “second reconstruction” became such a commonplace that few remember that there had already several “new reconstructions” and “second reconstructions.” Today, there are calls for a Third Reconstruction. Some focus, as Du Bois initially did, on voting rights and cross-racial coalitions. “What we really need is a constitutional amendment to guarantee the same voting rights in every state,” writes Reverend William Barber, who organized the Moral Monday movement in North Carolina to oppose the conservative efforts to rewrite the state constitution and embraces the interracial “fusionist” legacy of Reconstruction politics. “This must be the cornerstone of the Third Reconstruction.”<sup>156</sup> Meanwhile, the economic component of Reconstruction has been taken by the Movement for Black Lives, which defines its economic justice platform in the Du Boisian language of “a reconstruction of the economy to ensure Black communities have collective ownership, not merely access.”<sup>157</sup> And, as Du Bois did in the 1930s, it calls for “economic empowerment in low-income Black communities, by introducing and implementing cooperative institutions throughout urban and rural Black communities.” If there is a Third Reconstruction, it will be powered by these efforts at popular organizing that draw strength from the memory of reconstructions past.

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<sup>155</sup> C. Vann Woodward, “The ‘New Reconstruction’ in the South: Desegregation in Historical Perspective,” *Commentary* (June 1956). In words that would have been unthinkable without Du Bois’s scholarly and political work, he wrote, “negroes played important roles in both Reconstruction periods, but in the current movement they are vastly better equipped to defend themselves and advance their cause than were their newly emancipated grandfathers and great-grandfathers.”

<sup>156</sup> William J. Barber II and Johnathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 125.

<sup>157</sup> “Economic Justice,” The Movement for Black Lives, <https://policy.m4bl.org/economic-justice/>.

But perhaps the number of Reconstructions is beside the point. Perhaps politics always involves compromising with wrongs precisely because remedying old wrongs will always give rise to new ones. Perhaps reconstruction, then, is something we will always have to be doing. To some, this sort of realism might seem tragic in the wrong way, but it is in keeping what Du Bois told his readers in 1934, in words still worth hearing today. “The real battle is a matter of study and thought; of the building up of loyalties; of the long training of men; of the growth of institutions; of the inculcation of racial and national ideals. It is not a publicity stunt. It is a life.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Du Bois, “Counsels of Despair,” 1259.

The Poor Man's Machiavelli:  
Saul Alinsky and the Morality of Power

*As so often in political philosophy, the question needs to be asked: Who is supposed to be hearing this? Is there anyone who both needs to be told this and is in a position to make use of it? Political philosophy can no doubt offer reminders, but reminders are useful only where something is likely to be forgotten.<sup>1</sup>*

-Bernard Williams

The last three chapters have carried us an increasing distance from the mainstream of realist scholarship. From Hobbes on the nature of collective agency and the problem of rebellion, to Marx on working class organization and pressure politics, to Du Bois on the tragic dilemmas posed by the challenge of reconstructing an unjust political order in which survival cannot be taken for granted, I have tried to situate some of realism's abiding concerns in historical situations where they had real bite. While I hope this approach has been useful in broadening the range of authors and forms of agency that realists might want to study, the kind of realism it illuminates is, to a large degree, contextually specific and bound to a particular historical moment. At the end of each chapter, I highlighted some of the ways these arguments could speak to us in the present, but the focus so far has been on realism as a way think about the relationship between order and organizing in the history of political thought.

This chapter takes a different approach. Here, I turn to the work and ideas of American community organizer Saul Alinsky, who I place alongside contemporary realist thinkers to better understand what a realist approach to political organizing looks like today. Though he is not as influential as Hobbes, Marx, or Du Bois, Alinsky provides us with something that is missing from their work, namely a well-developed account of the organizer as a specific kind of political agent. Though these first three authors had sophisticated ideas about what popular organizing is and how it works, they generally saw organizing as the work of institutions and social groups. To

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 208.

be sure, there were labor organizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the NAACP had field organizers, like Ella Baker, from the time it was founded. But Marx and Du Bois saw themselves as providing intellectual leadership; they were more theorists of popular organizing than organizers themselves.<sup>2</sup> Alinsky, on the other hand, was an organizer for nearly his entire adult life, and the tradition of community organizing he inaugurated has only grown since his death in 1972. During that time, Alinsky consistently identified himself with and advocated for as a realist orientation to politics.

Unlike Hobbes, Marx, and Du Bois, who are sometimes read too abstractly, Alinsky is almost always read too practically, as a source for organizing tactics or the exponent of something called the “Alinsky method” or “Alinsky model” of organizing.<sup>3</sup> To many organizers working today, this model has become suffocatingly pervasive, a political monoculture that inhibits the emergence of new methods and practices better suited to contemporary struggles. The most prominent of Alinsky’s recent critics, Jane McAlevey, argues that Alinsky effectively destroyed real organizing, which was mastered by Communists in the CIO during the 1930s, by separating community organizing from labor struggles, abandoning the larger transformative vision of the left, and reifying the distinction between organizers and leaders.<sup>4</sup> She advocates a return to the “deep organizing” of the pre-Alinsky labor tradition. From the opposite angle, two veterans of the 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign have argued that Alinsky’s emphasis

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<sup>2</sup> This is less true of Du Bois, but even he frequently admitted that whatever authority he had came from the force of his ideas, not his skills in running an organization or maintaining relationships. This, after all, was why he chose to make *The Crisis* the center of his work at the NAACP.

<sup>3</sup> Hillary D. Rodham, “*There is Only the Fight...*” *An Analysis of the Alinsky Model*, Honors Thesis (Wellesley, 1969) is one of the first uses of the phrase “Alinsky model. On her connection to Alinsky, see below.

<sup>4</sup> McAlevey, *No Shortcuts*, esp. 40-9. For criticisms of Alinsky inspired by McAlevey, see Aaron Petkoff, “The Problem With Saul Alinsky,” *Jacobin* (May 10, 2017), <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/05/saul-alinsky-alinskyism-organizing-methods-cesar-chavez-ufw> and Clément Petitjean, “When Organizers Are Professionals,” (July 21, 2017), <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/07/community-organizing-staff-professionals-social-movements>.

on “small organizing “ruined the “mass revolutionary organizing” practiced by the American populists and the labor, civil rights, and gay rights movements. They advocate a turn towards “big organizing,” like that of the Sanders campaign, that uses modern communications technology “to mobilize millions of people.”<sup>5</sup> Alinsky’s influence of organizing has been so great that many organizers find it virtually impossible to criticize organizing as it is practiced today without framing their arguments as criticisms of him, even when these criticisms point in radically opposed directions.<sup>6</sup>

Though he wrote quite a bit about tactics and methods, and, to a certain extent, invited the kinds of criticisms offered by McAlevee, there is no such thing as the Alinsky model. The range of organizations he was involved with, the goals they pursued, and the methods they used are far too various to be described so monolithically. But it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage with these critics in detail. Instead, I want to reframe this conversation by focusing on Alinsky as a moral psychologist of political action and theorist of democratic ethics. This is not how he is normally read, but seeing his work in this light moves us beyond arguments about the Alinsky model towards the more fundamental question of what agency looks like in contemporary democratic politics. For Alinsky, organizing is a democratic vocation, and his description of the organizer is an example of what Sheldon Wolin famously called “epic theory,” a form of writing in which “the theorist seeks to reassemble the political world,” by giving us a

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<sup>5</sup> Bond and Exley, *Rules for Revolutionaries*, “Why Big Organizing.”

<sup>6</sup> That said, Alinsky continues to have many defenders and supporters. See Nick Bowlin, “Rereading Alinsky in Baltimore,” *Nation* (November 8, 2018), <https://www.thenation.com/article/build-baltimore-community-organizing-alinsky/> and Mike Miller, “Alinsky for the Left: The Politics of Community Organizing,” *Dissent* (Winter 2010), <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/alinsky-for-the-left-the-politics-of-community-organizing>. Among civil rights and racial justice organizers, Alinsky has been influential, but not so overwhelmingly so as to be subject to backlash. According to William Barber, “Saul Alinsky and his community organizing tradition had shown us the importance of building power and only tackling ‘winnable issues.’ His power analysis was crucial as we considered tactics and timing” (*The Third Reconstruction*, 81). But Barber, like Black Lives Matter groups, spends more discussing the importance of Ella Baker and other African American organizers than Alinsky.

new “structure of intentions,” through which to interpret politics.<sup>7</sup> While Alinsky would have been wary of how Wolin’s epic theory can become a substitute for action, he shared Wolin’s misgivings about “method” as the dominant category for understanding political and social life. Like Wolin, he believed that “because facts are richer than theorists it is the task of the theoretical imagination to re restate new possibilities.”<sup>8</sup> Wolin showed how Machiavelli exposed the new possibilities of modern politics in *The Prince*. Alinsky sought to do the same thing with the organizer.<sup>9</sup>

*The Prince* is guided by the question of how a new prince can acquire and hold power in a city without preexisting authority. Alinsky’s guiding question, and mine as well, is how power can be acquired and exercised by as many people as possible, starting from conditions of widespread inequality and popular disempowerment. His answer forces us to think about the possibility and the difficulties of affirming both a realist approach to political theory and a radical commitment to democratic politics. Like many realists, he saw political action as a continuous back-and-forth between the necessary creation of conflict and the eventuality of compromise. However, Alinsky went beyond most of today’s realists by embedding this back-and-forth in the larger process of democratic empowerment through organizing. He saw organizing as a form of political education that involves learning to use both conflict and compromise to build power and further the people’s goals. An organizer is an agent of the democratization of power who engages in “strategically hopeful action” to bring out the

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<sup>7</sup> Sheldon Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought* Martin Fleisher ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 23-75, 65-6.

<sup>8</sup> Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” 75. Though Wolin is skeptical of claims to realism in social science and of lazy efforts to classify theorists as realists or idealists, it is notable that his other exemplary epic theorist is Hobbes and that Marx also features prominently in this essay.

<sup>9</sup> In a letter to Jacques Maritain, Alinsky said his publisher wanted to call the book “The Poor Man’s Machiavelli,” hence the title of this chapter. See Bernard Doering ed., *The Philosopher and the Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky*. (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press: 1994), 89.

“potentially positive sum” nature of political power.<sup>10</sup> But Alinsky’s most important contribution, from a realist point of view, is his articulation of a distinctive approach to political ethics that holds these processes together in a way that is both recognizably realist and radically democratic, an ethical orientation we might call “the morality of power.”<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter, I develop Alinsky’s realist approach to democracy by examining how the morality of power can provide us with an alternative to realism’s traditional fixation on the ethics of statesmanship.<sup>12</sup> My aim is to clarify his ideas about power, self-interest, and the educative character of organizing in a way that illuminates how these concepts are used to develop the political and ethical capacities of ordinary people. Alinsky believed everyone should have the power to pursue their self-interest through politics, and this belief served as the foundation of his commitment to democratic empowerment. But, where contemporary realists too often follow Weber in understanding power as the ability to command violence, Alinsky was primarily interested in how relational power can serve as an alternative to violence. The morality of power entails learning how to use relational power and thick self-interest to further democratic forms of deliberation and action. Unlike the statesman of ordinary realism, the organizer’s goal is not just acquiring power and learning to use it ethically and effectively. An organizer’s job is to help the powerless learn how to use and think about power for themselves. Organizing is realist,

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<sup>10</sup> James H. Read and Ian Shapiro, “Transforming Power Relationships: Leadership, Risk, and Hope,” *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 01 (February 2014): 40–53, 41.

<sup>11</sup> “The Morality of Power” was the title of a speech Alinsky gave at Notre Dame in 1961 containing material that would later be published in *Rules for Radicals*. It was also one of the book’s working titles, though it was not a term he regularly used. See Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel: Saul Alinsky--His Life and Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 32.

<sup>12</sup> It is a great irony that Alinsky is best known today for the influence he and his ideas have had on two of the most important statesmen in America’s recent history: Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Clinton wrote her senior thesis about Alinsky, who liked her enough to offer her a spot in the IAF’s first training institute (she declined to attend Yale Law School). Obama never knew Alinsky, but he was trained as a community organizer in the Alinsky tradition and has written about his experience as an organizer in part two of *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004) and “Why Organize? Problems and Promise in the Inner City,” *After Alinsky: Community Organizing in Illinois* Peg Knoepfle, ed. (Springfield, Ill: Sangamon State University, 1990).

pedagogical, and democratic, and Alinsky's willingness to face up to the difficulty of holding these ideas together makes him an important source of inspiration for realists today.

At the heart of the morality of power is the idea we have been tracking throughout this dissertation: that organizing can mediate between order and disorder in ways that avoid the worst excesses of each. Alinsky saw the tension between order and disorder in both psychological and political terms. Psychologically, order implies the existence of "way of life...where things have some relationship and can be pieced together into a system that at least provides some clues to what life is about." Describing the 1960s youth movements, he argued, "what the present generation wants is what all generations have always wanted...a chance to strive for some sort of order."<sup>13</sup> At a political level, the yearning for order could contribute to progress. Much like today's realists, Alinsky believed "mankind has progressed only through learning how to develop and organize instruments of power in order to achieve order, security, morality, and civilized life itself, instead of a sheer struggle for physical survival."<sup>14</sup> This was why Alinsky emphasized the orderliness of organizing compared to other methods of political change. "Those who fear the building of People's Organizations as a revolution also forget that it is an orderly development of participation, interest, and action on the part of the masses of people," he wrote in his first book. "To reject orderly revolution is to be hemmed in by two hellish alternatives: disorderly, sudden, stormy, bloody revolution, or a further deterioration of the mass foundation of democracy to the point of inevitable dictatorship."<sup>15</sup>

Organizing draws on this yearning for order, but it recognizes that the yearning for order can itself become destructive if it is not productively channeled. A world characterized by

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<sup>13</sup> Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1989), xv, xvii.

<sup>14</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 52

<sup>15</sup> Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 198.

inequality, injustice, and powerlessness is “a world where neither motivations nor problems are neatly separated; where everything is involved and muddled with everything else; where the scene is one of disorder and strife.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Alinsky was scathing towards the educational system where people are “trained to emphasize order, logic, rational thought, direction, and purpose. We call it mental discipline and it results in a structured, static, closed, rigid, mental makeup.” Psychologically, the avoidance of disorder can be incapacitating. Politically, the need to assume order rather than create it is transformed into a fear of the disorder that would come from contesting existing injustices. When we accept this, “we turn from the glorious adventure of the pursuit of happiness to a pursuit of an illusionary security in an ordered, stratified, striped society.”<sup>17</sup> This was how Alinsky understood the rise of law and order politics in the 1960s and why he criticized it so vehemently. It was a “regress into acceptance of a coming massive repression in the name of ‘law and order.’”<sup>18</sup> Organizers, on the other hand, “must learn to see and understand the world in its disorder in order to be able to think and act in an orderly and logical manner.”<sup>19</sup> Organizing reveals that “real democracy is as disorderly as life itself—it does not hold to a form; it grows, expands, and changes to meet the needs of the people.”<sup>20</sup> The disorderliness of democracy is not a challenge to be overcome; it is essential to the functioning of political order. “Dissonance is the music of democracy,” Alinsky said, and an organizer is someone who knows how to carry the tune.<sup>21</sup>

### Realism and the Statesman

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<sup>16</sup> Saul Alinsky, “From Citizen Apathy to Participation,” (Industrial Areas Foundation, 1957), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 166, 196

<sup>18</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> Alinsky, “From Citizen Apathy to Participation,” 1.

<sup>20</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 199.

<sup>21</sup> Saul D. Alinsky, “The War on Poverty-Political Pornography,” *Journal of Social Issues* 21, no. 1 (January 1965): 41–47, 42.

Before turning to the specifics of Alinsky's democratic realism, it is worth looking at why t realism's efforts to develop a moral psychology of political action have come to focus so heavily on statesmanship. Andrew Sabl, one of the only realists to have written about Alinsky, argues that realism ought to be guided by:

a focus on agents, their decisions, and their strategic contexts or situations; a sense of the pervasive and permanent relevance of interests, conflicts and power to politics and to political theory; respect for instrumental rationality and comfort with hypothetical imperatives; a love of ugly facts and political complexity; an awareness that a crucial part of being powerless is standing especially in need of institutional – rather than philosophical – restraints on power; and an insistence that, given that no set of political reasons will seem 'legitimate' to everyone, state action rests partly on the authority of institutions rather than the persuasiveness of arguments, and [that] citizen politics uses pressure (strikes, boycotts, shaming and ostracism) as well as reasons.<sup>22</sup>

Realists like Sabl hope to use this kind of approach to develop an analysis of political conflicts and institutions that can provide guidance on how political actors should think about their actions in ways that ideal theories operating under highly idealized circumstances cannot.<sup>23</sup> Or, as Raymond Geuss succinctly puts it, ethical concepts “are politically relevant only to the extent to which they do actually influence behaviour in some way,” and it is only to that extent that political theorists ought to be concerned with them.<sup>24</sup> Thus, realists attempt to derive an ethics of political conduct from an analysis of existing political institutions and the moral psychology of the actors in them.

The close connection between moral psychology and political ethics illustrates realism's debt to Bernard Williams. In perhaps his most famous book, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams argues there can be no foundation for ethical reasoning because there is nothing that must necessarily count as a reason for acting. Building on his earlier account of internal reasons,

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Sabl, “Realist Liberalism: An Agenda,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (May 2017): 366–84.

<sup>23</sup> For realism as a focus on “actions and judgments” rather than “states of affairs,” see Sam Bagg, “Against Legitimacy: Towards an Action-Centered Realism,” manuscript on file with author.

<sup>24</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 9.

he insists that what counts as a reason is ultimately a question of the reasons an agent already believes herself to have and what she could come to recognize as a new reason on the basis of those pre-existing beliefs.<sup>25</sup> He also criticizes both Kantian and utilitarian ethics for suggesting philosophy can tell people what the moral thing to do in a given situation is on the basis of highly general concepts, like rational consistency or general utility, that separate out and give priority to specifically moral reasons for action over other sorts of practical considerations. Williams rejects the idea that there is a specific class of necessarily ethical reasons and suggests instead that philosophy ought to return to the older, Aristotelian tradition of moral psychology. For Aristotle, the study of ethics involved understanding the virtues that allowed a particular sort of person—the good man—to thrive in a particular form of collective social organization—the Greek polis. Williams did not believe that Aristotle’s virtues could be much of a guide to modern life, but he held that philosophy could contribute to ethical life by examining the “thick ethical concepts” people and communities use to create reasons for action by uniting judgments of fact and value.<sup>26</sup> Moral psychology then analyzes thick ethical concepts and relates them to ways of thinking and acting that express or are in conflict with them, recognizing that no particular concept will determine a person’s behavior in all circumstances.

Williams illustrates the importance of moral psychology to questions of political ethics in his classic essay, “Politics and Moral Character.” In it, he asks, “what sort of person do we want and need to be a politician,” if a political career requires “actions which remain morally disagreeable even when politically justified.”<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the more grandiose concerns of many realists,

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<sup>25</sup> Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101-113.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 140-5. For a slightly different use of these terms, see Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Williams, “Politics and Moral Character,” *Moral Luck*, 54-70.

Williams is interested in “the politician not so much as a national leader or maker of history, but as professional,” adding, “I shall defer the more heady question of politicians being criminals in favour of the more banal notion that they are crooks.” By this, he does not mean that politicians break the law, but that being a politician means sometimes treating other people—even friends—unfairly by lying, deliberately misleading, bullying, and using them to attain one’s own ends. These things are necessary because politics involves “large interests” and “unstructured bargaining.” Thus, “if politics is to exist as an activity at all, some moral considerations must be expected to get out of its way.”<sup>28</sup> That moral considerations must yield does not mean they disappear, and Williams wants politicians to remember that morally disagreeable actions, however politically necessary, are still morally disagreeable. A politician who performs such actions ought to regret them. “The point,” he argues, “is that only those who are reluctant or disinclined to do the morally disagreeable when it is really necessary have much chance of not doing it when it is not necessary.” Thus, a politician’s character is determined by a willingness to act on political reasons, even when doing so violates private morality, while still experiencing the regret that accompanies immoral behavior.<sup>29</sup>

An important corollary of Williams’s approach is that any theory that seeks to provide an account of political ethics must begin with the question of what sorts of political actors there are

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<sup>28</sup> Williams’ insistence on the importance of ordinary politics is brought out in a late essay on Wagner, in which he criticizes the dream of “a redemptive, transforming politics which transcended the political.” “Such ideas had in Germany a long, complex and ultimately catastrophic history,” he writes, and “politics, or at least ‘ordinary’ politics, the politics of parties, power, bargaining and so on, was seen as something divisive, low, materialistic and superficial, in contrast to something else which was deep, spiritual and capable of bringing people together into a higher unity.” See Bernard Williams, “Wagner and the Transcendence of Politics,” *Essays and Reviews, 1959-2002* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 388-404.

<sup>29</sup> The classic example in Williams’s *oeuvre* is Agamemnon, who faced a tragic choice between the personal wrong of sacrificing his daughter and the public wrong of calling off the Greek expedition against Troy. Williams believed that Agamemnon did what a leader in his situation had to do, but that he would be deeply wrong not to feel regret for killing his own daughter. See Bernard Williams, “Ethical Consistency,” *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 166-186.

in a given society.<sup>30</sup> There can be no view from nowhere, and Williams was critical of attempts to use a purely philosophical moral psychology on the grounds that doing so papers over the actual basis of political conflict. In sum, Williams's meta-ethical theory calls on realists to take the perspective of agents who exist within the political system they are trying to understand. This does not mean that they must take the perspective of statesmen, though it is not hard to see why realists have gravitated to that figure. Like Machiavelli, realists attempt to take power seriously by looking at the most visible political actors and institutions of their time. For Machiavelli, this meant the new prince and the independent principality. Today's realists, in turn, try to understand the political virtues that allow statesmen to create and maintain order through the dominant form of political organization in modernity, the sovereign state.

By using the term "statesman" I want to call to mind Max Weber's "Politics as Vocation," one of the touchstones of contemporary realism.<sup>31</sup> More precisely, I use "statesman" to refer to a person whose power derives from having been authorized to make decisions about the use of violence by an institution or hierarchically-organized collective agent of another sort. Though this usually means the state, it does not have to. The most important element of this definition comes directly from Weber, who asked, "can the ethical demands made on politics really be quite indifferent to the fact that politics operates with a highly specific means, namely, power, behind which violence lies concealed?"<sup>32</sup> For Weber, the exercise of power is not what makes politics ethically distinctive; the ability to use and command violence for political ends is what matters, and political ethics are about taking responsibility for violence. This means political

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<sup>30</sup> Bernard Williams, "St. Just's Illusion."

<sup>31</sup> See Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 34-5; Mark Philp, *Political Conduct*, 80-4; and Williams, *In the Beginning*, 72. For critical responses to realist readings of Weber, see Shalini Satkunanandan, "Max Weber and the Ethos of Politics beyond Calculation," *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 01 (February 2014): 169-81 and Stefan Eich and Adam Tooze, "The Allure of Dark Times: Max Weber, Politics, and the Crisis of Historicism," *History and Theory* 56, no. 2 (June 2017): 197-215.

<sup>32</sup> Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* David Owen and Tracy B. Strong eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 80-1.

ethics are only needed by statesmen who wield the coercive authority of the state to maintain order and by revolutionaries who seek to replace that order and usurp the state's right to the legitimate use of violent force. Weber had nothing to say about the political ethics required by ordinary citizens trying to control the actions of the state in which they live through nonviolent means.

Weber's influence can be found even when realist scholars explicitly try to examine political actors other than states and statesmen. To take a notable example, Mark Philp begins his *Political Conduct* with an extended discussion Julius Caesar and, particularly, of Machiavelli's evaluation of Caesar's role in the collapse of the Roman Republic.<sup>33</sup> This chapter, which deals with the question of how a political order is made and unmade by ambitions it fosters in its politicians, begins the first of the book's three major sections. They are: "Rulers," "Servants, Followers, and Officials," and "Subjects, Citizens, and Institutions," in that order. Of these, the section on rulers is by far the longest. When Philp does finally come to look at political actors operating outside the state in his chapter on "Resistance and Protest," in the third section, he focuses primarily on the leaders of resistance movements as wielders of power, bypassing the question of how that movement and its power were created in the first place. Moreover, he is most interested in the ways in which movement leaders, like statesmen, become responsible for the violence inflicted by or on their followers when violence is a predictable response to their protests, even when the protests themselves are nonviolent.

Karuna Mantena's study of Gandhi provides a more complex example of the role of the statesman in realist thought. Mantena is explicitly indebted to Williams's critique of normative liberalism and its tendency to speak "in the voice of the state or from a position of power,

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<sup>33</sup> Philp, *Political Conduct*, 19-36.

concerning itself with outlining legislation or policy along proposed normative guidelines.” This, she argues, results in “an absence of a theory of politics in the sense that liberal philosophy lacks a theoretical account of political constraints, contestation, resistance, and of what to do in the face of recalcitrance.”<sup>34</sup> However, her discussion of Gandhi does not focus his rise to power in the Indian National Congress or in the means he employed to contend with his rivals for leadership and authority, questions that seem typical of kinds of recalcitrance she describes. Instead, she takes Gandhi’s power as leader for granted so she can focus on the relationship between means and ends in nonviolence, particularly the ability of *satyagraha* to disrupt the cycles of violence so often characteristic of revolutionary political action. Mantena sees in *satyagraha* “a mode of militant and direct political action against unjust laws or an unjust political order, an order with which you are in, or place yourself in, an antagonistic relationship,” and her attention to how nonviolent power does this is undoubtedly an important corrective to most realist scholarship.<sup>35</sup> But, the idea of the Weberian statesmen still informs her argument insofar as Gandhi appears as a leader who must deal with, and bear the responsibility for, the violence resulting from his personal ability to command collective political actions. In other words, she commends Gandhi as a theorist of statesmanship because his political ethic of nonviolent *satyagraha* is, counter-intuitively, the most responsible way to use violence as a means for achieving political ends.

To say that realists have been overly fixated on the Weberian statesman is not to say that they are wrong to insist that the power of violence is at the core of the ethical problems of statesmanship. The mistake is in conflating the specific ethical demands of statesmanship with the ethical demands of politics in general, which concern the use of power in all its forms, not

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<sup>34</sup> Mantena, “Another Realism,” 459.

<sup>35</sup> Mantena, “Another Realism,” 465.

simply with respect to violence. Furthermore, focusing on the monopolistic control of violence leads realists to exaggerate the importance of statesmen at the expense of more democratic forms of political agency. The young Barack Obama expressed the limits of the statesman when he reflected on the accomplishments of Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor. "At the margins," he wrote, "Harold could make city services more equitable. Black professions now got a bigger share of city business. We had a black school superintendent, a black police chief, a black CHA director...but beneath the radiance of Harold's victory, in Altgeld [the public housing project Obama was organizing] and elsewhere, nothing seemed to change."<sup>36</sup> Obama's fears were duly confirmed when Washington died unexpectedly, leaving "no political organization in place" for blacks in Chicago to keep his political machine intact or choose a successor.<sup>37</sup> Though Obama eventually decided to abandon organizing and pursue political power as a statesman, his insights into the limits of the kind of power wielded by statesman, and the difficulties he had once he acquired that power, should make us wonder how realistic it is to believe that statesmanship can overcome the antidemocratic forces that dominate America politics.

### Saul Alinsky: The Archetype of the Organizer

The difference between a statesman and an organizer is brought out by a story Alinsky often told audiences who asked him what an organizer did. In the story, a group of radical, young seminary students visit him for advice. "We're going to be ordained," the students tell him, "and then we'll be assigned to different parishes, as assistants to—frankly—stuffy, reactionary old pastors. They will disapprove of a lot of what you and we believe in, and we will be put into a

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<sup>36</sup> Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 230.

<sup>37</sup> Obama, *Dreams*, 288.

killing routine.” Hence their question: “How do we keep our faith in true Christian values, everything we hope to do to change the system?” Alinsky responded that they had a choice between being priests or bishops. A bishop “bootlicks and politics his way up justifying it with the rationale, ‘After I get to be a bishop I’ll use my office for Christian reformation.’” “Unfortunately,” he continued, “one changes in many ways on the road to a bishopric, and then one says, ‘I’ll wait until I am a cardinal and then I can be more effective.’” The choice they faced was simple: “When you go out that door, just make your own personal decision about whether you want to be a bishop or a priest, and everything else will follow from there.”<sup>38</sup> In this story, the bishop is analogous to a Weberian statesman, someone who seeks to acquire power by rising through an existing institution into an official position that carries the authority to command others. The students who visited him might well have thought that this was the best way to change the system, but Alinsky’s story was designed to make them suspicious of the idea that change comes from above. Instead, by asking them to imagine what they could accomplish by remaining priests, he introduced them to the idea of the organizer as someone who creates power from the bottom rather than trying to capture it at the top.

Alinsky was born in 1909 to an Orthodox Jewish family in the slums of Chicago and attended the University of Chicago on a scholarship.<sup>39</sup> After graduating, he received a fellowship to do graduate work in criminology, which he used to study Al Capone’s criminal organization up-close. He later went on to study young street gangs and worked as a criminologist for the Illinois prison system. Around this time, he also became committed to the antifascist politics of

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<sup>38</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 13. Ironically, this story probably came from Bishop Bernard Sheil. A *Time* article on Sheil’s career from 1953 reports that the first time he took the stage with John Lewis in support of the CIO (an event Alinsky organized), a local banker told him “the minute you step on that platform, you lose your chance to become archbishop.” He stepped up anyway, and he never became Archbishop of Chicago. See “The Bishop’s 25<sup>th</sup>,” *Time* (May 11, 1953).

<sup>39</sup> Alinsky’s standard biography is Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*.

the Popular Front, working with the Congress for Industrial Organization (CIO) on progressive organizing efforts intended to prevent the rise of fascism in the in the United States. CIO leader John L. Lewis became Alinsky's lifelong friend and, along with Bishop Bernard Sheil, one his chief political mentors. In 1939, Alinsky began building a community organization in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood. The organization he helped create, called the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC), brought together the Catholic Church and the CIO, the two previously hostile institutions to which most of its Eastern European residents belonged. Agnes Meyer, wife of *Washington Post* owner Eugene Meyer and mother of Katharine Graham, called the BYNC an "orderly revolution, slowly but steadily getting under way throughout our whole country."<sup>40</sup> In 1940, Alinsky started the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in order to make Meyer's prediction come true, and he spent the rest of his life organizing in communities around the United States.

A few examples of these early IAF organizations will illustrate the range of Alinsky's efforts. The Community Service Organization (CSO) in California organized Mexican-Americans to register to vote and helped them acquire citizenship, as well as being the launch pad for the organizing careers of Cesar Chavez, Fred Ross, and Dolores Huerta. The Organization for the Southwest Community (OSC) sought to ease racial tensions and reduce white flight in southwest Chicago.<sup>41</sup> The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) was "the first large-

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<sup>40</sup> Meyer's six-part series on the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, "Orderly Revolution," *Washington Post*, June 4-9, 1945, made Alinsky a national figure and even attracted the attention of President Truman. On Alinsky's earliest organizing efforts, see Saul D. Alinsky, "Community Analysis and Organization," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 6 (May 1941), p. 797-808.

<sup>41</sup> On the OSC, see Mark Santow, "Running in Place: Saul Alinsky, Race, and Community Organizing," *Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change* Marion Orr ed. (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 28-55.

scale modern civil rights organization to Chicago.”<sup>42</sup> His last major organizing effort, FIGHT, was a black power organization created after large-scale race riots in Rochester, New York.<sup>43</sup> Among Alinsky’s most well-known antagonists were two of Chicago’s most powerful mayors, Joe Kelly and Richard Daley, Eastman-Kodak, then one of America’s largest corporations, and his own alma mater, the University of Chicago, which tried to force an unpopular urban renewal program on the African-American residents of Woodlawn. He also wrote two bestselling books on organizing, *Reveille for Radicals*, published in 1949, and *Rules for Radicals*, published in 1971, a year before his unexpected death.

Alinsky’s intellectual formation and influences reflect his life story. From the urban sociology he studied at the University of Chicago, he learned to define communities as patterns of meaningful relationships and repeated interactions. As Luke Bretherton has shown in his intellectual genealogy of IAF organizing, Alinsky also pulled from sources as diverse as the rabbinical tradition, the Christian social thought of Jacques Maritain and Reinhold Niebuhr, Deweyan pragmatism’s emphasis on compromise and suspicion of moralistic approaches to politics, and the close relationship between freedom and conflict expressed by early American thinkers like Thomas Paine, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson.<sup>44</sup> Bretherton claims the IAF embraced “a broadly Aristotelian conception of politics” only after Alinsky’s death, but his

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<sup>42</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*, 363. Charles E. Silberman’s glowing account of The Woodlawn Organization in *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1964) made Alinsky a celebrity for the rest of his life. The book’s cover carried endorsements from Ralph Abernathy, Whitney Young, and Malcolm X.

<sup>43</sup> FIGHT’s President, Minister Franklin Florence had been a friend of Malcolm X. According to Florence, Malcolm X told him, “Alinsky knew more about organizing than anybody in the country.” Stokely Carmichael also cited FIGHT as an important black power organization at an event where he shared the stage with Alinsky in 1967 (Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*, 464, 508). William F. Buckley Jr.’s characterization of FIGHT was predictably less flattering in “Is There an Alinsky in Your Future?” *National Review* (November 1, 1966), though Buckley clearly delighted playing Edmund Burke in response to Alinsky’s Jacobin, so much so that he even had Alinsky on *Firing Line* on December 11, 1967.

<sup>44</sup> Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 21-56.

abundant references to Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, and Heraclitus show that ancient political and ethical thinkers had long been an important source of inspiration for him.<sup>45</sup> The most important canonical thinker for Alinsky, however, was Alexis de Tocqueville, whose views of the relationship between self-interest and community are foundational to IAF organizing. From these sources came his view that if, beginning at the local level, people were able to gain the power they needed to take control of their lives in small ways, they would be driven by necessity to confront, step-by-step, the larger structures that limited the exercise of their newly-acquired power, thereby building their own freedom from the bottom up.

Though Alinsky is often thought of as a 1960s radical, his relationship to the New Left was quite contentious, and his intellectual anchor was in the radical politics of the 1930s and 40s. Of the various groups involved in the New Left, he was most sympathetic to the Black Power movement, though not unreservedly so.<sup>46</sup> Though opposed to the Vietnam War, he was strongly critical of the antiwar movement for what he saw as its neglect of organizing in favor of middle-class cultural politics.<sup>47</sup> He never seriously engaged with feminism and saw organizing in the macho terms of a stereotypical 1930s CIO organizer. At the same time, there are striking similarities between aspects of Alinsky's organizing work, like the house-meeting approach pioneered by the CSO, and the consciousness-raising circles used around the same time by

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<sup>45</sup> For example, von Hoffman's IAF paper "Reorganization in the Casbah," draws on book one of Aristotle's *Politics* to argue, in a section on the "business of politics," that "the arrangement of society and the conduct of the state are, more than anything else, the proper business of politics." Though "community and politics, as the words are usually used, are things apart," Aristotle's definition of politics reveals that this is a mistake, and community organizing must therefore be concerned with the political order in its largest sense. See Nick von Hoffman, "Reorganization in the Casbah," Industrial Areas Foundation Records, [ca. 1938-1995], box 4Zd572, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>46</sup> On Alinsky and black power, see Rowena Ianthe Alfonso, "'Crucial to the Survival of Black People': Local People, Black Power, and Community Organizations in Buffalo, New York, 1966-1968," *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 1 (January 2017): 140-56.

<sup>47</sup> Though Alinsky joined the antiwar protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, he was slow to criticize the war publicly, and he worried that Martin Luther King's decision to do so would weaken his national standing. But Vietnam's role in the crisis of American liberalism was the subject of his last published article: Saul Alinsky, "Liberating America's Liberals," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (April 1972): 1-6.

second-wave feminism.<sup>48</sup> These similarities point to ways in which Alinsky's views on power, agency, interest can be enriched by looking at how these concepts have been developed by contemporary feminist theorists.

Alinsky, however, was not a professional political theorist, and the aim of his books was not to provide organizers with systematic arguments. His aim in writing was to produce the organizers themselves. The "rules" of *Rules for Radicals* were really "principles that the organizer must carry with him into battle," or, as Andrew Sabl puts it, "dispositions of character he thought vital" to the work of organizing.<sup>49</sup> Alinsky's writing style performed his psychological objectives by both adopting and challenging the values he believed readers would bring to his texts. Frequently, this works as form of shock therapy, using jarring language to startle and even offend readers accustomed to talking about politics according to the conventions of "middle-class moral hygiene."<sup>50</sup> As his close friend Nicholas von Hoffman writes, "it is astonishing that anyone can read *Rules for Radicals* and not realize that its author was consumed by the demands of ethics... His words and phrases are harsh, pungent and provocative. That is as it must be because he was sounding the trumpet blast for democracy."<sup>51</sup> He was, in other words,

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<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Stout *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2010), 149. Mark Santow provides an example of IAF organizing that played to gendered norms while also recognizing the importance of women's agency. The OSC, trying to reduce white flight "published 10,000 copies of the short play *How to Use Facts to Change Your Husband's Mind*—a suggested role play for local wives to convince their spouses that the Southwest Side had the lonely suburbs beat" ("Running in Place," 36-7). One of the few social workers Alinsky deeply admired was Jane Addams, and his debt to her is explored in Maurice Hamington, "Community Organizing: Addams and Alinsky," *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams* Maurice Hamington ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 255-274. Heather Booth of the Midwest Academy and Citizen Action, has built on and revised Alinsky's method to account for feminist concerns, see excerpts from her work in Aaron Schutz and Mike Miller eds., *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 245-73.

<sup>49</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 138. Andrew Sabl, *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 270.

<sup>50</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas von Hoffman, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 181.

a practical moral psychologist who wrote to shape agents rather than arguments. And the key to agency, he believed, is power.

### Power - Why Organizations Exist

A cardinal principle of the morality of power is that politics is and ought to be about power. In the most famous passage from *Reveille for Radicals*, Alinsky differentiated his radicalism from a liberal approach to social justice according to their respective understandings of the ethical significance of power: “A fundamental difference between liberals and radicals is to be found in the issue of power. Liberals fear power or its application. They labor in confusion over the significance of power and fail to recognize that only through the achievement and constructive use of power can people better themselves.”<sup>52</sup> In *Rules for Radicals*, he lamented the negative connotations attached to words like power, self-interest, compromise, and conflict by people who were unwilling to face the realities of political conflict. “Every organization known to man, from governments on down, has only one reason for being—that is, organizing for power in order to put into practice or promote its common purpose... *To know power and not fear it is essential to its constructive use and control.*”<sup>53</sup> Alinsky wanted his readers to see organizing as something all institutions and collective actors interested in power necessarily do, regardless of whether they do it well or poorly, deliberately or naively. Power is the essential component of political agency, both the necessary prerequisite and the central objective of political action.

When defining power, Alinsky typically quoted *Webster's*, which told him power is simply “the ability to act.”<sup>54</sup> This may seem bland, but it is almost identical to Amy Allen’s

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<sup>52</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 21-2.

<sup>53</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 52-3, italics original

<sup>54</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 212.

definition of power as “the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act.”<sup>55</sup> Allen argues that only such a broad definition of power can encompass the full range of reasons that feminists are interested in power and the different forms it takes, what she calls power-over (as in the case of some people dominating others), power-to (as when people resist domination), and power-with (as when people join in solidarity to challenge domination together). Organizers have much the same reasons for being interested in power as feminists in that they must understand the forms of power that are used to dominate people, and the ways in which those people are able to resist domination, in order to help them organize their own power to oppose it. Alinsky, like Allen, thought power had to be understood broadly if it was to be used strategically.

But what is the ability to act? Alinsky was fond of saying “the real action is the reaction of the opposition,” and this is a philosophical point about his conception of agency as much a commonplace about the dynamics of political conflict.<sup>56</sup> According to Sharon Krause, “to be an agent is to have an impact on the world that one can recognize as one’s own.” Agency is, however, “a socially distributed phenomenon,” because “our effects frequently depend on the social uptake provided by other people—on how they interpret what we are doing and how they respond to it.”<sup>57</sup> The ability to act, therefore, is the ability to elicit a reaction from others; agency means not being ignored. Someone who does not have power is unable to act in this intersubjective sense, unable to engage in conflicts or to craft solutions to shared problems. In

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<sup>55</sup> Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 127. Geuss makes the same point when he writes, “it seems most enlightening to construe ‘power’ as in principle connected with general concepts like ‘ability to do’, rather than as designating exclusively a form of coercion or domination. One cannot treat ‘power’ as if it referred to a single, uniform substance or relation wherever it was found. It makes sense to distinguish a variety of qualitatively distinct kinds of powers” (*Politics and the Imagination*, 53, parentheses omitted). This is much more useful than the way he discusses power in *Philosophy and Real Politics*.

<sup>56</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 74, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Sharon Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 4.

order to be an agent, a person must exist in relationships with others whose uptake is the source of a given action's effects. This is the driving insight behind Alinsky's relational theory of power.

"Power," Alinsky wrote, "has always derived from two main sources, money and people. Lacking money, the Have-Nots must build power from their own flesh and blood... Against the finesse and sophistication of the status quo, the Have-Nots have always had to club their way."<sup>58</sup> Alinsky described his approach to this problem, goading political elites to use their power in counterproductive ways and "utilizing the power of one part of the power structure against another part," as "political jujitsu."<sup>59</sup> Though the language he used was often violent, the point is that power can only be built through the difficult and dirty work of building an organization; a mass of people unable to coordinate or act together are incapable of exercising power in a sustained way. The organizer creates relationships, brings together different groups on the basis of mutual self-interest, and helps the organization increase its power. When building an organization, "every move revolves around one central point: how many recruits will this bring to the organization... If by losing in a certain action he can get more members than by winning, then victory lies in losing and he will lose."<sup>60</sup> As von Hoffman wrote in a paper on organizing from 1963, "the organizer's first job is to organize, not right wrongs, not avenge injustice, not to win the battle of freedom. That is the task of the people who will accomplish it through the organization if it ever gets built."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 127.

<sup>59</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 148. I strongly suspect that Alinsky, like Gene Sharp, adapted the idea of political jiu-jitsu from the work of American Gandhian Richard Gregg, who described *satyagraha* as a kind of moral jiu-jitsu.

<sup>60</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 113.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas von Hoffman, "Finding and Making Leaders," in Schutz and Miller, *People Power*, 74-86, 81.

Ed Chambers, Alinsky's successor at the IAF, developed the idea of relational power by drawing on the work of political theorists like Hannah Arendt, Bernard Crick, and Sheldon Wolin.<sup>62</sup> Employing some of the same terms as Allen, Chambers defines relational power as a form of "power with," rather than the unilateral "power over" of command backed by violence. When people come together on the basis of common concerns, they are able to act to support each other in pursuit of their goals. Jointly, they are even able to force powerful opponents to enter into ongoing agonistic relationships with them, relationships in which conflicts and interests are accommodated through political means. In line with Arendt, Chambers argues violence is a form of unilateral power qualitatively distinct from and incompatible with relational power.<sup>63</sup> Alinsky, however, did not make absolute distinctions between relational power and other forms of power, including violence.<sup>64</sup> The relevant difference for him was not between different forms of power so much as the basis of the relationships from which power is derived and the ways in which it is brought to bear on opponents.

Alinsky's early experiences studying organized crime gave him a different understanding of the interaction between relational power and violence than is held by either Chambers or the standard Weberian picture. What he saw in 1930s Chicago was that violence, even violence that was seen as legitimate, was by no means an exclusive tool of the state. It was not always possible to differentiate between violence carried out by the city government and violence carried out by organized crime because organized crime effectively was the city government. Years later, he told an interviewer, "the Capone gang was actually a public utility."

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<sup>62</sup> Edward Chambers and Michael Cowan, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 55-7, 70. Chambers calls Wolin "America's finest political teacher" (125). Jean Elshtain was also a long-time board member during Chambers's tenure as head of the IAF.

<sup>63</sup> Chambers and Cowan, *Roots for Radicals*, 20.

<sup>64</sup> For a similar argument, see Pamela Pansardi, "Power to and power over: two distinct concepts of power?," *Journal of Political Power*, 5:1 (2012), 73-89.

He “learned a hell of a lot about the uses and abuses of power from the mob, lessons that stood me in good stead later on, when I was organizing.”<sup>65</sup> His intimate involvement with organized crime taught him that violence was not the sole source of the mob’s power. The mob’s ability to use violence depended on relationships of trust and reciprocity built around family bonds, common ethnic identities, and shared interests. As Bretherton argues, “trust and strong relationships, in addition to the threat of violence, are crucial to maintaining the effective management and power of any organized criminal group... In his work in *Back of the Yards*, Alinsky sought to use the same emphasis on trust and relationships in organizing the poor to resist the power of organized crime, substituting the threat of violence with the threat of nonviolent means of exerting pressure.”<sup>66</sup>

For an organizer, relationships are the foundation of political power, not violence. Even statesmen can exercise violence only because the state is composed of institutionalized relationships of office that give them the authority to do so. The power of violence itself can even be understood in relational terms insofar as violence is used to coerce people into unequal relationships upheld by fear. This underscores a larger point about Alinsky’s approach to political ethics. Violence is not the reason that politics requires its own morality because violence is just one way in which political power can be exercised among many. Political ethics must be concerned with the acquisition and exercise of power in all its forms. Not all the relationships people have in their lives should involve the pursuit of self-interest by way of power, at least not all the time, but political ethics are needed whenever they are.

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<sup>65</sup> Eric Norden, “Saul Alinsky: A Candid Conversation with the Feisty Radical Organizer,” *Playboy* (March 1972), 59-178 (nonsequential), 66.

<sup>66</sup> Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 26.

As Alinsky did not think that the use of violence was an essential feature of politics, he did not have an absolute position on when the use of violence is justifiable. His suspicion of violence came from his doubts about its value as a means for expanding a democratic organization's power, rather than a moral commitment to nonviolence. According to von Hoffman, Alinsky saw power "in terms of vote power or money power or public opinion power, never violent power." At the same time, "Saul had a lot to say in private about how hard it is to control violence. It is not like an electric wall switch to be flipped on and off. Judicious and measured, he would tell you, is quite a trick to pull off. People can get violent when it is a tactical disaster or stay cowed and quiet when one punch would do a world of good."<sup>67</sup> The other problem with violence, beyond how difficult it is to control, is that there is no reason to think democratic groups will get the better of violent conflicts. As Alinsky quipped, "'power comes out of the barrel of a gun!' is an absurd rallying cry when the other side has all the guns."<sup>68</sup> The difference between a punch and a gun is also a reminder that he was far too concrete and specific a political thinker to believe that an argument justifying the use of one could also justify the other. Violence is an abstract category containing many kinds of action that must be treated separately. Nor did Alinsky agree with Gandhi and Mantena that suffering can be a morally purifying or self-limiting force for containing resentment and converting opponents. Consequently, he shied away from tactics of nonviolent resistance that relied on exposing his own side to the violence of the state. He believed that organizers who knew how to acquire power through the full range of relationships and resources available to them could often find surer means of achieving their goals.

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<sup>67</sup> von Hoffman, *Radical*, 194.

<sup>68</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, xxi.

Some leading scholars of the IAF, like Harry Boyte, have argued that Alinsky's theory of relational power "neglects to acknowledge power based on control over the flow of information, communications, professional practices, and cultural productions—what can be called knowledge power."<sup>69</sup> According to Boyte, "in the 1960s, Alinsky severed the connection between community organizing and the cultural organizing necessary to develop broader democratic possibilities," resulting in "an absence of [IAF-style organizing] from elections, the professions, higher education, intellectual life, and the struggle over the meaning of the nation and the identities of its people."<sup>70</sup> Whatever the merits of this argument with respect to the practices of the contemporary IAF, it is hard to see how Alinsky, who devoted the last decade of his life to writing, speaking, and spreading the gospel of organizing any way he could, can be accused of neglecting cultural and intellectual production. He wrote *Rules for Radicals* because he believed that the isolation and disillusionment of New Left activists resulted from the way McCarthyism had cut them off from the larger history of the American radical tradition that Stears celebrates.<sup>71</sup> "Few of us survived the Joe McCarthy holocaust of the early 1950s," he admitted. "My fellow radicals who were supposed to pass on the torch of experience and insights to a new generation were just not there."<sup>72</sup> Culture and ideas matter, but they become power only through people. For example, when TWO hired its own urban planners to professionally critique the University of Chicago's urban renewal proposal, it used expert knowledge to further its own power in what was then an innovative way. TWO not only used "hard-power" tactics like rent

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<sup>69</sup> Harry C. Boyte, "Populism—Bringing Culture Back In," *The Good Society* 21, no. 2 (2012): 300–319, 306.

<sup>70</sup> Boyte, "Populism," 310–11.

<sup>71</sup> Alinsky played a bit part in the downfall of McCarthy when he organized and publicized Bishop Bernard Sheil's April 9, 1954 speech to the CIO, where Sheil became the first prominent Catholic clergymen to publicly condemn McCarthy. On the speech and its fallout, see Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*, 239–255 and Saul D. Alinsky, "The Bishop and the Senator," *The Progressive*, July 1954, 4–8.

<sup>72</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, xiii–xiv. Alinsky's radical tradition also made room for John Brown, whose portrait hung next Paine's in what he wryly called his "contemplative philosophy corner," reinforcing the point that Alinsky's preference for nonviolence was not absolute.

strikes, but also cultural activities like a community fashion show. In other words, there is no reason to think that Alinsky's emphasis on organized people as the source of relational power prevented him from seeing that knowledge, culture, and ideas play an essential role in determining whether and how people become organized at all.

Finally, relational power has important ethical implications for how an organization should deal with its opponents. One of the central rules the IAF instills in its organizers, leaders, and members is that there are "no permanent enemies, no permanent friends."<sup>73</sup> As political relationships are built on self-interest, an organization might later have common interests with one of its current opponents, and being able to build a relationship later will allow the organization to increase its power. Hence, IAF organizers place a premium on "depolarizing" their relationships with their opponents after a political conflict has been resolved. For a particularly humorous example, after FIGHT reached an agreement with Eastman-Kodak to create a hiring and training program for African-Americans, Alinsky told reporters he only wanted his picture taken with Kodak film since Kodak's financial interests were now FIGHT's.<sup>74</sup> The idea that opponents should always be seen as future sources of power places an internal limit on how opponents should be treated. Making a permanent enemy harms the organization's ability to build power in the future and, for that reason, is counter-productive. This does not draw a clear line on which tactics are acceptable and which are not, nor is it meant to. Alinsky did not believe that he could tell people what they could or could not do; they had to decide that for themselves. But making permanent enemies was an ethical and political failure on the part of the

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<sup>73</sup> This is an adaption of 19<sup>th</sup> century British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston's famous realist adage, "we have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow." That Alinsky removed the idea of permanent interests is telling. He believed that interests were not permanent because the development of people's interest from particular to general was essential to the democratic character of organizing. On Palmerston as a realpolitik statesman, see Bew, *Realpolitik*, 75, 98, 285.

<sup>74</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*, 502.

organization. The morality of power, therefore, treats power in terms that are both strategic and ethical.

### Self-Interest: The Low Road to Morality

An organizer can only build power if she understands the role self-interest plays as an ethical principle in politics. Alinsky's intense focus on self-interest might seem to go against realism's commitment to "a moral psychology that includes the passions and emotions," but the distinguishing feature of his theory of self-interest is the psychological thickness and complexity he brings to understanding just what a community's self-interest is.<sup>75</sup> By itself, self-interest is akin to what Williams called a thin ethical concept, one that lacks a strong connection to an agent's sense of self. If self-interest is to guide people in making political decisions, an organizer must find a way to thicken the concept of self-interest by connecting it with the specific experiences and aspirations that people already have. Alinsky understood the thickening of self-interest to work in two ways: first, by deepening the idea of interest in order to show agents how their sense of self gives rise to specific political interests; second, by broadening the sense of self to include as many of the social relations that define an agent's identity possible. Self-interest is not thickened through reflection, but through the work of organizing. Thick self-interest gives Alinsky's vision of agonistic democracy its normative underpinning by explaining the general significance and social content of political conflict.

"Political realists," Alinsky said, "see the world as it is: an arena of power politics moved primarily by perceived self-interests, where morality is rhetorical rationale for expedient action and self-interest."<sup>76</sup> When Alinsky opposed self-interest to more conventional moral

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<sup>75</sup> Galston, "Realism in Political Theory."

<sup>76</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 12-3.

considerations, he was trying to show why self-interest is a more reliable basis for political action. Sometimes he treated morality as a psychological and social device for justifying shifts in a political actor's real or perceived self-interest. "Drastic shifts of self-interest can be rationalized only under a huge, limitless umbrella of general 'moral' principles such as liberty, justice, freedom, a law higher than man-made law, and so on," he wrote. "Morality, so-called, becomes a continuum as self-interest shifts."<sup>77</sup> Alinsky's skeptical treatment of morality is one of the points on which he is most frequently criticized by his friends and demonized by his enemies.<sup>78</sup>

However, as Bretherton rightly argues, this "suspicion entails asking what motivates morality and what function morality plays in any justification rather than skepticism about morality as such."<sup>79</sup> Alinsky agreed with Geuss that moral arguments can be used ideologically to conceal and even legitimate popular disempowerment. "Justice, morality, law, and order," he wrote, "are mere words when used by the Haves, which justify and secure their status quo."<sup>80</sup> It is especially important to emphasize self-interest when dealing with people who have been oppressed by the existing political order. As Lois McNay notes, "for many individuals, a consequence of the lived reality of oppression is that they may acquire a deep-seated dispositional reluctance to act as agents of their own interests."<sup>81</sup> The rhetorical inversion of morality and self-interest is a useful device for overcoming the internalization of disempowerment and emphasizing the distinctiveness of political ethics.

Organizing "gives priority to the significance of self-interest. The organization itself proceeds on the idea of channeling the many diverse forces of self-interest within the community

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<sup>77</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 55.

<sup>78</sup> See Stout, *Blessed*, 117-8 for sympathetic, but forceful, criticism.

<sup>79</sup> Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 143.

<sup>80</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Lois McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political: Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 16.

into a common direction for the common good and at the same time respects the autonomy of individuals and organizations.”<sup>82</sup> Alinsky almost never used the term ‘interest’ by itself. This was not because he conceived of interests in individualistic terms, but because he wanted to emphasize the importance of people defining their interests for themselves by creating deep connections between their social identities and political interests. As social movements scholar Sidney Tarrow has argued, “interest is no more than an objective category imposed by an observer. It is participants’ recognition of their common interests that translates the potential for a movement into an action.”<sup>83</sup> The difference between objective interests and thick, self-defined interests mirrors Williams’s distinction between internal and external reasons in that self-interests, like internal reasons, must be developed from an agent’s existing beliefs and desires.<sup>84</sup> In order to uncover thick interests, Alinsky believed the most important quality an organizer needs is “an abnormal imagination that sweeps him into a close identification with mankind and projects him into its plight.”<sup>85</sup> As Obama described it, “the self-interest I was supposed to be looking for extended well beyond the immediacy of the issues, that beneath the small talk and sketchy biographies and received options people carried within them some central explanation of themselves. Stories full of terror and wonder, studded with events that still haunted or inspired them. Sacred stories.”<sup>86</sup> Without imagination, self-interest is only useful for people who are

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<sup>82</sup> Saul Alinsky, “You Can’t See the Stars through the Stripes,” *The Urban Poor: Proceedings of the National Workshop on Manpower and Consumer Potentials* (Washington DC: Chamber of Commerce of the United States, 1968), 94.

<sup>83</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>84</sup> For experimental evidence on importance of internal reason-based arguments in political persuasion, see Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer, “From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41, no. 12 (December 2015): 1665–81.

<sup>85</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 74. On realism’s use of imagination, see Geuss, “The Actual and Another Modernity: Order and Imagination in *Don Quixote*,” *Politics and the Imagination*, 61-80.

<sup>86</sup> Obama, *Dreams*, 190.

already experienced political actors with well-defined interests. With imagination, self-interest becomes a tool for drawing people into politics, as well.

The task of an organizer is to learn how people understand their interests, relate those interests to political strategies and objectives, and seek out allies who share those interests enough to make cooperation on some of those objectives possible. In *Reveille*, Alinsky wrote, “the fact is that self-interest can be a most potent weapon in the development of cooperation and identification of the groups’ welfare as being of greater importance than personal welfare.”<sup>87</sup> In *Rules*, self-interest is part of what he called “the low road to morality.”<sup>88</sup> Alinsky’s views on self-interest came from Tocqueville’s idea of “self-interest rightly understood” as an antidote to destructive individualism, as well as his training in urban sociology.<sup>89</sup> He understood self-interest as an inherently social concept because a person’s sense of self emerges from the social roles she inhabits, the institutions she belongs to, and the relationships she has with others. The intersubjective nature of self-interest makes it possible for organizing to broaden individual interests and turn them into collective actions.

As Alinsky’s friend Jacques Maritain described his organizing methods, “starting from selfish interests, they succeed in giving rise to the sense of solidarity and finally to an unselfish devotion to the common task.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Rom Coles has called this movement from self-interest to the common good a form of “trickster politics,” which nicely captures the flavor of Alinsky’s approach.<sup>91</sup> However, it would be a mistake to think that the common good ever

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<sup>87</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 94.

<sup>88</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 142.

<sup>90</sup> Doering, *The Philosopher and the Provocateur*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Romand Coles, “Review: Of Tensions and Tricksters: Grassroots Democracy between Theory and Practice,” *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 3 (2006): 547–61. See also Romand Coles, “Moving Democracy: Industrial Areas Foundation Social Movements and the Political Arts of Listening, Traveling, and Tabling,” *Political Theory* 32, no. 5 (October 2004): 678–705.

comes to replace self-interest. “It was a disservice to the future to separate morality from man’s daily desires and elevate it to the plane of altruism and self-sacrifice,” Alinsky wrote, “It is not man’s ‘better nature’ but his self-interest that demands that he be his brother’s keeper.”<sup>92</sup> As Jeffrey Stout puts it, “the well-being of the city as a whole is actually in the interest of each individual and group in the city. There is no radical or permanent division between the pursuit of one’s own interests and the promotion of the common good.”<sup>93</sup> Political morality, therefore, does not depend on self-interest being superseded by altruism; it depends on the enlargement of self-interest that results from acquiring and exercising relational power.

Nick von Hoffman gives an example of how Alinsky broadened self-interest and used it as a low road to morality in the course of convincing a racist, but powerful, Catholic priest to support The Woodlawn Organization. Alinsky “began with real estate considerations,” writes von Hoffman, “a topic which experience had taught him was of prime importance to members of the clergy. He said it was only a matter of time before a black family moved into the parish somewhere, that if someone set fire to their house and burned them out it would stampede white families into moving away because parents are not going to bring up their kids in a battle zone. That would decimate the parish and crash real estate values.”<sup>94</sup> Alinsky knew the Catholic Church was hurting from white flight and could not afford the scandal of racial violence. By appealing to the financial interests the priest had as a member of the Church, and revealing the extent to which these interests were threatened by violent efforts to maintain residential segregation, he gave the priest a broader vision of what his self-interests really were and who he needed to form relationships with to protect them. The racist priest became one of TWO’s most

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<sup>92</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> Stout, *Blessed*, 38.

<sup>94</sup> von Hoffman, *Radical*, 62.

important supporters. In politics, as Alinsky often said, “the right things are done for the wrong reasons”<sup>95</sup>

Another reason it is important for an organizer to initially separate self-interest from other considerations is that “a citizen’s organization needs to discover how narrow conceptions of self-interest currently operate in this or that segment of the community.”<sup>96</sup> The IAF term for this mapping of the political terrain is “power analysis.” A power analysis requires both an internal examination of the organization’s own strengths, weaknesses, resources, and strategic position, and an external analysis of who the key players are on any given issue, what their interests are, and whether they will be friendly or hostile to the organization, and to each other, on issues around which the organization wants to create conflict.<sup>97</sup> Power analysis makes it clear that the most important actors are rarely elected officials or statesmen. Chambers describes most politicians as “errand boys, or brokers at best,” and cautions, “lacking an accurate power analysis, most citizens’ organizing efforts try to negotiate only with politicians and government bureaucracies,” while “the real decisions are sealed months before in elegant boardrooms.”<sup>98</sup> For example, when FIGHT wanted to find a way to create jobs for the city’s African-American population, it ignored city government and targeted Rochester’s largest employer, Eastman-Kodak, with tactics that threatened their national reputation, like using stock proxies to confront Kodak’s management at their annual shareholder’s meeting. Power analysis made it clear that the best way for FIGHT to advance its self-interest in employment was to focus on Rochester’s economic power rather than its official political leadership.

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<sup>95</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 76.

<sup>96</sup> Stout, *Blessed*, 41.

<sup>97</sup> Stout, *Blessed*, 21-33.

<sup>98</sup> Chambers and Cowan, *Roots for Radicals*, 136.

A particularly telling example of how Alinsky thought about power analysis is found in the use Industrial Areas Foundation training makes of Thucydides, a favorite realist author. IAF training seminars and classes often begin with the Melian Dialogue, which is used to illustrate the consequences of approaching politics in a moralized way. Ernesto Cortes, who became the national leader of the IAF when Chambers retired, explains its importance:

We try to teach that the dialogue is really about understanding power and understanding your interests. And so we try to teach people who have an inclination because they are have-nots, to be Melians, and by Melians we mean victims, ideologues, people who don't really have the understanding or the flexibility, who aren't willing to negotiate. We try to teach them how to think like Athenians, because if you read carefully in the dialogue, the Athenians understand power. They're very skillful negotiators, they understand their interests, they understand the interests of the Melians, they've done a very careful power analysis. They know how the Spartans think; they know how everybody else thinks because they've taken Pericles' vision to heart, and that is that the power has to be restrained and disciplined, etc. Now, in the end they lose it, and in the end they operate very unilaterally and they operate very, very brutally. But up until the end, the Athenians are very skillful and very appropriate and very, very cautious and restrained. And so we try to teach people that if you're going to have power you've got to understand Athenian thinking.<sup>99</sup>

To be a Melian, in the parlance of the IAF, is to be morally self-righteous and over-principled in adopting “an excessively rigid approach to political conflict.”<sup>100</sup> To avoid being Melians, organizations must internalize the morality power. They must learn to appreciate what John Herman Randall Jr. called “the importance of being unprincipled.”<sup>101</sup> Power analysis depends on internalizing the morality power because an organizer who does not understand how the

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<sup>99</sup> Ernesto Cortes Jr., “Building a Just Society through Ethical Leadership,” available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140918023313/http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/archive/research/leadership/publications/conference1/openingKeynoteSession.html>, or on file with author. Alinsky included the Melian Dialogue on a draft syllabus for a course on “Community Power Structure” at Loyola University in 1964, so we that its use in IAF training goes back to him. See the reading list in box 4Zd558 of the Industrial Areas Foundation Records.

<sup>100</sup> Stout, *Blessed*, 179

<sup>101</sup> John Herman Randall Jr., “On the Importance of Being Unprincipled,” *The American Scholar* 7, no. 2 (1938): 131-43. Randall was Dewey’s successor at Columbia and one of the most important pragmatists of his generation. His article, along with “The Construction of the Good” chapter from Dewey’s *The Quest for Certainty* (charmingly mistitled as “The Quest for Uncertainty”) are on the same syllabus as Thucydides.

powerful define their interests will not be able to understand how to build power in a particular situation.

Like the idea of relational power, Alinsky's defense of the role self-interest plays in politics has ethical implications for how his morality of power structures political conflict. Most importantly, by insisting that everyone should be able to define their interests for themselves and pursue them on equal terms with others, he provided a justification for democratic politics. "Self-interest," Stephen Holmes writes, "is a profoundly egalitarian and democratic idea. Only a few have hereditary privileges, but everyone has interests. To acknowledge the legitimacy of interests is to say that all citizens, no matter what their socially ascribed status, have concerns that are worthy of attention."<sup>102</sup> The idea that everyone has interests that politics must respect applies even to one's opponents, adversaries, and oppressors. Alinsky was a strong advocate of polarizing and even personalizing political conflicts.<sup>103</sup> He saw conflict as productive because it generates power and can be used to make unequal relations more equal, even when the dominating side would prefer to maintain the status-quo. Organizers use conflict "to exploit political opportunities, create collective identities, bring people together in organizations, and mobilize them against more powerful opponents."<sup>104</sup> Conflict, however, is always a prelude to some kind of political agreement in which opposed interests are conciliated according to the distribution of power. Organizing shifts that distribution of power enough that new agreements become possible and forces adversaries to acknowledge that shift.

Alinsky's morality of power is a version of what political theorists call agonistic democracy. More precisely, it provides us with an example of what Bonnie Honig and Marc

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<sup>102</sup> Stephen Holmes, "The Secret History of Self-Interest," *Passions and Constraints: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 42–68.

<sup>103</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 130.

<sup>104</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 3.

Stears call “agonistic realism,” an approach to politics that combines an agonistic commitment to democracy with realism’s insights into “the nature of the opponent and of the circumstances in which the struggle for justice always – or at least often – takes place.”<sup>105</sup> But Alinsky does more than show us what agonistic realism looks like in practice; he also helps remedy some of agonism’s major weaknesses. McNay has faulted agonistic democrats for ignoring the social basis of their theories of political agency, leaving them “unable to address a series of issues about empowerment and participation that are crucial to their theory, such as how to mobilize individuals in the first place or why the ‘political’ should be the principal focus of citizen loyalty rather than any of the many other constitutive attachments and bonds of social life.”<sup>106</sup> The “social weightlessness” of agonistic theory is precisely what Alinsky’s theory of thick self-interest is designed to prevent. The organizing process gives social weight to agonistic politics, explaining why political empowerment and participation follow from other things people value without having to specify in advance which social conditions will be politicized and fought over. The democratic determination of the organization’s self-interest connects the agonistic dynamics of political conflict with organizing’s educative mission of teaching people how to be empowered political actors.

### Organizing: An Education in the Democratic Faith

Shortly before his death, Alinsky told an interviewer, “my only fixed truth is a belief in people, a conviction that if people have the opportunity to act freely and the power to control their own destinies, they’ll generally reach the right decisions.”<sup>107</sup> This is a statement of radical

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<sup>105</sup> Honig and Stears, “The new realism,” 203.

<sup>106</sup> McNay, *Misguided Search for the Political*, 15.

<sup>107</sup> Norden, “Saul Alinsky,” 150.

democracy in the most literal sense: the belief that it is good for people to have power as one's sole unshakable commitment. Yet the word "generally" points to Alinsky's awareness that people do not always do the right thing, that doing the right thing requires a great deal of experience, knowledge, and deliberation, that the people can sometimes go disastrously wrong. Democracy, Alinsky knew, is always risky, "but we assume this risk on the basis of a faith in the democratic way of life."<sup>108</sup> This democratic faith depends not on a view about the correctness of particular decision procedures, but in a belief about the possibilities of a people who have learned to appreciate power and use it intelligently. Organizing is not just about building power; it is also a form of political education for developing the democratic character and capabilities of the people. "Without the learning process," Alinsky argued, "the building of an organization becomes simply the substitution of one power group for another."<sup>109</sup> If organizers want to be political educators, and not just the new power group, they have to respect the people enough to learn from them how best to advance democracy and determine the purposes to which their organization's power will be put.

"The very purpose and character of a People's Organization is educational," Alinsky said, and his emphasis on organizing as a form of democratic education illustrates why he thought organizing was a distinctive and important form of political agency.<sup>110</sup> Bureaucratic mass-membership organizations focus on representing their members' interests rather than teaching members to fight for those interests themselves, and many of the criticisms of labor unions made by Piven and Cloward in *Poor People's Movements* on this point were anticipated by Alinsky in *Reveille*, which was written as a wake-up call to counter the increasing

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<sup>108</sup> Saul Alinsky, Nicholas von Hoffman, and Lester Hunt, "Questions and Answers," in Schutz and Miller, *People Power*, 68-73, 69.

<sup>109</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 123.

<sup>110</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 155.

complacency and conservatism of the postwar labor movement. Piven and Cloward's preferred alternative was for movements to be as disruptive and disorderly as possible to extract concessions from elites in those rare moments when they are able to do so, meaning they too had little use for political education.<sup>111</sup> Alinsky, on the other hand, would have agreed with Sharon Krause's view that "in a free society, the experience of affirming one's subjective existence through concrete action in the world must be available to all, and available as a regular part of everyday life not just in exceptional moments of heroic opposition."<sup>112</sup> Neither disruption nor abstract representation is enough to secure the kind of agency political freedom requires, but the process of organizing works to create an environment in which Krause's kind of agency becomes possible.

This is the difference between organizers and other sorts of political agents. Andrew Sabl contrasts organizers like Alinsky and Ella Baker with both the office-holding politician and the activist who relies on moral exhortations and the exemplary force of extraordinary actions "to shrink the gap between high moral principles and harsh political practice."<sup>113</sup> While realists have been too attentive to statesmen, Sabl argues that democratic theorists have been excessively focused on the activist's dramatic acts of moral suasion rather than the power and interest-centric work of organizing. Even Gandhi, who was both a statesman and an activist, neglected political education. By monopolizing control over decisions about when and how *satyagraha* would be used, Gandhi left his followers with an understanding of his tactics, but not his strategy, and the disastrous consequences of this failure became apparent after his assassination.<sup>114</sup> In short,

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<sup>111</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

<sup>112</sup> Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, 125.

<sup>113</sup> Sabl, *Ruling Passions*, 249.

<sup>114</sup> Mantena emphasizes the educative importance of constructive *satyagraha*, but this is a separate question from Gandhi's desire to maintain personal control over mass protests and to call them off when he saw fit, which infuriated his allies.

neither the statesman nor the activist provides as useful a perspective for understanding how people can learn to become democratic agents, which is the distinctive calling of the organizer.

In the same interview where he expressed a faith in democracy as his “only fixed truth,” Alinsky also explained how organizing works as political education. “The central principle of all our organizational efforts,” he wrote, “is self-determination; the community we’re dealing with must first want us to come in, and once we’re in we insist they choose their own objectives and leaders. It’s the organizer’s job to provide the technical know-how, not to impose his wishes or his attitudes on the community; we’re not there to lead, but to help and to teach.”<sup>115</sup> By emphasizing know-how and eschewing leadership for teaching, it might seem that Alinsky is trying to place the organizer above the people being organized as an unaccountable expert, but the key idea is that organizer finds and develops leaders from within the community being organized. These leaders are the conduits of political education, learning the morality of power from organizers while also teaching the organizers about the community’s interest and, when necessary, holding them accountable to the people. When meeting with a group of church and community leaders about the creation of the Woodlawn Organization, Alinsky told them, “it is the community, and above all its leaders...who decide what the tactics are to be. It is their responsibility to do nothing they will ever be ashamed in having a part in.”<sup>116</sup>

Leaders and leadership are an important part of organizing, but, unlike the typical realist statesman, these leaders are almost always independent of the state and have little to no control over violence or other sorts of coercive measures. Often, the spokesperson or president of one of Alinsky’s organizations was a clergyman put forward by the organizers, but most of the leaders involved had no official or institutional authority outside the organization. Two of the pastors

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<sup>115</sup> Norden, “Saul Alinsky,” 74.

<sup>116</sup> Alinsky, von Hoffman, and Hunt, “Questions and Answers,” in Schutz and Miller, *People Power*, 70.

who invited Alinsky to Woodlawn described their first encounter with the leadership team he put together like this: “Some of us ministers found ourselves being escorted to meet pool hall proprietors, janitors, distracted looking women on relief, stern retired mailmen. These individuals, we were informed, were community leaders... Most of them had little education, they spoke peculiar English, and their areas of greatest knowledge had nothing to do with traditional organizations.”<sup>117</sup> Leaders are the people other people trust, who they go to for advice, support, guidance, and help when it comes to making hard decisions. Leaders have people who follow them, not in the sense of giving orders, but because they have the respect of others. The problem is that leaders are not well-known outside their immediate circles; they rarely even know each other, and different people tend to be looked to as leaders on different topics. For an organizer, finding leaders is a process of learning about the community’s values, interests, and identities in order to understand what which virtues of character are esteemed by these particular people.<sup>118</sup>

Once an organizer has found leaders, the next step is to bring them together to form relationships with one another and learn about their shared interests. Bringing together the community’s leaders provides the organization with both power and democratic legitimacy, and the organizer plays a crucial role in helping leaders learn how to work together. Alinsky also emphasized developing the capabilities of each leader individually “so that they become recognized by their following as leaders in more than one limited sphere.”<sup>119</sup> Developing leaders means putting them in situations where they have to learn about new issues, acquire new skills, and work with people they might not like, and the organizer’s role in this process is like that of a

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<sup>117</sup> Ulysses B. Blakely and Charles T. Leber Jr., “From ‘The Great Debate in Chicago,’” in Schutz and Miller, *People Power*, 59-61, 60.

<sup>118</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 64-75.

<sup>119</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 74.

coach.<sup>120</sup> When leaders establish relationships, build power, and become political actors, they do not simply express the values and pursue the ends they already had. Political action has a transformative effect on a person's character, and the goal of organizing is to ensure that this transformation is for the better. "If people feel they don't have the power to change a bad situation," Alinsky wrote, "then they do not think about it...It is when people have a genuine opportunity to act and to change conditions that they begin to think their problems through—then they show their competence, raise the right questions, seek special professional council and look for answers. Then you begin to realize that believing in people is not just a romantic myth."<sup>121</sup> In this way, leaders eventually become like organizers themselves, practitioners of the morality of power and teachers to the other members of the organization.

Perhaps the most important thing Alinsky wanted political actors to learn was how to hold a realistic appraisal of political possibilities together with a belief in the character and value of democratic life. Like Weber, who asked, "how to forge a unity between hot passion and a cool sense of proportion in one and the same person," Alinsky saw this as a problem moral psychology.<sup>122</sup> But while Weber used the seeming impossibility of this combination to argue that a true statesman is a rare, even heroic, character, Alinsky believed that organizing could help people develop an attitude of "cold anger" to guide their political actions.<sup>123</sup> Cold anger is an affective orientation that integrates the contradictory demands and split perspectives involved in political conflict at an emotional level. Cold anger is reflective, self-conscious anger that allows a person to think strategically in the heat of conflict without giving in to the paralyzing demand

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<sup>120</sup> On coaches exercising power-over in a non-dominating way, see Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory*, 125. For how early IAF trainers used the same idea, see Dick Harmon, "Collective Leadership," (June 6, 1974), box 4Zd571, Industrial Areas Foundation Records.

<sup>121</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 105-6.

<sup>122</sup> Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, 77.

<sup>123</sup> Mary Beth Rogers, *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics* (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 1990).

for objectivity. Alinsky said cold anger helped him realize that “actions are designed primarily to induce certain reactions,” to never “confuse power patterns with the personalities of individuals involved,” to eschew “the simple, hot, angry, personalized denunciation,” and to be “the master rather than the servant of [his] tactics.” Cold anger is the product of both experience and reflection, of accepting “the prime importance of the Socratic adage about the unexamined life.”<sup>124</sup> Learning to be a political actor is, therefore, as much about developing the right sort of character as mastering the right set of skills.

Alinsky often reached for ideas from Socratic philosophy to clarify the political and educational role of the organizer. “Socrates was an organizer,” he wrote in *Rules*, because “the function of an organizer is to raise questions that agitate, that break the accepted pattern.”<sup>125</sup> In the meeting with the Woodlawn pastors mentioned above, he invoked a famous metaphor from Plato’s *Theatetus*: “We have as much and the same kind of relationship to organization tactics as the midwife has to the birth of a baby.”<sup>126</sup> An organizer teaches, according to Horwitt, “not by unilateral action, but by raising alternatives, by engaging community members in a kind of Socratic dialogue.”<sup>127</sup> As in an actual Socratic dialogue, the way an organizer uses questions to guide deliberation varies according to the needs of the moment. Sometimes, the questions used are genuinely open-ended, as when trying to understand the way people in a community understand their self-interests. But Alinsky also thought an organizer might need to “suggest, maneuver, and persuade” people towards a desired course of action, again like a coach.<sup>128</sup> This is necessary because people who have not had much experience with power do not know the uses

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<sup>124</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, ix-x.

<sup>125</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 7.

<sup>126</sup> Alinsky, von Hoffman, and Hunt, “Questions and Answers,” 70.

<sup>127</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*, 175.

<sup>128</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 91-2.

to which it can be put, or how those in power typically think. Organizers cannot assume that the people already have the political skills they will only acquire over the slow and difficult course of building an organization.

“A community is not a classroom,” Alinsky insisted, “and the people are not students coming to classrooms for education. The People’s Organization must create the conditions and climate in which people want to learn.”<sup>129</sup> In order to create this climate, the organization’s actions must track the self-interests and objectives of the people, and this requires two-way learning between the organizer and the people. “An effective organizational experience,” he wrote, “is as much an educational process for the organizer as it is for the people with whom he is working.”<sup>130</sup> But Alinsky often worried that organizers might try to impose their own views on the people being organized. He felt it was better if organizers lacked clear normative prescriptions of their own, having only “a bit of a blurred vision of a better world.”<sup>131</sup> His regular injunctions against organizers having theories, creeds, or substantive programs of their own were not simply councils of tactical flexibility; they were also a way of trying to keep organizers from having the sorts of beliefs they might want to impose on the organization in the first place. This conception of the organizer as someone who attends power—people power—more than any particular purpose or ideal is what led the right to attack him for being utterly amoral and some in the New Left to denounce him as “downright reactionary,” but Alinsky saw this as what makes an organizer truly democratic.<sup>132</sup>

Even on questions of organizational strategy, a good organizer must be able to learn from the people and not cling to ideas just because they worked in the past. Alinsky himself

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<sup>129</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, 165.

<sup>130</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 123.

<sup>131</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 75.

<sup>132</sup> Stears, *Demanding Democracy*, 175 fn. 3.

provides an example of this with the Woodlawn Organization. TWO's first action was to target local merchants who were shortchanging, short-weighting, and otherwise exploiting their customers, an issue which surprised some of the local religious leaders but came out of discussions with the organization's leadership team. However, following a rally for some of the Mississippi Freedom Riders that became the largest event yet staged by TWO, Alinsky and von Hoffman, neither of whom had been initially enthusiastic about the rally, shifted the organization's concerns to civil rights issues like voter registration and segregated schooling. Alinsky was generally wary of social movement organizing as being more focused on specific objectives than general empowerment, but the decision "pinpointed Alinsky's brilliance as a political tactician: he was able to shed even his most favored organizational concepts and assumptions when confronted with a new, unexpected reality."<sup>133</sup> It also demonstrates that he understood how important it is for an organizer to learn from the membership and ensure that the organization ultimately belongs to the people being organized.

"The basic difference between the leader and the organizer," Alinsky wrote, is that "the leader goes on to build power to fulfill his desires, to hold and wield the power for purposes both social and personal. He wants power for himself. The organizer finds his goal in the creation of power for others to use."<sup>134</sup> The organizer's desire that others have power, however, is not a form of altruism. It is a product of the organizer's extended imagination and awareness that her agency depends on others having the power to enlarge and respond to her actions. Thus, democratic empowerment is deeply tied to the organizer's identity and self-interest. "The ego of the organizer," Alinsky said, "is stronger and more monumental than the ego of the leader."<sup>135</sup> The

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<sup>133</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel* 1989, 401.

<sup>134</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 80 Sabl, *Ruling Passions*, 280-9 shows Ella Baker drew a similar contrast between organizer and leader.

<sup>135</sup> Alinsky, *Rules*, 61.

organizer wants power not just for one or another particular organization, but for as many people as possible because the creation of a democratic society is the highest expression of the organizer's own agency.

### Conclusion - Measuring up to Democracy

Alinsky saw democracy as the messy, endless, and often unsatisfying interplay of conflict and compromise, organizing and counter-organizing. He had no interest in the dream of a world that would transcend the dynamics of power politics, and his realism was neither a brand of political minimalism nor plea for chastened politics.<sup>136</sup> It was a thoroughgoing critique of political sentimentalism, of appeals to harmony and moral consensus rather than power and self-interest. Nevertheless, he was an important theorist of political ethics who, like Williams, refused to draw a sharp distinction between moral and strategic reasoning. Alinsky used organizing to teach the ethical significance of power and self-interest people fighting to acquire power through democratic means and using it for democratic purposes.

He also knew the difficulty of holding these objectives together, of maintaining a long-term belief in the character of an empowered people to make the right choices when faced with the many failures of democracy he saw around him and the ethically compromising things the organized would have to do to fight back against their disempowerment. The morality of power “cultivates a sense of nuance, ambiguity, complexity, and the ironic, even tragic qualities of the

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<sup>136</sup> This was the point of Alinsky's notorious criticisms of the Johnson administration and its allies in the war on poverty. “Their definition of consensus is not the compromise which ensues from negotiation between power organizations; the inevitable compromise which is the cost of human coexistence. Nor do they recognize that it is always conflict which leads to the negotiations table and to agreement or consensus. They attempt to introduce an artificial non-existent dichotomy between conflict and consensus. To them consensus and conflict are simply defined; it is the definition always held by the status quo; that if you agree with the status quo you represent consensus and that if you disagree with them you represent conflict.” See Alinsky, “The War on Poverty,” 43.

human condition.”<sup>137</sup> This was important to Alinsky since he, like Weber, saw that politics requires “the trained ability to scrutinize the realities of life ruthlessly, to withstand them and to measure up to them inwardly,” because, “the ultimate product of political activity frequently, indeed, as a matter of course, fails utterly to do justice to its original purpose and may even be a travesty of it.”<sup>138</sup>

Alinsky saw his purposes travestied by the Back of the Yards, the community where he began his career as an organizer in 1939. As the neighborhood grew prosperous, in large part because of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council he created, it used its power to enforce segregation and maintain itself as an all-white neighborhood. At first, he tried to convince the leaders to let in a few black families on a very limited scale, but to no avail. As the segregationism of the Back of the Yards became more widely known, he was put under increasing pressure to sever his ties with the organization, something he said an organizer always had the right to do if an organization betrayed basic democratic principles, but he refused. He could not disown the organization he had helped create, even though it pursued what he saw as fundamentally undemocratic goals, because those goals were still an authentic expression of the values of the community and could not be wished or lectured away. As he told an interviewer:

I certainly don't regret for one minute what I did in the Back of the Yards. Over 200,000 people were given decent lives, hope for the future and new dignity because of what we did in that cesspool. Sure, today they've grown fat and comfortable and smug, and they need to be kicked in the ass again, but if I had a choice between seeing those same people festering in filth and poverty and despair, and living a decent life within the confines of the establishment's prejudices, I'd do it all over again.<sup>139</sup>

Instead, Alinsky, started to organize new communities in Chicago to counter the racist policies of his first organization. Initially, he tried to organize whites elsewhere in the city to accept partial

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<sup>137</sup> Boyte, “Populism,” 305.

<sup>138</sup> Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, 91, 78.

<sup>139</sup> Norden, “Saul Alinsky,” 76.

integration through racial quotes. Then, he started organizing in Woodlawn in order to form “a powerful black community organization that could ‘bargain collectively’ with other organized groups and agencies,” like the BYNC.<sup>140</sup> The solution to the abuse of organized, democratic power was not the rejection of organizing, but its extension to new groups of people whose interests would challenge the old ones. “It just might be necessary for me to go back and organize against the organization I set up,” he told another reporter, “and then, ideally, someone else should come and organize against me.”<sup>141</sup> This was what it meant for Alinsky to measure up to the unforeseeable consequences of political action without losing faith in democracy.

The BYNC is still in existence today, long after most whites have left the area. It is now a service organization, of the sort Alinsky generally disliked, for the neighborhood’s primarily Hispanic residents with no connection whatsoever to the IAF. Its website seeks to reassure anxious readers that it has “substituted an emphasis on community and economic development for Alinsky’s confrontational methods.”<sup>142</sup> Though a very different organization from the one Alinsky started in 1939, it still reveals something of his stamp and spirit in its motto, the same motto chosen at its first convention, over seventy-five years ago: “We the people will work out our own destiny!”

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<sup>140</sup> Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel*, 368.

<sup>141</sup> von Hoffman, *Radical*, 53.

<sup>142</sup> Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, “History,” <http://bync.org/about/history-2/>.

### Conclusion: Realism After Order

*To understand the behavior of people as they are in the real world precludes either disillusionment or cynicism. You learn to be realistic in your expectations. You go on using the probables in the eternal struggle to achieve the improbable.*<sup>670</sup>  
- Saul Alinsky

In *What Is History?* E.H. Carr, the historian and founding figure of realism in international relations, compared the value of philosophical ideals and concrete political programs to the difference between a compass and a map. “A compass is a valuable and indeed indispensable guide,” he reminds us, “but it is not a chart of the route.”<sup>671</sup> Often, when political theorists look to recover thinkers and ideas from the past, we are interested recovering are their compasses. We are looking for concepts that can be extricated, generalized, and brought into the present, that can orient us not just in the political world of the person or people we are studying, but in our own world, as well.<sup>672</sup> In the preceding chapters, I have done some of this kind of theory. But I have also tried to recover each thinker’s maps, the plans they formulated to guide political organizing according to their ideas about where order came from and how it could be contested. My goal in this has not simply been to understand these programs, but, more importantly, to understand how and why Hobbes, Marx, Du Bois, and Alinsky came to draw and redraw their maps the way they did. My goal, in other words, has been to investigate the connection between history and political imagination in realist thought.

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<sup>670</sup> Alinsky, *Reveille*, xii.

<sup>671</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 153. Carr’s use of the metaphor, in which the compass is the idea of historical progress and that which is being charted is the future course of events, is somewhat different from the use of it I make here.

<sup>672</sup> The most obvious example in the recent history of political theory has been the recovery of the republican idea of freedom as nondomination. For the importance of domination in realism, see Williams, *In the Beginning*, 5, 27, 63, 71. On the overlap between realism and republicanism more generally, see Philip Pettit, “Political Realism Meets Civic Republicanism,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (May 2017): 331–47.

Many realists have emphasized the importance of imagination to understanding political action and order. It is even more obvious that organizing, which seeks to bring new collective agents into being, is a deeply imaginative enterprise. Realism emphasizes that political imagination, like political judgement, must be trained and developed from the best possible materials if it is to fulfill its role as a guide to action. Realists also believe that history is source from which these materials should be drawn and, therefore, the source from which political imagination ought to proceed. So, I have tried to understand how the historical imagination can guide popular organizing by looking at how it has done so in the past. At the risk of straining the metaphor, I hope to have revealed something of the political geology and historical cartography that makes it possible to imagine new forms of popular organizing.<sup>673</sup>

Near the end of “Political Theory as a Vocation,” Wolin bemoans the political scientist “who discovers that the philosophy of democracy places excessive demands on the ‘real world’ and hence it is the task of political science to suggest a more realistic version of democratic theory.”<sup>674</sup> The last few years have given us countless examples of this type of realism, and not only by political scientists. By way of a conclusion, I want to look at some of the ways in which realism is discussed in American politics today. Doing so will reveal why we need to think more imaginatively about popular organizing. Though there are only a few direct links between political theory’s new realism and this wider conversation, they share similar tendencies towards overemphasizing order, presuming the necessity and availability of state agency, and a yearning for enlightened statesmen to steer the course for democracy. As I hope to have shown, realists

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<sup>673</sup> In a more normative vein, books like Gerald F. Gaus, *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) use metaphors of topography and mountaineering to criticize Rawlsian approaches to justice in terms of our ability to differentiate between locally and globally maximal systems of justice. Though I sympathize with parts of these arguments, they seem to stretch their topographical metaphors and special mappings of justice a great deal too far.

<sup>674</sup> Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” 75.

need not accept these views. There is little reason to believe that the best way to be realistic about politics is to give up on the allegedly excessive demands of democracy. Instead, realism ought to be about using theory to understand how our democratic demands can be posed more effectively, not just demanded but pressed with force and skill. Historically, popular organizing has been one of the most important ways in which this has been done. And while it would be rash and unrealistic to suggest that popular organizing is all we need to respond to the disfunctions of democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is also hard to see a way forward without it.

For many American commentators, the return to realism is inseparable from the election of Donald Trump. His embrace of “law and order” notwithstanding, the Trump administration’s crimes, scandals, turnover, listlessness, unpredictability, and venality strike many people as the height of political disorder. It is not surprising, then, that his opponent in the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton, has emerged as one of the most prominent defenders of political realism. As she told Ezra Klein during the campaign, “the hard questions about what was real, what was realistic, and what could happen with the right kind of election outcome were never really joined.”<sup>675</sup> In *What Happened*, her account of the 2016 election, she devotes a chapter to her search “for the right balance of idealism and realism,” and her belief that “driving progress in a big, raucous democracy like ours requires a mix of principle and pragmatism—plus a whole lot of persistence.” These invocations of balance, however, belie her clear preference for realism. Nowhere in her book, for instance, does Clinton fault anyone for being insufficiently idealistic, and all her references to herself as an idealist concern her college years.<sup>676</sup> On the other hand, she invokes realism in her criticism of Bernie Sanders’s habit of one-upping her policy proposals

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<sup>675</sup> Ezra Klein, “What Hillary Clinton Really Thinks,” *Vox*, September 13, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/9/13/16298120/hillary-clinton-what-happened-interview>.

<sup>676</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 196.

with “something even bigger, loftier, and leftier, regardless of whether it was realistic or not,” and by way of justifying her campaign’s abandonment of a universal basic income proposal because “it was exciting but not realistic.”<sup>677</sup> The trope of balance notwithstanding, Clinton’s invocations of realism are of a piece with her repeated depictions of herself as an archetypal Weberian statesman who understands that “a lot of governing is the slow, hard boring of hard boards.”<sup>678</sup>

Like many realists today, Clinton seems to take the content of realism at face value, as a posture of political wisdom that results from her unique mix of experience and temperament. The task of presenting Clinton’s invocations of realism as a general theory of politics has instead fallen to journalists, commentators, and think-tank experts, typically of a liberal cast. During the election, Matt Yglesias picked up on Clinton’s reference to “Politics as a Vocation” to construct a more developed account of how “Weber’s essay offers a systematic defense of a Clintonian approach to politics, one that’s more transactional than inspirational, in contrast to the alternatives offered by Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, and even Barack Obama.”<sup>679</sup> Klein has asked Clinton about realism in a number of interviews and wrote a lengthy article entitled, “Hillary Clinton and the Audacity of Political Realism.”<sup>680</sup> “The argument for Clinton” Klein tells us, “is that she’s best suited to handle this war of partisan attrition — she knows how to work the bureaucracy, defend against a hostile Congress, and find incremental gains where they

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<sup>677</sup> Clinton, *What Happened*, 227. For the contrary argument about the realism of universal basic income, see Bregman, *Utopia for Realists*.

<sup>678</sup> Klein, “What Hillary Clinton Really Thinks.” Weber also invoked the importance of balance, but he too is usually read as more sympathetic to the demands of realism and the ethic of responsibility.

<sup>679</sup> Matthew Yglesias, “How Max Weber Explains the 2016 Election,” *Vox*, July 11, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/11/12053146/max-weber-hillary-clinton>.

<sup>680</sup> In fairness, some of this questioning has been critical of realism. “Is it possible to be too realistic about the forces arrayed against change, about the institutional constraints against change in the American political system,” he asked her, “so realistic that you miss openings, so realistic that it’s hard to inspire people, so focused on constraints that your idea of what’s possible actually begins limiting what’s possible” (Klein, “What Hillary Clinton Really Thinks”)? Clinton granted the force of this point, but Klein allowed it to drop.

exist.”<sup>681</sup> For Klein and Yglesias, as for scholars like Williams and Philp, realism is best understood as kind of statesmanship that takes seriously the limitations on political action created by existing structures and institutions and advocates strategies that are responsive to these limits, even at the expense of larger political ideals.

Though realism has been buoyed to prominence by conflicts that surfaced in the 2016 election, its popular resurgence began slightly before this. In early 2015, when the presidential campaign was still young, Brookings Institution senior fellow Jonathan Rauch published the colorfully-titled, *Political Realism: How Hacks, Machines, Big Money, and Back-Room Deals Can Strengthen American Democracy*. A self-described “Burkean conservative,” Rauch argues that “though they use diverse approaches and vocabularies,” political realists “can be meaningfully regarded as an emerging school, one characterized by respect for grubby but indispensable transactional politics and by skepticism toward purism, amateurism, and idealistic political reforms.”<sup>682</sup> Realism “sees governing as difficult and political peace and stability as treasures never to be taken for granted. It understands that power’s complex hydraulics make interventions unpredictable and risky.”<sup>683</sup> To his credit, Rauch does not reduce realism to a question of statesman. Instead, the heart of his argument is that only stronger political parties can bring order and restore function to American politics, and strengthening political parties requires allowing them do things that are often denounced as corrupt to maintain their control over officeholders. Focusing on parties is a welcome deviation from the realist norm, but Rauch’s emphasis on parties as gate-keepers and deal-makers is too narrow. It forgets the role parties

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<sup>681</sup> Ezra Klein, “Hillary Clinton and the Audacity of Political Realism,” *Vox*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/1/28/10858464/hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders-political-realism>.

<sup>682</sup> Jonathan Rauch, *Political Realism: How Hacks, Machines, Big Money, and Back-Room Deals Can Strengthen American Democracy* (Brookings, 2015), 2.

<sup>683</sup> Jonathan Rauch, *Political Realism*, 7.

have historically played by organizing people into active political life. His insistence that parties need to be insulated from outside pressure, that the loss of democratic accountability within parties is the price of order, entails a refusal to distinguish between the oligarchic power of organized wealth and the democratic power of organized people.

This suspicion of democracy as it is ordinarily understood finds its most powerful expression in Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels's *Democracy for Realists*. The aim of their book is primarily critical: to expose the failure of both "the folk theory of democracy" that underlies our everyday beliefs about how democratic political systems work and the inadequacy of prominent academic theories—like retrospective voting—that legitimate democracy in more minimalist terms than those used by the folk theory. "Election outcomes turn out to be largely random events from the viewpoint of contemporary democratic theory," they write. "That is, elections are well determined by powerful forces, but those forces are not the ones that current theories of democracy believe should determine how elections come out."<sup>684</sup> Achen and Bartels look to a "realist political tradition" associated with thinkers like James Madison, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Walter Lippman, who all endorsed a "group theory of politics" that does a better job of explaining what democracy is and how it works than either the folk theory or its academic heirs.<sup>685</sup> According to the group theory, "voters, even the most informed voters, typically make choices not on the basis of policy preferences or ideology, but on the basis of who they are—their social identities. In turn, those social identities shape how they think, what they think, and where they belong in the party system."<sup>686</sup> This is not to say that Achen and Bartels abandon the goals and values of democratic politics. "In the end," they claim, "it is the folk theory that props

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<sup>684</sup> Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>685</sup> Achen and Bartels, 214.

<sup>686</sup> Achen and Bartels, 4.

up elite rule, and it is unrepresentative elites that most profit from the convenient justifications it provides for their activities.”<sup>687</sup> Only by embracing the realist tradition and its emphasis on the salience of social identities and groups can the legitimate goals of a democratic polity be realized.

The influence of *Democracy for Realists* on the broader conversation of realism has been profound.<sup>688</sup> Even before the election, Yglesias called it “the best book to help you understand the wild 2016 campaign.”<sup>689</sup> After it, *Vox* posted a lengthy interview with Achen and Bartels on the book’s major arguments and what they meant for the Trump presidency.<sup>690</sup> Less than a month later, Klein wrote a long piece on *Democracy for Realists* in which he described himself as “a bit obsessed with” the book.<sup>691</sup> At Brookings, Rauch has incorporated its main findings into his broader argument that “most voters are rationally underinformed, irrationally biased, and have no compelling reason to be otherwise; elections provide little by way of substantive guidance for policymakers; and, even on its own terms, direct democracy is often self-defeating and unrepresentative.” Therefore, “there is no particularly good reason to believe that more participation will improve government performance, better represent the public interest, or make the public happier.”<sup>692</sup> The success of *Democracy for Realists* exemplifies Wolin’s fears about

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<sup>687</sup> Achen and Bartels, 328.

<sup>688</sup> Among political theorists, the response has been more ambivalent. See the articles in Antje Schwennicke et al., “A Discussion of Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels’ *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*,” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 01 (March 2017): 148–162.

<sup>689</sup> Matthew Yglesias, “This Is the Best Book to Help You Understand the Wild 2016 Campaign,” *Vox*, October 14, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/10/14/12663318/bartels-achen-democracy-for-realists>.

<sup>690</sup> Sean Illing, “Two Eminent Political Scientists: The Problem with Democracy Is Voters,” *Vox*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/1/15515820/donald-trump-democracy-brexite-2016-election-europe>. Illing, it should be noted, has a doctorate in political theory.

<sup>691</sup> Ezra Klein, “Why Did the 2016 Election Look so Much like the 2012 Election?,” *Vox*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/5/15161442/2016-election-normalcy-democracy-realists-identity>.

<sup>692</sup> Jonathan Rauch and Benjamin Wittes, *More Professionalism, Less Populism: How Voting Makes Us Stupid, and What to Do about It* (Brookings, May 2017), 6.

what happens when scholars ask how democratic theory must be made more realistic, rather than how realism can be made more democratic.

Nevertheless, there is much in this argument that speaks to the organizing tradition. It would not have surprised Alinsky, Marx, Du Bois, or even Hobbes, to hear that citizens make political decisions based on deeply-held identities that are more fundamental to them than policy issues.<sup>693</sup> Nor is it surprising that the most salient identities for shaping people's political behavior are group identities. But group identities are not prior to politics, as Achen and Bartels often seem to imply. They admit that "the role of political elites in structuring politically relevant cleavages needs to be understood better," but they are silent on the possibility that identities are also constructed by the organizing activities of ordinary people.<sup>694</sup> If people can play a substantial role in structuring and restructuring their shared identities, which is one of the main things popular organizing tries to do, then popular self-rule and the group theory of democracy are not as remote as the authors think.

*Democracy for Realists* was written before the Trump presidency, so, whatever the flaws in its understanding of realism, it is not wracked by the nostalgia for order that has emerged among intellectuals since the 2016 election. This is most apparent in the explosion of books and articles that describe the rise of Trump and other right-wing leaders as a resurgence of populism.<sup>695</sup> These anti-populist authors see politics as an opposition between a norm-governed liberal, democratic order and an unstable, disorderly, authoritarian populism. According to the realist and anti-populist scholar William Galston:

Populists view themselves as arch-democrats who oppose what they regard as liberalism's class biases. Their majoritarianism puts pressure on the individual rights and

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<sup>693</sup> Achen and Bartels claim Marx as a predecessor of the group theory on 215.

<sup>694</sup> Achen and Bartels, 230.

<sup>695</sup> The best overview, though highly critical, is Jedediah Purdy, "Normcore," *Dissent* (Summer 2018), <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/normcore-trump-resistance-books-crisis-of-democracy>.

the limits on public power at the heart of liberal democracy. More dangerous still is the populists' understanding of the "people" as homogeneous and unitary, which leans against the pluralism that characterizes all free societies in modernity. Because the assumption of homogeneity is always false, it leads first to denial and then to suppression. Faced with disagreement, populism responds with anathemas: the dissenters are self-interested, power-hungry elites who aren't part of the virtuous and united people. They are rather the enemies of the people and deserve to be treated as such.<sup>696</sup>

To realize this agenda, populists look for leadership to demagogues who refuse to honor the normal rules of politics. Though none of the anti-populists believe American democracy was healthy prior to the 2016 election, they are united in their effort, in Yascha Mounk's words, to "show what we can do to rescue what is truly valuable in our imperiled social and political order."<sup>697</sup> To save democracy, they argue, we must learn to be realistic about the limits of what democratic governments can accomplish, moderate our demands so as not to put excessive stress on our "fragile" political order, and de-escalate conflicts between parties who are willing to uphold the Constitution. Otherwise, the populists win.

The populism of Mounk, Galston, and others is not the populism of Alinsky or other self-identified populists.<sup>698</sup> Nor is a good fit for the American populists who originated the term. The anti-populists miss what Jason Frank has called populism's "institutional improvisations and formative praxis," its commitment to "cooperation and organization."<sup>699</sup> To the extent that anti-populists recognize popular organizing at all, they see it simply as threat to political order. As Yascha Mounk puts it, "the costs of political organizing have plummeted. And as the

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<sup>696</sup> William A. Galston, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 5. Galston does not draw the connection between realism and his critique of populism, but see Jan-Werner Müller, "The Populist Danger," *Democracy* no. 50 (Fall 2018), <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/50/the-populist-danger/>. See also Bagg, "Against Legitimacy."

<sup>697</sup> Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>698</sup> On Alinsky and populism, see Luke Bretherton, "The Political Populism of Saul Alinsky and Broad Based Organizing," *The Good Society* 21, no. 2 (2012): 261–278. For populist organizing since Alinsky, see Laura Grattan, *Populism's Power: Radical Grassroots Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>699</sup> Frank, "Populism and Praxis," 629.

technological gap between center and periphery has narrowed, the instigators of instability have won an advantage over the forces of order.”<sup>700</sup> But organizing, for Mouck, is little more than social media, which he sees as too often a tool for supporting and empowering demagogues. The reason he thinks this is that Mouck, like the other anti-populists, sees popular agency in terms of representation. Popular agency can be expressed through a constitutionally-bound representative system, or it can be the vicarious feeling of power people have when they watch demagogues bend that system to their will. While this may be a reasonable way to describe how Trump and some of his most enthusiastic supporters think, it is only a partial image of how populists have historically understood politics.<sup>701</sup> Anti-pluralists bifurcate popular agency between the good, orderly democracy and the bad, disorderly people. As a result, they miss the crucial role that organizing can play as form of populist agency that is both disorderly and order-creating. In this, they wind up reproducing a mistake made by Trump himself, who, as I noted in the introduction, also claims to stand for order against disorder, but has little to say about organizing.

Popular organizing will not replace representative institutions or make political leadership obsolete, nor is it supposed to. But we can see the power of organizing in the waves of teachers strikes breaking out across the country, the Moral Monday movement in North Carolina, the rise of insurgent political campaigns, in Black Lives Matter, or in the countless community organizations fighting for local democracy every day. Not all these efforts will succeed, and many will give rise to reactionary movements organizing against them. There will be inevitable failures and tragedies in organizing, but that need not worry realists, who know that to be the condition of all politics. Fundamentally, organizing reminds us that order can only be maintained

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<sup>700</sup> Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy*, 20.

<sup>701</sup> To my knowledge, Trump has never referred to himself as a populist, though he did retweet two Fox News anchors saying, “the President has been remarkable. I do not doubt that he will thrive in this new environment, and he will be a constant reminder of what populism is.”

when it is not held onto too tightly, that order must be tempered by disorder if it is to be strengthened and improved. This might seem a trivial point on which to end a dissertation in political theory. But, as Bruno Latour reminds us, “being trivial might be part of what it is to become a ‘realist’ in politics.”<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>702</sup> Bruno Latour, “From realpolitik to dingpolitik or how to make things public,” Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel eds., *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (London: MIT Press, 2005): 1-31, 4.

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