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The Future of Black Leadership

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What is the future of black leadership? In the wake of the Movement for Black Lives on the one hand and the “election” of Donald Trump (and the forthcoming presidential election) on the other, a range of intellectuals, pundits, activists, and organizers have begun to ask “what next”?

Some suggest that black populations would be better served by organizing around class lines as opposed to purely racial ones. What I want to do in this essay is take a stab at this issue by going backwards. My attempt here is not abnormal by any stretch of the imagination–many who examine black politics with an eye towards problem solving it tend to look backwards. But in many if not most cases that move backwards tends to end at the beginning of the post-civil rights era.

What I’m going to do below is go back a bit further, back to the end of the 19th century. That moment arguably represented one of the best opportunities to build a black institutional apparatus that combined the intellectual arena with the political arena focused on black workers. And to the extent this moment requires anything I’d suggest that it requires “black leadership” far less than it requires a set of institutions that can in turn redevelop a robust democratic political culture as well as generate intellectual leaders and political organizers from black working class communities.

Before I take you to that moment, first I briefly examine what I think the Movement for Black Lives has done for us in combination with Occupy Wall Street, and then address one of the strongest critiques of the movement against police violence.

When we look back on Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street–and although some don’t take them in tandem I think we should as they represent related responses to the neoliberal turn. The relationship between police and black populations has historically been contentious, but we do not see significant growth in the carceral state until the late seventies/early eighties. Relatedly this is the moment we begin to see significant increases in inequality. Although the victims of the carceral state are disproportionately black it is worth noting that the poor are even more disproportionately represented among this group than black people are. Because black people on the wrong end of police violence, and people on the wrong end of the economic inequality, had for decades been held responsible for their own condition, it was difficult if not impossible to get the type of traction required for political action. But in part through egregious murders like those of Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, and Freddie Gray, in part through the 2008 crash, and in part through technological advances (that made it far easier to mobilize and galvanize communities), we had widespread protest and civil

disobedience the likes of which we haven't seen in decades.

Ideationally the movement for black lives specifically changed the way we thought in a few different ways.

It changed the way we thought about black bodies. In the early years of the twentieth century, black elites developed what later scholars called "uplift ideology". One of the most important functions of this ideology for the purposes of this paper was to make clear distinctions between black populations able and willing to uphold the norms and ideals of mainstream (white) society and those unable and willing to do so. This had significant political consequences–during the Civil Rights Movement individuals like Rosa Parks stood out over individuals like Claudette Colvin because Parks upheld the standards and norms of mainstream society even as she violated Jim Crow segregation laws, while Colvin (who was unmarried, younger than 20, and pregnant) did not. The majority of the victims of police violence were individuals who arguably did not uphold mainstream societal norms, and the human rights approach activists took on their behalf turned the idea of respectability on its head. Leadership in traditional civil rights organizations tended to be male, straight, and Christian, and as a partial result tended towards the charismatic. The leadership of many if not most of the organizations broadly considered part of the Black Lives Matter movement tended to be not only female, but queer. The victims no longer had to be perfect. The leaders no longer had to be straight. With these two moves the movement expanded what Cathy Cohen calls the "boundaries of blackness" in important ways.

It changed how we thought about black institutions. One of the reasons that leadership of the civil rights organizations tended to be male, straight, Christian, and charismatic was because of the role individual black churches played in the movement–the churches involved were the closest thing blacks had to autonomous organizations. However as a partial byproduct of relying on these institutions civil rights movement organizations tended to reproduce these churches institutional culture, and as a result focused (with exceptions like SNCC) more on mobilizing individuals than developing their capacity to organize themselves. The bulk of the various organizations that constitute the Movement for Black Lives tended to be non-hierarchical, in fact taking something close to an anti-institutional position, being incredibly wary of charismatic leadership, and wary of traditional institutional structures in general.

Finally, in as much as culture plays a critically important role in communicating ideas about politics, the market, and civil society, arguably black lives matter has indelibly changed popular culture. In the music of a Kendrick Lamar, a DeAngelo, a Kamasi Washington, Beyonce, JayZ, in the movies of Ryan Coogler (who just signed on to film a movie about the life and death of Fred Hampton), in the actions of athletes like Colin Kapernick, LeBron James, and others, we see a black popular culture far less interested in reproducing some of the elements of the neoliberal turn than before.

These ideational shifts were accompanied by political shifts. At the state and local level a number of individuals have been elected to office on what could be called Movement for Black

Lives platforms. In centers of activism like Ferguson and Baltimore we saw significant turnover in City Council elections. In Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis, and Philadelphia, voters removed prosecutors unwilling to take police brutality seriously. Individual police officers have begun to be successfully prosecuted for police violence, and police corruption in places like Baltimore and Chicago has begun to be dealt with, this in addition to Justice Department consent decrees generated partially by activists and organizers. Finally, for the first time in decades the Democratic Party was forced to move away from the tough on crime approaches it began to embrace aggressively in the late eighties and early nineties.

These changes are not radical by any stretch, but in comparison to the decades before–we used to write about the Reagan-Bush years, but in a way we're talking about the Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush years–what we saw constituted change. However, over the same period we've seen the presidency of Donald Trump and a marked increase in racial terrorism. As a partial result we've seen a decrease in Movement for Black Lives activism, as well as a decreased focus on black activism and organizing more generally.

Where do we go from here?

Some, like Adolph Reed and Cedric Johnson suggest that a multi-racial class coalition be developed, one that takes organizing around the types of structural violence committed against working class populations more broadly seriously. For them, doing so would have a few benefits. Intellectually it would move us away from the types of transhistorical approaches towards race and racism that has some thinking that contemporary forms of police violence are uniquely anti-black and can be traced neatly back to the Jim Crow order if not before. Police victims do tend to be disproportionately black, but they are far more likely to be poor than they are to be black–indeed while we can point to instances like that of Henry Louis Gates, who was accosted by Cambridge police officers while trying to get into his own home, we cannot point to an instance of police violence meted upon a black professional that comes close to that meted upon an Eric Garner or a Freddie Gray. Politically it would allow for a more robust political movement that can generate substantive changes not just in the carceral state but in the neoliberal state more broadly. Although I do believe we should take Occupy Wall Street and the Movement for Black Lives in tandem, activists organizing against police violence have not been as robust in examining economic inequality. Finally, and relatedly doing so would enable blacks to move more aggressively against the type of black class politics that often sees what could be called "the black agenda" co-opted by a strata of black professionals and managers in such a way as to render it useless for progressive (much less radical) change.

I agree that intellectually we would do much to move past the types of New Jim Crow approaches that characterize some forms of black activism in this moment. It not only gets the story wrong, but it leads to a form of politics that moves us backwards not forwards. I agree that activists need to better connect contemporary police violence to the types of economic violence associated with the neoliberal turn. While we definitely cannot solve police violence with the types of technological fixes proposed by elites–cameras won't solve our problems–we also cannot solve police violence without tackling economic inequality. Finally I agree that the

black political agenda to the extent one can be said to exist, has been dominated by class concerns.

With this said, neither Reed or Johnson fully reckon with hypersegregation. The areas that have served as the center of the movement for black lives, Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago, are areas defined not just by racial segregation but by race and class segregation. Further the standard labor condition in these spaces is not under-employment but long term unemployment. Moreover, not just long term unemployment, but long term unemployment structured by carceral state employment. The neighborhood Freddie Gray was murdered in spends more money incarcerating its residents than any other neighborhood in the state of Maryland.

(What does this mean?)

First it means that the black populations hardest hit by police violence are in some real ways uniquely cordoned off from other poor populations. Because the populations in these areas aren't working in the formal economy, they aren't in the types of workplaces in which bonds of labor solidarity can be easily be established with other populations. And as they live in hyper segregated neighborhoods these neighborhoods by definition are not ones that easily allow for bonds of solidarity to be established with white populations outside of them. The police violence meted upon these populations represent a combination of attempts to keep them away from capital (the police district Freddie Gray was murdered in abuts the central business district) and to expropriate fines and fees from them to bolster dwindling municipal coffers (before the Justice Department decree Ferguson collected more than 20% of its municipal revenue from fines and fees).

There are instances of police brutality involving whites–police have murdered more whites than blacks over the past decade or so–however these other instances have rarely resulted in white protest. This is, in significant part, a spatial matter–given the reality of rural spaces it would seem to be difficult if not impossible to generate the types of political protest that would bring widespread attention to a given instance of rural police violence. More importantly, because the areas poor whites live in do not appear to be beset by the types of concentrated policing the areas poor blacks tend to live in whites simply don't see police violence as an issue. They may see state encroachment as an issue, but this does not tend to translate into antagonism towards police in general nor towards individual acts of police violence. In fact given the economic opportunities the carceral state may provide for poorer whites (in the form of prison and police employment) their support for police and the carceral state in general may be significant.

Over the past few years we've seen a resurgence in conversations about populism. I suggest that the populist movement might give us some traction as to how to think about this.

A quick primer. The civil war, won by the North as a result of the "great strike", brought about and exacerbated two important changes. First, it further spread the democratic impulse

brought about by extending the right to vote to non-propertied men in the 1830s by giving black men the right to vote and by giving blacks full political citizenship. Second, it brought about significant economic changes by first moving to a paper currency and then to a hard currency. The first change led to some of the first broad attempts to enact what Du Bois would call an abolitionist democracy, using taxing power to create some of the nation's first public schools and what could be thought of as a progressive government. The second change, alongside the 1877 Hayes-Tilden Compromise, significantly exacerbated the economic hardship faced by individuals in the agricultural sector, as the shift to a hard currency reduced the power of debtors in favor of creditors.

The industrial and communication sectors grew during these changes. Industrial workers and agricultural workers alike began to feel the pinch generated by reduced currency (which increased their debt) and by poor working conditions. Industrial workers sought to use the strike to bring about better working conditions. Agricultural workers at first sought to create cooperatives that would give them better negotiating power, but came to realize that the cooperatives they wanted to create had little weight without political power. And came to realize they had common cause with industrial workers in the north and the spreading west. Realizing that the only way they could accumulate the political and economic power they needed was by organizing a broad political movement they created the People's Party, with a platform that called for a silver backed currency, term limits, direct elections for senators and presidents, state ownership of the telegraph, and worker's rights (among other things).

The People's Party had a brief but significant effect on American politics. People's Party candidates either by themselves or on fusion tickets won important victories throughout the south. But in the face of growing opposition and an attempt by the democratic party to co-opt much of the populist movement's energy (with only a little bit of the platform) the People's Party gave way to a white supremacist movement that ended up transforming the South and hamstringing progressive politics in the south for generations.

Many recognize the role race played in the end of the populist movement, but few recognize the importance not just of race but of black populism in the beginning of the populist movement. It is here I want to turn.

At the same time white agricultural workers in the south began to create worker cooperatives and white workers in the north began to create the first industrial unions, black workers in the north and the south began to organize as well. Black workers in the north joined the Knights of Labor by the thousands, creating their own chapters in instances and joining pre-existing white ones in others. Black workers in the south created their own cooperatives. In as much as there were far more black workers in the south than in the north–the great migration was a few decades away–it was this move that became tremendously important. The "Colored Wheels" black workers created generated the backbone of what would become the Colored Farmers' Alliance. This organization, like its white counterpart, had a few moving parts. It was formed of individual chapters each comprised of dues paying members. Its leadership was elected by these chapters and held accountable by them. It had a communication organ that spread

information about the activities of various chapters. Finally, it developed a network of cooperatives that enabled members to reduce costs and increase profits of their agricultural labor. The success of the populist movement in general depended upon this segment of workers–black workers constituted a significant portion of the agricultural worker sector in general as a result of slavery. Both the transition into the People's Party and the electoral victories the People's Party ended up getting came largely from the support given by black members. With the death of the people's party came the rise of the Jim Crow regime designed not primarily to segregate blacks, but primarily to concentrate political and economic power within the hands of planters through segregating and disfranchising blacks. One of the primary byproducts of this regime was the development of a political culture within black communities that increasingly focused on extra-political means of generating political accountability.

The most important aspect of the Jim Crow regime was its disfranchising black (and many white) voters. These citizens couldn't vote, serve on juries, elect representatives, articulate and fight for policy. This dynamic concentrated political power in the hands of the Democratic Party and then within the Democratic Party the planter class, who used their power to stave off union development and any instance of progressive government that might benefit working class citizens in general and black citizens (regardless of class) in particular. Furthermore though, in as much as black communities were still large enough to require some means of management, a black broker class developed comprised largely of black religious and educational leaders. This broker class received much of their social power from their ability to not only provide services to black communities in a segregated economy, but for their ability to negotiate between white economic and political elites and black communities. Arguably what peace existed during the south at this time existed in part because this broker class was able to often garner and distribute enough resources to black communities on behalf of blacks while at the same time "cooling out" radical elements in black communities on behalf of whites.[1] Even as we now have thousands of black elected officials and in the 2008 and 2012 elections blacks outvoted whites for the first time, what could be called "a black agenda" still reflects the residue of this period.[2]

It is this dynamic that Cedric Johnson and Adolph Reed (among others) rightly critique, hand in hand with the transhistorical framework many in the movement adopt when describing the causes of police violence. If the Movement for Black Lives continues to think of police violence primarily in racial terms then it not only opens itself up to the possibility of intra-racial cooptation, working class black populations are opened up to the possibility of yet more brokerage. Indeed, to an extent we saw this happen during the last Obama term. However, what they ignore is that the police violence meted upon urban communities segregated by race and class is disproportionately meted out upon these communities where they live as opposed to where they work. To conduct the type of political movement that would transform the nation we require a political infrastructure that would have every black neighborhood, every block, every household politicized. Doing so would not just allow for expanded mobilization against the types of egregious murders that police have been causing, it would allow for the development of a cadre of leaders who can self-organize both against these egregious murders and against the types of routine state violence and corruption that ends up hurting poor black

populations the most, and it would give black working class populations the ability to shape what we think of as “the black political interest” in their favor. And it would give black working class populations the ability to work across racial lines with other communities beset by equally pressing issues.

Looking backwards to the Populist Party, we did have a brief moment in which black and white workers came together on behalf of their shared economic interests, and in doing so radically expanded the what was politically possible in an America that was barely 100 years old. However what also stands out about that period is that blacks were the victims of a particular form of state violence that whites tended to ignore.

Now I recognize that this attempt to look backward is fraught. The populist moment happened long before the nation industrialized, long before cities much less metropolitan areas became the central space of American development. It happened long before advances in communication technology–the telegraph was barely being used and the telephone was decades away. It happened long before advances in transportation technology. Finally, it happened a few decades before unions took hold. Yet and still I think the fundamental aspects–the fact that blacks and whites had common economic ground but very different relationships with the state on the issue of racial violence, the fact that blacks were able to create local groups that organized around their interests but that these groups were fraught with intra-racial class tension–point us both to the continued necessity of multi-racial class based organizing and intra-racial class based organizing.

Notes

[1]. Truth be told southern blacks and blacks in general were not bereft of a political infrastructure. Two decades after the end of the populist movement we see a significant increase in black only organizations. But these organizations were largely populated by black middle and upper income men and women. The black fraternities and sororities mostly created between 1906 and 1922 by definition excluded individuals without a college education. Neither the NAACP nor the Urban League were exclusive but its leadership (when not white) was primarily upper class. Both the United Negro Improvement Association and arguably the African Blood Brotherhood stood as exceptions, but the UNIA largely eschewed formal politics and was stridently capitalist while the African Blood Brotherhood was not an organization with a large membership base.

[2]. The political infrastructure I note above as important as it became during the civil rights years skewed what could be called a black political agenda towards the interests of middle to upper class blacks, and then created a leadership class that had few formal mechanisms of accountability. Indeed thinking about the post-civil rights era we can almost draw a straight line between individuals like Jesse Jackson jr., Louis Farrakhan, and Al Sharpton, to the largely unaccountable broker dynamic, and thinking about the post-post civil rights era we can draw a straight line between Barack Obama’s presidency and this dynamic. A number of instances stand out, but I’ll point to one–after a wave of police killings a number of prominent black

intellectuals visited the White House to get Obama to be more aggressive. Obama deployed Al Sharpton to tell the group in no uncertain terms that it was their responsibility to support Obama, not the other way around.

“Down with White Leadership!!”: Racial Capitalism, “Race Men,” and the Wages of Political Blackness

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In late 1913, several well-heeled African Americans, mostly businessmen, in New York City founded the United Civic League (UCL) to promote the “interest and welfare of the Negro voter by organizing and solidifying said voters into a body without party designation.”[1]

Civic leaders, like Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, deemed it a “good time” for elected black leadership.[2] Dr. W. R. Lawton, pastor of St. James Presbyterian Church, shared, “The candidacy of a colored man for alderman in New York City at this time when the race is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its emancipation is a most fitting aspiration.” “This movement,” he added, “comes after fifty years of citizenship as a test of our ability to get together and cooperate for our common good in civic and political affairs.” That year, the group’s president, John M. Royall, a black realtor, ran for Alderman from Harlem’s 21st Assembly District (AD). Royall lost, but, for the next two decades, Harlem’s “race men” continued to demand, “down with white leadership!”[3]

The concept of “race men” has been a frequent trope in African American history. In their classic tome *Black Metropolis*, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton sketched the traditional understanding of “race men:” “The masses leave ‘the burden of The Race’ to those individuals who are oriented around ‘service.’ “‘Solving the race problem,’” they explain, “is left in the hands of Race Leaders,” who “are expected to put up some sort of aggressive fight against the exclusion and subordination of Negroes.” When asked to describe the attributes of “race leaders,” respondents in their survey mentioned the following: “knows the difficulties of the race and fights without selfish reason;” “is a sincere person;” “has a constant, sincere interest in the race;” “has the interest and well-being of the Negro race uppermost in his life.”[4]

The view that black progress has been carried on the shoulders of a series of selfless, industrious, community-minded, male leaders is as common as it is problematic. It silences the voices of many anti-racist activists. Fortunately, social scientists and historians have recovered black women from the periphery of this history.[5] Others have probed the ideological foundations and the social and political repercussions of this erasure.[6] Literary scholar Hazel Carby penned a searing critique of “race men” trope, particularly its operation in black political thought and culture. From her trenchant study of W.E.B. Du Bois and close reading of his classic *Souls of Black Folk*, she uncovers a “conceptual framework that is gender-specific” and that fails “to imagine black women as intellectuals and race leaders.” Carby writes, “Du

Bois described and challenged the hegemony of …racial formations in the United States at the dawn of a new century, but he did so in ways that both assumed and privileged a discourse of black masculinity."[7]

Persuaded by Carby's gendered critique, I hope to expose the effects of capitalism and class on the discursive strategies and political projects of "race men" and reevaluate normative defenses of this leadership. While the leaders of the UCL claimed to act on behalf of the "interests and welfare of the negro voter," one cannot help but wonder whether their own class position shaped how they imagined the voter's "welfare." It is plausible that the values and financial concerns of business owners and educated clergy swayed their rendering of the "common good," both the "good" and the boundaries of the community it served. Consequently, this essay asks: What are the theoretical, normative, and political implications of situating "race leadership" within a broader political economy? What conceptual frameworks animate this activism? What is gained by middle-class leadership? What is lost? I am certainly not alone in this endeavor. Adolph Reed,[8] Cedric Johnson,[9] Cathy Cohen,[10] and Lester Spence[11] have laid bare the democratic limits of black politics—the conservative or capitalist impulses of African American elites. I attempt to build on these significant contributions by excavating the political economy uniting them. I derive from Cedric Robinson's concept of *racial capitalism* a theory of black class stratification and use it decipher middle-class African American leadership.

Popular and scholarly treatments of black politics tend to obscure salient cleavages and depict a progressive consensus in African American political culture.[12] According to some historians, persistent racial segregation, urban disinvestment, and police violence and mass incarceration have compelled broad swaths of the African American community to endorse "black power" and militant antiracism.[13] Social scientists have supplied their own version of the consensus. National analyses have shown a substantial degree of homogeneity in African American political behavior.[14] Large-N surveys have exposed considerable racial differences in policy preferences.[15] Given the postwar party realignment around race, especially the Republican party's increasingly reactionary stance on civil rights, race-based attitudes and behavior at the national level are not particularly surprising.[16] They are also not the whole story.

At the local level, black politics assumes different complexions. Minority groups battle it out for recognition and influence.[17] Contrasting claims of culture and conflicting class-based considerations tear at the fabric of African American communities in cities throughout the United States.[18] My own work on the Rockefeller drug laws reveals how middle-class African Americans in Harlem—caught in the throes of drug trafficking, addiction, and violent crime—began to view the urban black poor as the source of their ills, turned to police and prison for remedies, and drew upon religious values to justify this punishment.[19] None of this, of course, absolves the astonishing devastation of white supremacy or its persistent grasp on American life. But that's not the whole story. As Lester Spence avers, "Even as racism still shapes the lives of blacks in [Detroit, St. Louis, and Baltimore]," "racism cannot explain why some blacks in these areas have a lot of resources and some have a few." He continues,

“Racism cannot explain why there are some black populations we as black men and women are all too willing to fight for, while there are other black populations we are will to let die. And racism cannot fully explain how black people choose to fight, nor can it fully explain the solutions black people generate for the problems they face.”[20] Spence fleshes out the rest of the story by unveiling the neoliberal components of black political thought and urban African American politics. Following his lead, I adopt a local lens to observe the effects of racial capitalism on black politics. I return to Harlem and trace the political appeals of “race men” from the end of Reconstruction until the New Deal.

Although a century ago, this period represents a formative moment in the historical development of African American politics. Michael Dawson’s “black utility heuristic,” holds that “as long as race remains dominant in determining the lives of individual blacks, it is ‘rational’ for African Americans to follow group cues in interpreting and acting in the political world.”[21] In this canonical account, the organization of civil society is determinative: “The tendency of African Americans to follow racial cues has been reinforced historically by institutions developed during the forced separation of blacks from whites during the post-Reconstruction era.”[22] Accordingly, segregated social institutions fostered intra-group solidarity, including middle-class attachment to poor and working-class African Americans. Testing this hypothesis, I summon on a diverse array of sources to survey the structural and ideological dimensions of Harlem’s post-Reconstruction public sphere, ascertain how they shaped the formation, meanings, and purposes of race-based frames, and assess their representativeness.

Finally, I borrow the concept “political blackness” to chasten the interpretive work. As Carby’s reflections make clear, even the shrewdest analysts can inadvertently construct their own version of “blackness” as they assay racism. Writing about racial discourses in the United Kingdom, Tariq Modood criticizes scholarly and activist attempts to impose “blackness” on Asians in order to build pan-ethnic anti-racist movements in the United Kingdom.[23] According to Modood, this “political blackness,” “falsely equates racial discrimination with colour-discrimination” and “obscures the cultural antipathy to Asians.”[24] For him, it suggests a “false essentialism,” the idea “that all non-white groups have something in common other than how others treat them.”[25] With this in mind, I, instead of taking the statements and programs of “race men” at face value, hope to denaturalize African American politics, interrogating how the “race”—its interests, goals, and boundaries—is conceptualized and deployed.

Racial Capitalism and Political Blackness

Extant theories of race are bedeviled by excessive reductionism and false dichotomies. Marxist approaches to race reduce racism to the imperatives of economic structures. Writing about the United Kingdom, Robert Miles argues that “‘*black people in Britain*’ cannot be adequately [analyzed] as a ‘race’ outside or in opposition to class relations.”[26] Likewise, theories that conceive of race as an independent and autonomous social system reduce class and capitalism to dictates of that ascriptive hierarchy. Refuting class-conflict theories of race, Michael Omi

and Howard Winant write, “Racial dynamics must be understood as determinants of class relationships and indeed of class identities, not as mere consequences of these relationships.”[27] While these useful correctives might tell us what capitalism and class not explain, they do not clarify for what they can account. Surely, both racism and capitalism matter.

Cedric Robinson formulates a useful synthesis: *racial capitalism*. In his critique of western Marxism, Robinson reconstructs the racial aspects of European feudalism and its subsequent impact on the development of capitalism.[28] “In the intensely racial social order of England’s industrializing era,” he writes, “the phenomenology of the relations of production bred no objective basis for the extrication of the universality of class from the particularism of race.”[29] Robinson indicates that “persistence and creation” of ethnic, racial, and national divisions “within the working classes were a critical aspect of the triumph of capitalism in the nineteenth century.”[30] Inspired by Robinson, my theory of black class stratification draws attention to the historically and spatially contingent interaction of ascriptive hierarchies and capitalist technologies of production and exchange within polities.[31] The value and agency of individuals entangled in “free markets” are defined by the unequal distribution of material and cultural worth across social groups operative before the emergence of those economies. As Robinson illustrates, these hierarchies smoothed the advance of capitalist systems by validating their concomitant dislocations and disparities.

Technologies of production and exchange can also solidify or rearrange ascriptive logics across groups while modifying the dispersion of material and cultural worth within groups.

Although recent applications of racial capitalism have explored how the menacing mix have exacerbated disadvantage for the urban black poor,[32] the interaction can produce opportunities for others.[33] While discrimination within capital markets restricted black access to financial resources, segregation within service sectors created incentives for “ethnic entrepreneurs” to meet needs unfilled by white firms, and segregation established social networks and racial ties from which “ethnic entrepreneurs” could marshal capital and cultivate customers.[34] As Drake and Cayton and others have revealed, white supremacy and capitalism in the post-Reconstruction era generated a social stratum of professionals, including lawyers, doctors, undertakers, real estate agents, saloon keepers, and barbershop and beauty parlor owners, and deepened and legitimized internal material disparities and cultural cleavages that had originated in the antebellum racial order.[35]

The sinister nexus of economic exploitation and racial domination can place this black petite bourgeoisie at odds with working-class and poor African Americans. N. D. B. Connolly uncovers the role “nonwhite property owners” played in the evolution of segregation and emergence of concentrated poverty in southern Florida. He acknowledges that “black business and property interests often provided the organizational resources and personal connections that proved critical to race reform.”[36] Even so, the ventures of this class were not always progressive or benign. In a jaw-dropping conclusion, he writes, “In the preceding chapters, one finds civil rights and civic leaders who, as landlords, strong-armed their poor black tenants or willfully allowed their properties to collapse on top of black children. One finds middle-class black

suburbanites who sought to isolate an emerging underclass."[37] Connolly's rich history does not demonstrate that racism and capitalism placed nonwhite property owners in the same structural situation as their white counterparts. White supremacy granted white businesses access to financial and political capital unavailable to minority firms. Nevertheless, African American property owners existed in a structural location of their own: apart from white society and, at once, near and removed from poor and working-class blacks.

These theoretical insights inform this exploratory analysis of African American leadership in early twentieth-century New York City. I argue that the race-based claims of "race men" should not be taken at face value. They should be interpreted with an analytical sensitivity to the structural location from which those ideas and proposals emerges. As Dawson rightly suggests, post-Reconstruction black civil society played a critical role in the evolution of race-based political frames. Yet, as Connolly's uncompromising history insists, the "race men" who led those civic institutions and managed those organizational resources bore their own unique motivations. Thus, while "political blackness" can be molded and mobilized on behalf of working-class and poor African Americans, it can also be devised for the benefit of the black middle-class.

Race, Class, and the Evolution of Political Blackness

From the end of Reconstruction until the beginning of WWI, a nation seemingly washed of its original sin of slavery was damned once more by Jim Crow, the violence of white supremacist terrorists, and a federal government at times ambivalent and at times hostile to the fate of newly-freed slaves.[38] Southern trees bore strange fruit.[39] Escaping the carnage of the Redeemer's south, many African Americans sought refuge in cities in the South and North. According to the Historian Marci Sacks, the "individual testimony" of "race men," like Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and James Weldon Johnson, and "race women," like Ida B. Wells, "confirmed that the fear of falling victim to lynching propelled black people away from their native homes" to New York City.[40] Demographic data are consistent with this narrative. The black population of New York City climbed from 33,888 in 1880 to 60,666 in 1900. It hit 91,709 in 1910 and climbed to 152,207 in 1920.[41]

These migratory patterns, however, were products of both the politics *and* economy of the South. Between the early 1890 and early 1922, the boll weevil, floods, and other events undermined the Southern cotton economy.[42] In response to these shifts, black laborers moved to cities and the North in search of work and higher wages.[43] The available attitudinal evidence affirm the causal force of the economic incentives and personal desires. In 1907, Helen Augusta Tucker's survey of 385 black wage laborers revealed that "many who come from the South have relatives or acquaintances here who picture the wages and conditions in too glowing colors and forget to speak of the disadvantages." One man told her, "They go back South to visit with two or three different styles or clothes and two or three rings and shake them people up something wonderful."[44] Fielding Ogburn's 1909 study of fifty black migrants from Richmond, Virginia found that seventeen relocated for financial reasons, fourteen migrated because of relatives, nine migrated for the "Glamour of New York city." In

Benjamin H. Locke's 1913 survey of thirty-five African Americans in Harlem, nineteen migrated for work, eight came with family, six came for "adventure," and only two moved because of "race friction."[45] A larger 1912 survey of 365 black wage-earners corroborate these Locke's findings: 47.1% gave "economic" reasons for their move to New York City, including to "find work" and get "more money." Another 32% listed "family" reasons, including "Brought here by parents," "Came with husband" and "Had a sister here." In addition to being dawn because of labor and love, number of wage-earners shared personal reasons, like "Wanted to make a change" or "Got tired of Baltimore; thought I'd see some of New York." Still some just wanted to see New York: "Heard talk of enjoyable life here" and "Thought I'd like New York."[46]

Racism and capitalism limited the economic opportunities of all African Americans while stratifying black society. After the turn of the twentieth century, more and more African American businesses came into being to service the expanding consumer base. Based upon his canvass of 567 businesses listed in a 1909 directory of black businesses, George Edmund Hayes, executive director of the Urban League, counted 475 enterprises. Of the 309 firm for which he was able to secure records, 50 were barbershops, 36 were groceries, 26 were restaurants or lunch rooms, 24 were tailors or related shops, 19 were coal, wood, or ice vendors, 17 were hotels or lodging houses, 14 were employment agencies, 12 were express and moving vans, and 11 were undertakers. The rest included pool rooms, saloons and cafes, hairdressers, and printers. Haynes observed two key patterns: "The largest number of the enterprises are the outgrowth of the domestic and personal service occupations and they are mainly enterprises that call for small amounts of capital."[47] Another trend is evident: most enterprises provided goods or services the city's black population could not or would not get from white-owned firms.

Encouraged by civic leaders, these entrepreneurs used their racial identity to expand their consumer base and amass wealth. In 1914, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. argued that since the "white man" had forced African Americans into "separate lodges, Christian associations, churches, and …communities," "we" should force "him" out of businesses "among us" and "build up strong race enterprises and strong race men."[48] In 1916, the *New York Age* led a campaign to support "race men" operating businesses in Harlem. Declaring the effort a success, the paper claimed that a "mass of people" had not only awakened to the need for "race solidarity" in the market place , but they had also made themselves "missionaries" for the "doctrine" of "buying from race merchants."[49] Over a decade later, the Harlem Life Insurance Company branded itself as the "first life insurance company to by organized by Race men [in the State of New York].[50] These "race men" also claimed their ownership of commercial enterprises could only benefit the race. In 1912, the father of Harlem argued that "colored tenement properties" should be managed by "Negro agents" because the agents would have more "interest, sympathy and respect for tenants."[51]

At the same time, black laborers faced formidable roadblocks in the labor market. In 1900, over sixty percent of black males were in domestic or personal service, including janitors and sextons and servants and waiters. Although black men increasingly found industrial work, the racism of employers and labor unions severely curtailed their options.[52] In Tucker's study,

several carpenters noted these challenges when explaining why they did not work in their trade. Two said, “I didn’t try because I knew I couldn’t get it.” Two reported, “Told I had no chance.” Others shared similar views: “Owing to Union” and “Didn’t try to join Union, having learned they were against colored.” One painter said he couldn’t find regular work because he was “barred on account of color.” Another worked “off and on” due to “too much discrimination.” One blacksmith applied for jobs at several horse-shoeing shops but was told that it “wasn’t costmary to employ colored men, the white men won’t work with you.”[53] The consensus view among respondents in Forrester B. Washington’s 1916 survey was that “the colored man hasn’t a chance in New York in the trades.”[54]

As the membership of the UCL suggests, members of Harlem’s political class came primarily from its petit bourgeois, which had specific ideological consequences for “race leadership.” Many of the professionals that dominated African American electoral politics from the 1900s until the 1930s had followed Booker T. Washington and espoused conservative economic principles. In 1910, Washington’s Negro Business League held its tenth anniversary meeting in New York City.[55] The convention’s stenographer recorded “chunks of practical wisdom,” including, “We are not seeking rank, but opportunity;” “The more we advertise discrimination, the more discrimination we have;” “It is not a good thing to advertise your non-employment;” and “The bad men in both races are not far apart.”[56]

Although the conference featured speakers from across the country, representatives from New York City proudly expounded on the precepts of free enterprise.[57] John Royall, who would later lead the UCL, praised African American brokers and agents for creating “for his people better conditions, better houses, in better locations; which culminated in the colonization of Harlem, a section now representing nine-tenths of the business thrift among Negroes in New York.” In his welcome address, Charles Anderson, leader of black Republicans in the city, told attendees that they were “gaining respect for the race and making easier the progress of its future.” To laughter and applause, he remarked, “You men represent the aristocrats of our race, for you know that there is nothing in the world so aristocratic as the ‘almighty dollar,’—except it be ‘two dollars.’” Anderson praised their accomplishments, which they achieved despite “poverty and dire difficulties,” with a “resolute determined spirit,” and without “whining or complaining.”[58]

While members of Harlem’s political class continued to espouse the tenets of laissez-faire capitalism, they eventually embraced the “militant” civil rights approach of the NAACP. Although Fred Moore, editor of the *New York Age*, welcomed the NAACP and its civil rights agenda in the 1920s, he had not always felt this way. In 1911, Washington admonished Moore for his attacks on the organization and instructed him to “stop fighting” and “pursue a course of reconciliation.”[59] To ingratiate himself with the “militants” and secure their political support, Royall began distancing himself from the Tuskegee machine. Charles Anderson remembered that before Washington had died Royall had “[criticized] and abused the Doctor almost nightly” and grumbled that “now he is weeping over his death because it is popular to do so.”[60]

This ideological consensus among elites was not provoked by the desires of poor and working-class African Americans. By the 1920s, the NAACP, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. remembered, "had not captured the indignation of the working class."[61] It no surprise why. When the New York branch of the association opened in 1916, its officers included James Weldon Johnson; John E. Nail, real estate impresario and Johnson's brother in law; John Royall, leader of the UCL; Mrs. Reverdy C. Ransom, wife of Rev. Ransom, whose run for Congress the UCL would soon sponsor; and E. A. Johnson, a lawyer whose candidacy to the state Assembly was also sponsored by the UCL.[62] The first forum held by the new branch was on "The Predicament of Colored Medical Students under the new Interne Requirements," a "very serious problem confronting colored medical students desiring to practice in New York State." Not surprisingly the Manhattan branch struggled building a membership. In 1918, its roster numbered 1,477.[63] The congregations of over a dozen black churches exceeded that total. The Abyssinian Baptist Church alone boasted a congregation of 8,000. In 1923, the *Amsterdam News* even begged its readers to join the organization, stressing that "the national office and the various branches have done enough to compel us to see the great need of their work."[64]

The organization's middle-class sensibilities alienated many black New Yorkers. According to E. Franklin Frazier, Du Bois was "too intellectual to satisfy the mob."[65] Garvey's *Negro World* portrayed the Harvard-educated scholar as the "idol of the drawing room aristocrats," someone who "lingers around universities and attends pink tea parties." The paper charged that the "author of the 'Souls of Black Folk,'" had not "become the popular leader of the masses of his own race." It explained, "Du Bois appeals to the 'Talented Tenth"… The N.A.A.C.P. appeals to the Beau Brummell, Lord Chesterfield, kid gloved, silk stocking, creased trousers, patent leather shoe, Bird of Paradise hat and Hudson seal coat with beaver of skunk collar element.[66]

While the some of this criticism might be chalked up to interpersonal rivalries among leaders, Du Bois's own words betray the class biases of many race "militants." Du Bois and segments of Harlem's elite did not always include Afro-Caribbean immigrants within the boundaries of blackness. For Du Bois, Garveyites represented "the lowest type of negroes, mostly from the West Indies."[67] This anti-immigrant was not simply a reaction to the extravagances of Marcus Garvey. In 1934, years after the collapse of the Jamaica's movement, lawyer and founding UCL member Louis Lavelle wrote President Franklin Roosevelt protesting the appointment of the Dr. Godfrey Nurse, who had immigrated from British Guiana in 1918, a Presidential Elector on the Democratic ticket. For Lavelle, "That honor…should have been place upon the worthy shoulder of a native born American colored man." He then commenced a diatribe against Afro-Caribbean immigrants: "These [foreign-born] colored persons, naturalized citizens in the main, like a certain type of lodger in one's home who does not stay for long, has been handing out…inherited estate of native born American colored people." For him, plum patronage posts represented the "political estate of [native-born] colored people—citizens of the soil."[68]

Du Bois's "theory of Harlem" is also telling. In his review of white author's Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, a novel about Harlem's boisterous night life, Du Bois called the novel a "blow

in the face" and an "affront to the hospitality of black folks." In addition to inveighing against the controversial title, Du Bois objected to the book's focus on Harlem's nightlife: "To him the black cabaret is Harlem; around it all his characters gravitate." The NAACP leader called this "theory of Harlem" "nonsense." He explains, "The average colored man in Harlem is an everyday laborer, attending church, lodge and movie and as conservative and conventional as ordinary working folk everywhere."[69] In his review of Rudolph Fisher's novel *The Walls of Jericho*, a study of life of Harlem society in the 1920s, Du Bois lamented that Fisher had not "depicted Negroes like his mother, his sister, his wife, his real Harlem friends." "The glimpses of better class Negroes are ineffective make-believes," he added.

Setting aside Du Bois's Victorian sensibilities, the available evidence does not fully support his theory of Harlem. As Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby observed, social activities in Harlem ranged from "noisy 'chitterlin' suppers' and 'barrel house' parties to stilted *soirees*, symposiums, and musicals."[70] Seymour's 1912 survey a group of Virginia migrants discovered "a half-dozen churches or missions," a "five-cent-theater," "plenty of saloons," "a relatively large number of pool rooms," and "a sort of 'red light café' and dancing rooms." One barber enjoyed "walking about, dancing, baseball, and pool playing.' He spent "his money free" and took great interest in his image: "his clothes…are extreme in cut and color and supplemented by pins and rings" and "[b]y much oiling, rubbing and plastering down he has made his hair almost straight."[71] In 1913, Locke stumbled across similar patterns. Twenty-six of thirty-five individuals worshiped at a Baptist church. While more respondents reported participating in religious services and related activities more in the South than in New York, they enjoyed other amusements more in the city than back home: ten individuals listed pool, nine listed boxing, eight listed none, six listed tennis, and four listed baseball. Twenty-five individuals "expressed fondness for dancing." Fifteen individuals enjoyed cards, including whist, poker, pinochle, and black jack. While none attended movies in the South, thirty-two had seen films in New York.[72]

Not all working people fancied Harlem's nightlife. In one survey, a twenty-eight-year-old man, husband and father of two had "little time for frivolities." A middle-aged woman who worked "off and on" as a cook and laundress considered the theatre and the like "foolishness." Instead, she involved herself in the church, Rosebud Society, and the True Reformers.[73] Unlike her, some workers could not afford lodge dues. Others could not always pay the price of admission at movie and vaudeville theaters. Even so, money-strapped residents brought Harlem's nightlife into their homes. Less inhibited than their church-going neighbors, many working-class residents threw rent parties, filling their apartments with and charging guests for boogie woogie, blues, and home cooking to keep up with housing expenses.[74] While some working-class Harlemites lived up to Du Bois's expectations, his theory of Harlem not only underestimated the pleasure most everyday black folk derived from the vices of the community's nightlife, but it also belied an insensitivity to the vicissitudes of urban life. Given his incomparable sociological tools,[75] Du Bois's theory of Harlem was clearly sculpting a "political blackness" that did not adequate capture how everyday folk lived and reveled in their own blackness.

Racial capitalism not only cultivated contrasting cultural sensibilities, but it also generated divergent interests. Although Royall and other African American property owners congratulated themselves for building for "[their] people" "better conditions, better houses, in better locations," quality housing remained major concern of many black Harlemites. In a 1927 survey of twenty-four hundred black families in Harlem, just twenty-two percent of respondents described their apartments as "good," eighteen percent labeled them "fair," and forty-eight percent said "poor," "bad," or "needed cleaning." Among this group, the list of grievances included, "Rats, rat holes, and roaches;" "Ceilings in two rooms have fallen, and third is about to fall;" "We have hot water twice a week;" "Unsanitary and dirty;" and "Very damp and cold all of the time." [76]

Early in Harlem's storied history, the logic of the local housing market placed African American property owners and renters on a collision course. Because of a city-wide housing shortage, rents spiked as housing quality declined. In 1916, Harlem residents enraged about rising rents convened a series of meetings to voice their grievances. Attendees blamed "colored real estate agents" for the "abnormal increase" in rents after apartments have been "opened for colored tenants."[77] One hundred nine tenants signed a petition denouncing "the so-called Negro real estate 'brokers' who are taking advantage of the present demand for more houses by making Negroes pay such unequal rents when we have such unequal opportunities to earn a living." The petition stated that the "vast majority of Negro" could not afford present rents "without 'commercializing' their apartments." This commerce necessitated "many lodgers," "socials," "loud and offensive language," and "prostitution."[78]

Despite the assumed properties of "race men," African American property owners and brokers did not react with much selflessness or solidarity. Many, like their white counterparts, blamed the rents hikes and squalid conditions on the cost of materials and high taxes. John Royall, UCL leader and officer in the New York Branch of the NAACP, took umbrage at the tenant meetings, remarking that he had "never heard of such a thing as bettering the condition of the renting class by providing lower rents." He called the effort "foolish" and advised attendees to target the "the high cost of living" instead of rents. He even objected to this activism: "I want to know the object of these meetings? Who suggested the movement?" He also dismissed the motives of organizers, calling the "movement" a "socialistic idea" or "grafting scheme."[79]

Though less aggressive than Royall, many other African American owners and brokers were not particularly empathetic. Philip A. Payton, Jr., real estate entrepreneur known as the "Father of Harlem," said "electing to office men who will give an economical government of the city" was the remedy. He explained that "self-preservation gives the owner and agent no alternative but to raise rents when cost of upkeep increases so sharply. [80] C. A. Knowles, another black agent, denied his firm had raised rents, but defended agents and owners saying, "the fault is not always theirs." He argued that "[i]f the colored man, knowing his paying capacity is over anxious to move into a house the moment he hears it is going [to be vacated by white tenants] and [often] takes such places under the most unfavorable sanitary conditions, the fault is theirs."[81] During this controversy, John E. Nail, another local NAACP official, did not say much, except that he could not "adequately or justly" explain the rent crisis. Back in 1914,

however, he was a bit more vocal about his opinions on race and real estate: “Negroes should live according to their economic condition and not according to their inclination.”[82] For the purposes of this analysis, whether these sentiments represented honest of assessments of their constraints or evidence of predation is beside the point: “race men” in real estate had systematically different interests than black renters.

African American electoral politics initially papered over class-based divisions focusing instead on recognition. Royall and others mobilized for “race representation” at all levels of government[83] and urged “race loyalty” without offer a policy agenda that addressed the needs of the entire community.[84] Instead, they characterized the individual election of lawyers, doctors, and other professionals as inherent goods. In 1918, after UCL-backed attorney Edward A. Johnson and Royall protégé John Clifford Hawkins defeated their opponents in Republican primaries, the *New York Age* declared, “race men are victorious.”[85] A similar headline appeared after each win.[86] Before each election, calls for “race loyalty” also repeated themselves. In 1924, the *New York Age* asked black votes to “show their loyalty” by voting for dentist Dr. Charles Roberts for Congress.[87] Keeping with these themes, Roberts wrote James Weldon Johnson “that the election of one of our race to the Congress of the United States…would certainly set to speed the progress of our people.” [88]

Although these “race men” were vehement advocates for civil rights, their economic program was not as progressive or inclusive.[89] The UCL tackled discrimination within the labor market but prioritized professionals: “Our Doctors should be Internes in the City Hospitals;” “We should have our Nurses in the City Hospitals and Milk Stations;” “Our Lawyers should be Magistrates in City Courts.” The league also endorsed the diversification of public agencies but said nothing about racism within unions or the struggles of domestic workers.[90] After Johnson entered the assembly in 1918, he introduced a civil rights bill targeting discrimination in public accommodation, which made denying services to or employment of African Americans in public accommodations, including theaters, restaurants, and hotels, a misdemeanor that carried a $50 to $500 fine. The legislature passed, and the Republican governor signed the bill.[91] Johnson introduced legislation curtailing child labor laws.[92] George A. Hall, secretary of the New York Child Labor Committee, condemned the measures, which effectively removed age and other restrictions, for enacting a “a ruthless regime of child exploitation.”[93] African American socialist activist A. Philip Randolph took Johnson to task, assailing the Assemblyman for being “ignorant of the fundamental recreational and educational needs of children,” and “part of the Republican machine, which represents factory and canneries interests which makes millions out of child labor.” “Here… is a clear case of a Negro being the father of a measure from which Negro children will be the chief [sufferers],” Randolph added.[94] While it is certainly plausible that partisan imperatives influenced Johnson’s actions, the statements of his UCL-supporters at the annual convention of the Negro Business League and during the rent crisis a preexisting and sincere belief in laissez-faire capitalism.[95]

As Harlem’s elites forged a political blackness devoted to civil rights and reflective of their class sensibilities and interests, individual pursuit of power and prestige frequently

complicated the project. When Royall ran for the board of alderman, Anderson, the leader of black Republicans, opposed the real estate entrepreneur because Royall had "no more chance than I have to be made president of Argentina."[96] For Anderson and other Republican "race men," personal power and position more than racial matters guided their strategy in local contests. Cold, hard calculations undercut the UCL-sponsored Reverend Reverdy Ransom's run for Congress.[97] After losing the Republican primary, he launched an independent bid,[98] claiming that he wanted to break "the stranglehold of the Republican organization" and serve "notice that the day of the civic and political exploitation of the black people of Harlem is ended."[99] Although the *Crisis* labeled Ransom "the candidate of the colored people,"[100] black Republicans and Moore's *New York Age* threw their support to the party's nominee. Forty of them met at headquarters of the white Republican candidate[101] and declared that it had become "the duty of all colored voters to support the candidate of the Republican Party."[102]

Harlem's ballooning black population increased the viability of "race men" in Republican primaries, so its elite increasingly coalesced around their "political blackness" and aggressively deployed it against white party leaders. [103] But their shared quest for recognition eventually got caught in the headwinds of Democratic counter mobilization and progressive policies. Figure 1 tells a familiar story: black voters in Harlem shifted their allegiances from the party of Lincoln to the party of FDR after 1932. [104] Figure 2, however, showcases a broader pattern. Tracing party registration in one of Harlem's main aldermanic districts over time shows that the Democratic party had become competitive by the early 1920s, before election of Franklin Roosevelt. All of this raises a critical question: What explains the increasing success of Democrats during black Republicans' aggressive, pre-New Deal push for "negro leadership"?

Figure 1: Party Proportion of the Presidential Vote in Harlem, 1920 to 1940

Source: New York City Board of Elections, *Annual Reports*, tabulated in John Albert Morsell, *The Political Behavior of Negroes in New York City* (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1951, 66).

Figure 2: Party Registration in Harlem's 21st Aldermanic District, 1917 to 1930

Source: New York City Board of Elections, Annual Reports, tabulated in George Martin Furniss, The Political Assimilation of Negroes in New York City (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1969, 297).

Democrats cut into the Harlem vote by appealing to residents marginalized by African American political elites. Despite an elite education, Ferdinand Q. Morton, leader of Tammany

Hall's black auxiliary the United Colored Democracy (UCD), reached out to Caribbean immigrants, working-class residents, and "underworld" figures.[105] Critics even accused the Mississippi native of being too cozy with "criminals," "gamblers," and "bootleggers."[106] As local Democratic leaders attempted to disentangle themselves from the retrograde racial tendencies of the national party,[107] they, with Morton's guidance, emphasized "material assistance" in Harlem.[108] During Democratic Mayor John Hylan's 1921 reelection bid, he ran as a "friend of the poor man,"[109] and the UCD circulated a leaflet "to Colored Republicans" stating that the incumbent's policies "are calculated to promote the interests of wage earning classes, to which we belong."[110] Even the Republican *New York Age* conceded that "as a group" black New Yorkers were not unmindful of "the good things [affecting their interests] that have been accomplished under the Hylan administration."[111] He won 70.5% of Harlem's 19th District and 74% of its 21st District.

Many in Harlem's elite looked askance at these Democratic inroads and interpreted them through class-based lens. In 1923, the *Amsterdam News* complained that newly-elected governor Alfred Smith "was swept into office" with the "assistance of thousands of Negro voters in Harlem." Acknowledging that many African American voters might have found themselves "at odds" with the program of the state Republican party, the paper was yet confident that the "majority of race-loving, law-abiding colored citizens will still be found outside the 'Tiger's' fold." And, as it emphasized, "that hyphenated word, 'law-abiding' gives the key to the whole situation." According to the paper, black Democratic politicians, "race traitors," recruited "vice-mongers, the gamblers, the bootleggers, and the underworld poolroom proprietors" after unsuccessfully appealing to the "thinking element of the colored vote."[112] Months later, the *Amsterdam News* accused Democrats of dividing the "Negro vote" by "[grinning] in the faces of a few Negroes, [patting] a few others on the back, [keeping] a few criminals out of jail, and [buying] a round or two of bootleg whiskey."[113] The position of the *Amsterdam News* was clear: "We fail to see what permanent service to the race can be rendered by a Negro elected on a Democratic ticket anywhere. We still contend that it is possible and much more honorable to elect *race men* to the Board of Alderman, the Assembly and Congress on the Republican ticket, if possible, and on an independent ticket if necessary."[114]

Democrats utilized economic themes in subsequent elections. In his 1925 reelection effort, Hylan advocated retaining a 5-cent subway fare, which enthralled Harlemites.[115] It prompted a group of black activists to form the Hylan Five-Cent Fare Club.[116] The Pocahontas Negro Democratic Club took out an ad in the *New York Age* asserting, "The colored people of Harlem number upward 200,000, one-half of which travel out of the district each day to business, and with increase of [carfare] of $18.00 per capita [for] this district alone." "[T]his is enough," it continued, "to cause the voters to rally to the support of Mayor Hylan."[117] That same year, the Colored Women's Democratic League, an affiliate of the UCD, donated five hundred baskets to needy children.[118] The mayor lost the primary to Jimmy Walker but won Harlem.

Black democratic activists continued to stress "material assistance" into the Walker

administration. The Colored Citizens' Non-Partisan Committee for the Re-Election of Mayor Walker praised the incumbent's stand on the five-cent fare, his advocacy of a local rent law which prevented "unscrupulous landlords from exploiting the occupants of low-rental apartments" and "mostly affected Harlem housing." The committee told black voters that because of the mayor's opposition to a 40% fare hike "you saved at least $5.00 a year" and claimed that the rental law "saved…Negro tenants hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars." It lauded the administration for public improvements in Harlem, including swimming pools, a public bath, new traffic lights, and "repaving, widening, and resurfacing streets and avenues in Harlem."[119]

This increased competition prompted African American elites to sharpen both their racial appeals and expand the electorate (and blackness). In 1928, Edward Johnson, whose election to the Assembly in 1917 had been engineered by the UCL and who had submitted legislation curbing child labor protections, ran for Congress on the Republican ticket.[120] The *Amsterdam News* proclaimed that it was the duty of "every Negro voter, Republican or Democrat" to "send Edward A. Johnson to Congress." It added, "Remember that you are voting for him, not as the member of a party, but as the representative of a race which has long been denied political recognition."[121] At a registration rally, Johnson argued that "foreign-born Negroes living in Harlem take out citizenship papers so that they might enjoy the political benefits of this country."[122] When he lost, the *Amsterdam News* chastised black residents for shirking their duty: "[Johnson] made a good run and received enough white support to have won if the Negroes had only done in their full part."[123]

Elite-driven racial cues abounded during the next electoral cycle. In 1929, Harvard Law School graduate Lamar Perkins entered the Republican primary for the Assembly as an independent candidate, [124] Managed by Samuel F. Holman, who had led Johnson's failed Congressional bid,[125] the insurgent campaign decried white domination of the district. Perkins declared, "We are tired of the white despots who hand us hand-picked representatives…and then speak of racial cooperation."[126] During that same cycle, Republicans nominated Hubert T. Delaney, an African American assistant United States attorney and son of a prominent North Carolina Bishop, as its congressional candidate.[127] Harlem's political class enthusiastically backed his candidacy. William M. Kelly, editor of the *Amsterdam News*, even managed his campaign. Clarifying his strategy, Delany hoped that "race pride" would "break down party lines."[128] According to his calculations, he needed ten thousand votes, and he intended "to ask the women of Harlem to give me those votes."[129] When the Democrat defeated him, Delany groused about Tammany racial mischief and poor black voter registration and turnout.[130] The *Chicago Defender* concurred with the latter, asserting that the chances of electing a "Race congressman" declined when "our people" did not demonstrate enough interest in registering and voting. The paper also castigated some black leaders for abandoning the Republican party: "Like…white men, he too, has become [a] political opportunist, and the party of Abraham Lincoln [and the freeing of the slaves] …no longer appeals to him."[131]

The *Defender* was not entirely wrong. Some "race men," former Republican stalwarts, had started to cozy up to the Tammany tiger. In a 1931 editorial, the *Amsterdam News* urged

Harlemites to "defeat Fred R. Moore," the *Age* publisher who had been elected to Board of Alderman. Among several calumnies, the paper criticized Moore for voting with Tammany and working with Democratic Mayor Jimmy Walker. After endorsing his previous two runs, the paper now called him a "good old Uncle Tom" and a "Negro has risen to power by hoodwinking his own race."[132] Although instigated by a "bitter newspaper [feud],"[133] this condemnation hinted at something salacious and entirely conceivable: Democratic monopoly of city government inured some rapacious "race men" to Tammany.

This theory, however, disregarded the popular origins of Democratic victories and their effects on Harlem's political elites. Nothing illustrates this more than the evolving politics of housing. Toward the end of the 1910s, Democrats, locally and statewide, began to embrace housing reforms as a key part of their agenda. Mayor Hylan and then Governor Al Smith introduced measures to aid tenants with rising rents, give renters more bargaining power against landlords, and compel property owners to provide quality housing.[134] None of this was out of the goodness of their hearts. Propertied interests were as powerful in Tammany Hall as they were in the Republican party or among "race leaders," but socialist organizing around these issues and the mobilization of tenant associations threatened the Tiger's hold on power.[135]

In Harlem, Democratic credit-claiming and the mobilization of cross-racial tenant associations pushed black and white Republicans to left on housing issues.[136] In 1925, Jewish Republican Assemblyman for Harlem Abraham Grenthal introduced a bill mandating that landlords make needed repairs and main sanitary conditions.[137] The *New York Age* praised his "championing of the interests of the tenants in New York."[138] After winning a seat in the Assembly from Harlem's 21st Assembly District in 1929, Republican Lamar Perkins vowed to assist the rent payers of Harlem, take on the exuberant rates pawn brokers, and aid taxi owners and drivers.[139] In 1930, newly-elected Republican from Harlem's 19th Assembly District Eugene Rivers, who had been educated at Yale and Columbia Law School,[140] introduced legislation that permitted a tenant to withhold rent if the landlord was found to be in violation of health and housing codes, forcing property owners to complete needed repairs.[141] Praising the legislative efforts of Perkins and Rivers, the Urban League's *Opportunity* noted that "[n]either the proposed legislation nor its opposition is based wholly on race": "Class interests alone have determined the complexion of the opposing groups."[142] That is, two African American politicos who had been mentored and supported by UCL members stood up against propertied interests they would have otherwise supported a decade before.

Eventually, white leadership in Harlem came to an end. In 1944, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. became, in his own words, "the first bad nigger in Congress."[143] With Powell, we get a "political blackness" that not only is inclusive of poor and working-class African Americans but one that exists for it.[144] Years before, Powell, the son of an UCL supporter and one of Harlem's great "race men," waged a "Jobs for Negroes" campaign and became the leader of the Greater New York Coordinating Committee for Employment. This more democratic blackness was not unique to Powell. [145] "The 'struggle for Negro rights' in postwar New York," historian Martha Biondi tells us, "began as a fight to keep jobs." In fact, she finds the "support of Harlem's middle-class leadership for social democratic, pro-union politics created a

deeply enabling environment and a broad push for social change."[146]

This progressive middle-class leadership, however, should not be viewed as a logical consequence of the racial order or a natural result of the New Deal era. Although the UCL promised in 1913 to promote the "interest and welfare of the Negro voter," its program and that of most Harlem's "race men" prioritized the welfare of New York's black elite, especially those in real estate. Even as this coterie abandoned Booker T. Washington, its "militant" approach to civil rights did not fully attend to the desires and aspirations of working-class African Americans. It was not until the mid-to-late 1920s that Harlem's elite began to enlarge blackness and target the compounded disadvantages of racial capitalism. Only after local Democrats began to siphon votes and threaten black Republican pursuit of power by promoting affordable transportation, public improvements, and better housing, did this petite bourgeoisie fully attend to the wishes and worldviews of the multitude.

Conclusion

This brief study of the evolution of "race leadership" in Harlem from the turn of the twentieth century to the New Deal raises serious methodological questions about the historiography of black politics as well as normative defenses of race-based activism. Recovering African American history is a tortuous endeavor, at times a profoundly politicized project.[147] Racial capitalism complicates the craft. Indigenous sources, such as organizational records, letters, and periodicals, generated by social elites do not offer a black history from below.[148] Based on these types of documents, histories of Harlem at this moment described it as a period of rising racial consciousness.[149] Yet black elites and periodicals were not unbiased arbiters of sentiment or the racial order. Tracing the racial claims of members of Harlem's political class, specifically those associated with the UCL and the Republican machine, reveals their instrumental origins. At some moments, they bellowed, "Down with white leadership!" At others, they pleaded for interracial cooperation. At some moments, they called for "race pride." At others, they demanded party loyalty. These shifts did not follow inflections in the racial order. African American political elites consistently defined and redefined blackness and assessed and reassessed racism to achieve their own goals.

Again, telling African American history from below is challenging. I have attempted to overcome formidable obstacles by triangulating different sources, including rare surveys, organizational data, and voting trends. Instead of confirming a natural solidarity, they tell a more complicated story. Middle-class and working-class African Americans migrated to New York for different reasons. While Jim Crow looms large in the migration narratives of "race men" and "race women," available surveys suggest that working-class African Americans moved to cities for work and love. Once in New York City, racial capitalism constrained elite access to capital. For black laborers, racial capitalism limited access to collective bargaining and quality work. These contrasting structural locations beget conflicting material interests and cultural sensibilities. Harlem's civic life frequently exacerbated these differences while its political life frequently ignored them. But not for long. Registration and voting data suggest that as "race men" ramped up their campaign for "negro representation," Democrats mobilized

around “material assistance” and began to undercut Republican strength and the political influence of black elites. “Race men” responded to these new incentives by freeing themselves of conservative economics, inviting more African Americans into the electoral process, and devising a “political blackness” that joined “negro representation” and “material assistance.”

“Race men” figure prominently in descriptive studies of black political thought normative evaluations of African American politics.[150] Specifically, scholars have plumbed the statements and writings of race to explain the nature of the American racial order and defend demands for recognition, separation, and solidarity.[151] While many of these leaders do not bear the same specific and intense economic motivations as property owners in early 20th Century Harlem, they were nonetheless impacted by their class position. Few have unmasked the dizzying malevolence of white supremacy than W. E. B. DuBois, but, if one would have drafted a political agenda based on his theory of Harlem, it would have been inadequate. A program for the “conventional” and “conservative” “average colored man” would have excluded the perspectives of many women, immigrants, and all the folks that enjoyed pool rooms more than pews and pulpits.

All of this also indicates the pitfalls of the scholarly fixation on national black leadership and African American politics. Just looking at national measures from the turn of the twentieth century to the New Deal, one could tell a simple racial story about the movement from Lincoln to FDR. But those accounts would miss definitive episodes in the historical development of African American politics and the conjunctural and contingent nature of racial politics. In cities, “race men” were deeply embedded within social orders generated by racial capitalism. They were also actors within complex local polities. The confluence meant that, at some moments, middle-class “race men” could depend on “race pride” and “race loyalty” to gain influence and maintain their own personal position. The confluence also meant that, at other moments, “race pride” and “race loyalty” would not be enough: they would be vulnerable to competition from those willing to appeal to elements and concerns at odds with their own class-based interests and sensibilities. The response to the latter was a bigger blackness, fuller in scope and intention.

The local lens helps us observe and understand those moments when “political blackness” is not just exclusive but also dangerous. While endorsing civil rights for all, many “race men” in Harlem endorsed an economic philosophy that harmed most. To be clear, none of this is a defense of white leadership. Given the logic of racial capitalism, it is reasonable to believe that the interests and desires of everyday black folk would not be well served by white middle- or working-class leadership. Indeed, despite their failings, Harlem’s “race men” were seminal figures in the development of equal rights in New York State, which certainly served poor and working-class African Americans well. Instead, this analysis complicates our theoretical and normative understanding of “black power” and its pursuit by African American leaders. Even as calls for “black power” justly responds to the shared constraints and indignities of white supremacy, advocates are also engaging in their own race-making work. “Black power” exists simultaneously as an articulated descriptive and normative claim about the distribution of influence within the broader society and an unarticulated normative claim about the

distribution of influence within black communities. Harlem's early history demonstrates that African Americans must always interrogate both sets of claims. The moral of this story is that without competition and contestation "political blackness" can fail most black people even as it strives to aid all.

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A New Wealth Tax? Or Strengthen the Tried-and-True One We Already Have?

By | 2019: vol. 18, no. 1

Senator Elizabeth Warren has offered up a proposal for wealth taxation – three percent per year on fortunes over a billion, two percent on fifty million and up, with in-kind equivalents for the owners of private companies, so that Bloomberg and the Kochs would simply hand over shares in their firms which the government would then auction to the public, diluting the ownership over time.

The impulse is admirable, to rid America of the vulgar plutocrats who infest our politics, our culture and our very lives. Warren's tax would hit only seventy-five thousand households a year, the very tip of the iceberg. Its advocates confidently claim that it can be done – most American wealth is in liquid stocks and bonds, most is inside the country, holding and hiding things overseas is hard, and so forth. While it's true that thresholds are problematic – the billionaire four times over could save forty million each year by splitting his wealth with a spouse and two children – advocates don't seem overly worried by that. And they confidently dismiss constitutional objections, possibly with correct legal arguments but more faith in the current Supreme Court than I'm inclined to share.

All that said, the idea does not seem very serious to me. It would have strange incentive effects, rewarding high-risk investors over the cautious, and those whose fortunes originate and may be held offshore (think Sheldon Adelson's casinos in Macau) over locals. It would depress the price of liquid financial assets in favor of those that are easier to hide or harder to value. Chances are, it would bring us even more gaudy mansions and hidden art collections than we have already.

But there is a deeper problem. How would the Internal Revenue Service even know who has wealth at or above the thresholds and who does not? The only way is for every household, however modest, to maintain an inventory of its wealth holdings – stocks, bonds, houses, cars, art and jewelry – as of some particular date in the year and to report on this annually in a tax filing. Otherwise, how does one know that the girl next door isn't a dot.com multi-millionaire, an heiress or a discreet drug dealer?

You can't have a tax without a tax base. To collect this information, and to check it (!) even on a spot-check basis, for all American households would mean constructing an entirely new tax system, far more complex and onerous and intrusive than the one we already have. The present one, in all its complexity, works (to the degree it works) largely because income is a relatively clear-cut concept, possible if not easy to define in law, and because the populace remains

(despite considerable evidence) persuaded that income tax is largely fair and effective. It would be very difficult to persuade them on a wealth tax, even though the declaration for most households might be quite simple, and even if one could come up with a good reason, as to why the US government needs to know about everything of possible value that one might happen to own.

Of course, we can and do tax wealth already. We do it through the estate and gift tax, and this has two practical virtues. First, it applies mainly at death of the estate-holder, when assets can be frozen and appraised, once for all, and then taxed before they are distributed to heirs and assigns. Thus it is integrated into a process that has to occur anyway, with any significant estate. Second, it creates a large incentive for the rich to give their assets away while still living – to non-profit institutions – and this recycles accumulations into current spending and jobs in education, health care, religion and the arts. The effect in the United States is considerable: about eight percent of all jobs are in institutions funded in part by estate-tax socialism.

And much could be done to make the estate tax stronger. It should have a higher, tiered set of progressive rates, becoming nearly confiscatory at levels of a billion dollars or more. (No American should die with that much money still in hand.) It should have a high threshold, so that it does not threaten the ordinary middle class. It should have fewer loopholes, less abuse in the valuation of assets transferred, and the trusts and charitable foundations created by the mega-wealthy should be subject to limited life spans, and in the case of foundations higher payout rates.[1]

The underlying principle is that in a dynamic capitalist system the rise of great fortunes is not avoidable, nor entirely undesirable. Schumpeter had a point: the system runs on the competition for large gains. But in a democratic republic, the wealth passed on to heirs and assigns should not be such as to create a caste of hereditary plutocrats, who then direct and dictate the politics of the country. In the next generation, the wealth should be diffused over the society at large – and in such a way that the wealthy are duly and suitably honored for their generosity however tax-induced it may be. In this way, public and para-public institutions ultimately benefit from private accumulations.

Senator Bernie Sanders has been working along these lines and has made a proposal to strengthen the estate and gift tax, with a much higher rate on big fortunes. And while the Sanders proposal can be improved, it’s based on the tried-and-true, and not so much on the attention-grabbing and flashy. So while Senator Warren deserves praise for bringing renewed notice to the curse of plutocracy, dynasty and private power, an effective path to reform lies through channels already well-established in the American democratic tradition and known to work.

Notes

[1] For a documented list of feasible measures, see the Shelf Project of Calvin Johnson,

Professor of Law at The University of Texas at Austin. Other measures that would strengthen our current taxes on wealth include ending the step up in basis at death, along with curtailing real estate shelters and the carried interest loophole, and treating gains on the sale of depreciable property as ordinary income.

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Why Liberal Democracy is a Threat to Nigeria's Stability

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In 2015, Nigeria, a country of about 190 million, spent $625 million to conduct federal and local elections. By comparison, India, with a population of 1.2 billion, spent $600 million on its 2015 election, according to figures released by the Electoral Commission of India (ECI).[1]

In 2019, the election budget of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) rose to $670 million. This represents about 2.5 percent of Nigeria's $28.8 billion budget for 2019, a portion of which is being financed through borrowing. To put the electoral spending in context, more than half of the country subsists on about a dollar a day, and the country recently acquired the dubious distinction of being named the poverty capital of the world, with more people living in extreme poverty there than in any other country.[2] Key infrastructures and services such as roads, railway, electricity, water supply, healthcare, and education are severely inadequate, requiring urgent investments and interventions.

Election-related expenditure is expected to rise in the near future as INEC implements a wider slate of digital technologies to combat manipulation and improve the integrity of the electoral process. For comparison, Nigeria typically devotes about 7 percent of its budget to education. And yet Nigeria continues to maintain a four-year election cycle, with smaller by-elections occurring in between. This electoral calendar guarantees that about $1 billion is spent on elections every four years. As the electoral price tag has grown, democratic dividends have plummeted.

Nigeria's predicament is a microcosm of the phenomenon of rising financial costs of elections in Africa and diminishing returns on democracy. Across the continent, the cost of electoral democracy is increasing and threatens the delivery of social goods. As African countries battle myriad socioeconomic challenges, the question needs to posed: is it wise for these countries to continue to spend a large percentage of their revenue every four or five years on a political ritual with fewer and fewer positive socioeconomic consequences for their populations? Is this expensive, periodic democratic ritual called election worth its price?

It is not only the monetary cost of elections that now threatens to defeat their purpose and engender disillusionment and, along with disillusionment, the erosion of trust in the state and its ability to produce and distribute public goods. The social cost of periodic elections has been arguably greater, depleting, with each election cycle, the residual stability of the state and the credibility of its institutions.

Elections conducted in Nigeria since the return of civilian rule in 1999 have brought with them anxiety, tension, death, violence, and dangerous rhetoric that, taken together, have frayed the national political and social fabric. Elections have widened fissures and intensified preexisting primordial cleavages.

I can recall no electoral cycle since at least 2003 that was not been accompanied by fears of Nigeria's disintegration or at the very least the acceleration of its demise. In 2007 and 2011, post-election violence claimed hundreds of lives in Northern Nigeria as supporters of then candidate Muhammadu Buhari rioted after his loss. In the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections, at least 46 people were reported to have died from election-related violence. In the state assembly and governorship elections two weeks later on March 9, 2019, another 10 people died across five states in what the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper described in its headline as "another bloody election."[3]

Two riders below the same *Sunday Tribune* headline encapsulate the turbulent character of Nigerian elections. One was "Thugs, vote buyers, arsonists take over on election day"; the other was "Nigerians condemn militarization of elections in Rivers, Bayelsa, Kwara, Akwa Ibom, Benue," a reference to the government's deployment of soldiers and other military assets to opposition strongholds before and during the election. The involvement of soldiers and other military personnel in the election was a brazen violation of Nigeria's Electoral Act, an action which many observers interpreted as the incumbent administration's effort to use its might to manipulate the election in states held by the opposition.

Every election cycle in Nigeria sees massive, fear-induced demographic mobility as members of different ethnic groups and religions relocate to areas considered dominated by their kinsmen and co-religionists to await the conclusion of elections that often degenerate into communal clashes especially in the volatile north of the country.

Periodic national elections have thus worsened Nigeria's notoriously frail union and caused apathy and discontent. The Nigerian people, the major stakeholders in Nigeria's democracy, have grown weary of being periodically endangered and rendered pawns in an elaborate elite ritual with little or no consequence for their lives.

Electoral aftermaths have not improved economic conditions or strengthened the capacity of citizens to hold elected leaders accountable. Moreover, as I shall discuss shortly, the familiar abstract freedoms that democracy, lubricated by periodic elections, can confer on citizens who participate in such exercises, have eluded Nigerians.

The result has been noticeable apathy represented most poignantly by voter turnout, which declined from a peak of 69.1 percent in 2003 to 46.3 percent in 2015 and to about 35 percent in 2019. In the same 2019 election cycle, turnout declined to less than 20 percent in the governorship and state assembly elections, with many Nigerians on social media stating that they had lost faith in the electoral process and that the official results of the presidential elections two weeks earlier had shown that their votes would not count towards the declared

outcome.

Voter apathy alone is not an indication of democratic disillusionment but it can portend or indicate something more devastating: diminishing trust in the state, its institutions, and its processes.

Such a trust deficit exists already and it predated the return of civilian rule in 1999 after about two decades of military dictatorship. However, by all theoretical formulations, such a cumulative loss of confidence in the transactional sociopolitical contract between the state and citizens should be corrected by the democratic ideals of voting, representation, and accountability. This has not happened in Nigeria. In fact, the opposite scenario is visible: a negative correlation between successive electoral cycles and citizens' trust in the Nigerian state. Therein lay the paradoxical consequences of democratic practice in Nigeria.

If elections are increasingly burdensome as they have become in Nigeria, the corrective potential of democracy, broadly speaking, is lost. Citizens consequently lose faith in the state and resort to self-help, including criminal self-help. That is how states collapse. Nigeria is not far off this possibility.

In Nigeria, recent political realities reveal a blind spot of pro-democracy advocacy: without the modulating effect of decentralization, sustained economic growth, a growing, secure middle class, and a literate, hopeful poor, liberal democracy can do and has done more damage than good. Liberal democracy has ironically become both an incubator and protector of mediocrity, corruption, and bad governance. The overarching casualty has been Nigeria's very stability.

Gaming Democracy, Gutting the Nation

Members of Nigeria's ruling class have become adept at gaming democracy, rhetorically proclaiming their commitments to its tenets but subverting those same tenets through their actions. Since 1999, elected presidents have generally reneged on their promises and morphed into self-absorbed rulers unaccountable to and unfeeling toward the Nigerian electorate. This leitmotif is partly political theater to be sure, but it is also a manifestation of the uniquely high stakes of electoral politics in the country.

The dramatics of verbalizing and performing democratic commitment caters to an external audience of Euro-American, democracy-promoting foundations and governments. The contrapuntal reality of manipulating elections, brazenly subverting the will of the people, avoiding accountability, aggrandizing power, and undermining institutions of checks and balances is designed to capture power in its totality because, in Nigeria, as in most African countries, the person or party that occupies the highest office also controls the nation's purse strings and the prerogative for distributing such resources.

Elections and the political power that they confer on victors are thus seen merely as vehicles to access national resources and leverage them for personal and group gains.

Since 1999, Nigerian leaders, once elected, have seen no need to engage with or be accountable to the electorate. Instead, they have devoted their energies and the new resource pipelines they control to their own perpetuation in office or to the fight for a second term in the case of term-limited officials such as governors and the president.

The current president, Muhammadu Buhari, typifies this Nigerian democratic paradox of pretend democrats undermining democracy while participating in its electoral formalities to obtain power and mollify external political pressures.

A former military dictator who ruled in the 1980s, Buhari, when running for the presidency in 2015, assured Nigerians that he had abandoned his draconian instincts and become a converted democrat. As the candidate of a new coalition, the All Progressive Congress (APC), Buhari unleashed a dizzying array of electoral promises.

Upon assuming office in May 2015, he reneged on his promise to publicly declare his assets and sell off a fleet of presidential aircraft numbering about 9. That was his first act of disdain for the Nigerian electorate to whom he had made these pledges. Even before Mr. Buhari took office, he gave a speech at Chatham House, London, and disavowed several promises he had made during the campaigns, describing the promises as those of his party rather than his.

On the economic front, Buhari had promised to run the economy on market principles. Once he took office, he disregarded that promise and the counsel of economists and fixed the exchange value of the naira, Nigeria's currency. This act led to massive loss of foreign direct investment. Buhari then created a second tier exchange regime where the naira's exchange rate against the dollar was higher. This opened to the door to massive profiteering and corruption. The economy tanked, deepening poverty and unemployment.

Mr. Buhari had promised to never pay subsidy on petrol but to rather fix Nigeria's broken refineries to provide access to cheap and abundant fuel. He reneged on that promise and increased fuel price by about 70 percent and continued to pay the subsidy he had condemned. For the country's poor, this is perhaps the biggest act of betrayal as the vagaries of every economic sector depend on the price of petrol. Increase the price of petrol and watch the price of everything from transportation to groceries move up in correspondence to the increase.

Other promises made during the campaigns lay in ruins, disavowed or disregarded by the president and his henchmen. Buhari has sacrificed his promise to fight corruption on political expediency, going after opposition figures with graft allegations but not only ignoring credible allegations against politicians in his party but playing an active role in efforts to exonerate, reinstate, and rehabilitate them.

Under Buhari, it is not just the GDP that has shrunk. The Middle class, which grew in the 2000s and seemed primed to become the bedrock of democratic accountability, has been decimated. No objective observer today considers the Nigerian middle class the democratic buffer that it seemed destined to be.

Mr. Buhari is only the latest elected president to thump his nose at the voters, fearing no electoral payback. This arrogance of power is fueled by one factor: with the almost unchecked power of incumbency, which can be deployed to manipulate the vote or to muzzle the opposition and win a default victory, incumbents fear little electoral consequence for their actions.

Previous elected presidents have governed in a similarly indifferent way, and only in 2015 did an incumbent finally pay a price for governing poorly and betraying voters' confidence. That was however an aberration enabled by a weak president who lacked the confidence, ambition, and guile of other presidents. Overall, there has been no electoral recompense at the ballot box.

Fetishizing Liberal Democracy

Why is it possible for elected presidents to abuse democracy in such a manner while using its rhetoric and the legitimacy obtained through elections to bolster their power and undermine the stability of the polity? The other question is, what is the endpoint of the corrosive effect of these expensive "democratic" charades? The debasement of valorized democratic principles by Nigeria's political elite has a genealogy that should be excavated in order to illustrate Nigeria's ill-fated trajectory of democratization.

In the 1990s, when a plethora of Western foundations and governments encouraged and funded democratization in Nigeria and other African states, three critical, interrelated mistakes underpinned these efforts. One was an assumption that liberal democracy was its own justification and that Africans, traumatized by different iterations of dictatorship, would simply grasp democracy's inherent virtues and take proprietary ownership of it precisely because it is superior to other forms of government.

The second was a somewhat contradictory and deceptive association of democracy with development. In this rhetoric, democracy and development were Siamese twins, feeding off of each other. Democracy, in this orthodoxy, was the original, catalytic order of things, without which development was impossible.

The notion that democracy was synonymous with the amelioration of socioeconomic lag was a staple of Western prodemocracy propaganda. This functionalist, instrumental rhetoric on democracy was then taken up uncritically and amplified by Nigerian partners of Western democracy advocates. Over time, it fossilized into a banal folk wisdom which held that participating in democratic processes, especially elections, was a way of assuring one's socioeconomic future and/or improving one's present condition.

In the incestuous and cacophonous world of prodemocracy jargons, neither African prodemocracy activists nor their Western ideological and financial benefactors thought about disentangling democracy from development. The two became intertwined in the minds of Nigerians. This rhetoric of democracy as a prelude to development inspired unrealistic expectations that democracy, liberal or otherwise, can never fulfill. I will return to this theme

shortly.

The third error was the belief that Nigerian political actors would regard the democratic process and the institutions that safeguard it as sacrosanct, and that politicians would be accountable to the citizens they serve. The idea of public service as a platform to serve the public and of elections as the arbiter of this paradigm of service was a cardinal element in Western prodemocracy advocacy and was a blind spot in the cognition of local activists who echoed and fought out this advocacy on the ground.

Western democratization theories argue that incumbents have a "desire to impress the voters" because if they do not they will be punished at the ballot box in the next election and if they do they will be rewarded.[4] This may make sense in a perfect theoretical world, but in African settings, incumbents do not fear electoral punishment because they control the levers of power that are critical to determining electoral outcomes, so the theoretical incentive to do right by voters is nullified in reality.

None of the aforementioned prognostications has materialized in Nigeria. On the contrary, political leaders have acted in disregard for the rules, norms, and processes codified as guiding legal and constitutional frameworks for Nigerian democratic practice.

Democracy as Corruption

Nigerians who yearned for electoral democracy in the belief that it would deliver development have been left disappointed. The material promise of democracy, that is, the supposed correlation between democracy and improved standards of living that was at the heart of the prodemocracy advocacy of the 1990s, has yet to materialize for Nigerians in almost twenty unbroken years of democratic practice.

What's more, under the guise of democracy, Nigerian political leaders have found the perfect alibi for corruption: the very legal processes designed to promote transparency, probity, and procedural integrity. Democracy has provided the perfect cover for corruption – massive corruption. Democracy has – forgive the redundancy – democratized corruption. Under military rule, corruption was a quasi-monopoly; it was tightly controlled by a small cohort. Under Nigeria's current democratic order, the need to cultivate political support and immunity means that the loot has to circulate, expanding the network of patronage and corruption.

Democracy has also made corruption legitimate, as contradictory as that may sound. In the days of the military, the zones of legal and illegal monetary appropriation were clearly demarcated, so citizens could easily determine when an act of corrupt self-enrichment had occurred. Not anymore. Under the current democratic order, public officials steal public funds legally. They only have to underwrite what they steal as a licit item in the legislative appropriation process. This can be done in a few choreographed, taxpayer-funded legislative committee sessions and a hurried process of debate-less approval. Political office holders even steal public funds in anticipation, carefully documenting future thefts and including them as budgetary earmarks or exculpatory footnotes in legislations. And this is all legal – and perfectly

within the procedural norms of liberal democracy. In recent years, this legitimate, democratized corruption has found a name in Nigeria's capacious political lexicon. Nigerians call it anticipatory corruption. I call it legitimate corruption, intending the oxymoron to intensify my designation.

Where the law did not exist to legitimize the theft, Nigeria's legislators have enacted or been goaded by executive pressure into enacting one-off bills to authorize acts of pilferage deemed in the pecuniary interest of legislators and their executive partners. In other words, democracy as currently practiced in Nigeria has licensed and unleashed novel forms of corruption. Democracy has expanded the stealing field by legitimizing corruption.

What is clear then is that Nigeria's ruling elites have figured out a way to turn the rules of democracy on their heads and to thus take perverse advantages of the very democratic processes promoted as inherently good, as instruments of public restraint, and as catalysts for enlightened political behavior in the public interest.

The Real Cost of Democracy

Aside from the aforementioned financial cost of elections and patronage, other expenditures bring the recurring cost of the Nigeria's 20-year democratic project into tens of billions of dollars, an expense that will sooner or later cripple the country financially. Let me expatiate. A recent report confirmed what many Nigerians have long suspected about the remunerations of their elected executive and legislative leaders: Nigerian elected public office holders at all levels of government are the highest paid in the world.[5] Together with their string of assistants and advisors (who sometimes have their own paid advisors), Nigeria's public officers gobble up at least half of the nation's revenue and budgetary appropriations in legitimate rewards.

This prohibitive democratic overhead has left the country with a smaller pool of funds than ever to invest in the things that matter to Nigerians: roads, healthcare, schools, water, electricity, and food production. This odd reality of low returns on democratic investment is unsustainable. Something has to give.

What is being eroded is the very stability of the state, along with any trust that citizens still have in it. This is a proverbial ticking time bomb that will implode or explode if the trend continues, if this democracy endures. Twenty years since the return of civilian rule, it is not an exaggeration to say that not only has democracy not paid off for Nigeria but that it is now a threat to its stability and survival. This is a radical shift that has occurred stealthily and has thus been missed by the Western governmental and non-governmental actors that encouraged and funded democratic advocacy in the 1990s.

Democratic Disappointment

With such a low dividend of democracy, and with democracy being so costly and toxic to the body politic, it is no surprise that many Nigerians have begun to question their loyalty to the

received wisdom that democracy is superior to its alternatives.

For many Nigerians and Africans, democracy has failed. It has failed to live up to its publicized benefits – tangible and intangible. A survey conducted by the respected Afrobarometer polling organization in December 2014 concluded as follows:

Focusing on attitudes toward democracy and accountability, the analysis finds that while most Nigerians embrace the concept of democracy and reject other forms of government, significant proportions of the population express support for non-democratic practices, such as military rule or an authoritarian president who is above the checks of Parliament and the courts. Public dissatisfaction with how democracy is working in Nigeria and with the performance of their elected leaders is high. Many Nigerians believe that public institutions and office holders can serve as checks on each other, but they do not see voters as playing a leading role in holding political officials accountable.[6]

The finding of this survey is a remarkable development given that in 1999 when civilian rule was restored, Nigerians were overwhelmingly hopeful about democracy and its capacity to catalyze development and accountability and reinforce Nigeria's fragile national cohesion. Since 2014, this democratic disillusionment has only deepened along with distrust in institutional constraints and in the potential of electoral participation to effect change.

Western democracy theorists may be scrambling to comprehend this dramatic reversal of public opinion from a craving for a democratic overthrow of a military dictatorship two decades ago to a yearning for authoritarian rule today. But this attitudinal shift is completely understandable as a logical outcome of democratic overpromising and under-delivery. The significant number of Nigerians who expressed a favorable view of undemocratic processes and forms of government in the survey were not enamored with military autocracy per se. They were voicing their disillusionment with a failed democracy.

Between Abstract and Tangible Democracies

Africans' perception of democracy is a largely utilitarian one. It is similar to Africans' relationship with religion, which is also starkly utilitarian, rooted more in lived experience and its quotidian dimensions and needs than in abstract spiritual and doctrinal aspirations.[7] Whether it is a new religion or the new concept of liberal democracy, Africans' encounter with new ideological formations is often marked by this utilitarian ethos. Africans rarely engage with systems of thought and practices from the perspective of their alleged intrinsic merits. Instead, what matters is how these practices translate to improved socioeconomic wellbeing. It is a rational thought process grounded in the materiality of self-interest.

As a subset of Africans, Nigerians are similarly inclined in their perception of democracy, going beyond its abstract benefits to make tangible demands of it. It is a cultural phenomenon that neither Western nor local prodemocracy activists took into account in the 1990s prodemocracy frenzy. It is also, as earlier stated, a product of the expectational universe created by an

overzealous prodemocracy movement. If democratization fails to engender tangible improvements in the body politic it is unrealistic to expect that, in a developmentally-challenged country such as Nigeria, democracy would be seen in any other way other than as a failure. Or that citizens would embrace an abstract barometer for evaluating post-Cold War political liberalization.

Nigerians who campaigned for democracy in the 1990s have been slow to acknowledge the nexus of democracy and systemic dysfunction. When they recognize the disappointment of democratization, they tend to retreat into two unhelpful bromides of prodemocracy orthodoxy. One is to say that democracy takes time to get entrenched, to mature, and so the answer to a broken democracy is more democracy, as the popular cliché goes. This contention does not account for the enormous, unsustainable cost of democracy. It also does not consider the fact that countries besieged by a perfect storm of economic, political, and existential troubles do not have the luxury of waiting for democracy to mature. Time, literally, is not on the side of such countries.

The second response is a belated attempt to decouple democracy and development and to affirm a more abstract democracy of rights and liberties, a democracy, if you like, that privileges recognition over redistribution, to invoke the moral duality posited by Axel Honneth.[8]

In social media forums and Nigerian listservs, I read the argument from some career prodemocracy activists that democracy is intrinsically virtuous even if it does not lead to development because it promotes abstract freedoms, civil liberties, and rights. This claim is little comfort, of course, to Nigerians who were seduced and then left disappointed by the earlier advertised correlation between democracy and development.

This argument rests on the power of incremental improvements over several election cycles, of cumulative democratic self-correction. For this logic to martialize in Nigeria, however, there needs to be accountability at the ballot box. There is not. Even if there were, in a country already fractured by the Boko Haram insurgency, armed herdsmen attacks and banditry, a persistent if mutating Biafra agitation, and other centrifugal forces, and in a country saddled with weak institutions, four years of bad, unaccountable democratic rule can cause irreparable damage. And without the robust structural buffers and safety nets of Western countries, such a country could collapse or be put on the path of disintegration. A country already beset by debilitating threats cannot afford four years of democratic dysfunction and a suffocating political gridlock that maps onto preexisting fissures, let alone several four-year cycles of these debilities.

The argument about the abstract merits of democracy also does not account for the fact that, far from guaranteeing or promoting civil liberties, democratization has at best only had a modest impact on civic freedoms. Since 1999, political freedoms, the valorized abstract benefits of democracy, have been receding under the assault of democratically elected leaders. In this respect, the abysmal human rights record of the current Buhari administration is a great

example.

Previous democratic administrations sought to constrict the civic space by pushing laws to their most elastic limits or by exploiting legal and constitutional loopholes. Each administration operated in an ever-expanding territory of extra-legal exactions and rights violations. The current administration and its human rights record is thus the climax of the sustained erosion of civil liberties since 1999.

In December 2015, hundreds of Shiite Muslims who had protested against the persecution of their group, were massacred by troops in the city of Zaria. Their homes were destroyed and many of their surviving members, including their leader, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, were detained without charges. The detainees are now being tried in secret in defiance of supplications and protests from local and international human rights groups.

Sambo Dasuki, the National Security Adviser under the previous administration, remains in detention despite several court orders granting him bail.

In September 2017, soldiers attacked members of a nonviolent pro-Biafra group called Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), killing, maiming, and arresting hundreds of them. Some of the soldiers attacked and ransacked the family home of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, briefly detaining his aged parents.

Activist and anti-Buhari critic, Deji Adeyanju, languished for two months in prison on a farcical charge for which he had been acquitted several years ago, and after he had been granted bail by a federal court.

Dino Melaye, a senator and member of the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) has undergone an ordeal of several arrests and detentions in what many Nigerians believe to be retribution for his persistent criticism of the president.

In January 2019, Nigerians were shocked to learn that soldiers had invaded and were occupying the offices of the national daily, *Daily Trust*. This was an event reminiscent of the military era and a scandalous departure from the press freedom Nigerians expect under democratically elected administrations. Yet anyone who had been watching the muzzling of the press, the detention of journalists and activists in several parts of the country, and the growing governmental intolerance for dissent would hardly have been shocked by the assault on the *Daily Trust* newspaper.

The Nigerian press, once hailed as a bastion of expressive freedom, is now cowed by intimidation, harassment, and the arrest of journalists. The Nigerian civil society, traditionally one of the most vibrant in Africa, has either been coopted into the emerging fascistic order or has lost its voice under the ongoing assault on the discursive public sphere.

The recent brazen removal of the Chief Justice of the Federation, Walter Onnoghen, without resorting to the prescribed constitutional process signaled the extent to which the democratic

and constitutional order has been desecrated. Under Buhari and to a lesser degree his predecessors, Nigeria has degenerated into a contradictory brew of democratic pretensions and authoritarian disdain for political freedoms.

What this reality means is that democracy is fast losing legitimacy on account of its failure to deliver the abstract benefits that one takes for granted in a democratic system, the freedoms that are supposed to compensate for democracy's failure to produce development. Far from being a bulwark against instability, democracy has become a threat to whatever stability remains in Nigeria.

Reworking Democracy, Reforming the Nation

Democratic setbacks do not necessarily authorize or legitimize authoritarianism. They merely make it tolerable — a tolerable, desperate afterthought. The solution for Nigeria and other African countries experiencing democratic disillusionment is not the Utopian promise of a benevolent dictatorship articulated by Zambian economist, Dambisa Moyo, because as she herself acknowledges, dictators are rarely benevolent because there is no incentive to be.[9] What is required rather is a radical shift in attitude away from orthodox thinking and towards an acknowledgement that multiparty liberal democracy can, as Moyo argues, "hamper development" as political rivalry and dueling ethnic and regional agendas create gridlock and stall policies and developmental initiatives.

Democratic failures do not discredit democracy as a generic set of ideas connoting accountability and representation, nor do they call for the abandonment of democracy altogether. What is required is a reimagining of democracy and, along with this reimagining, a willingness to redesign and redefine it to take into account and respond to each country's peculiar socioeconomic and demographic circumstances.

For Nigeria, the foundational problems are fairly familiar and cannot be solved by a democratic project that avoids rather than enhances solutions to these first order problems. Nigeria is a nation cobbled together from hundreds of different ethnic constituents by British colonizers for their own purposes. Today, those ethnicities divide into several broad regional and religious cleavages and are marked by drastically divergent, competing visions and aspirations. Ethnic and regional identities have, for good or ill, persisted as the organizing idiom of politics and sociopolitical claim-making. This is a recipe for intense rivalry, suspicion, enmity, distrust, and zero-sum political maneuvering.

The only institution ironically preventing this cauldron from boiling over, but which is itself a permanent impediment to both national unity and democracy, is the de facto unitary governmental structure of Nigeria, which keeps resources, power, and initiatives concentrated in the center while stymieing subnational constituencies and forcing them to subserviently look to the center in Abuja.

This system reverses the order of popular sovereignty as an all-powerful central state usurps

all sovereignty, which then flows vertically upwards rather than manifesting first in horizontally-linked constituents and then flowing from them to a weak center. The result of this unitary system is that the state enjoys no legitimacy in the eyes of subnational constituents as it is seen as a distant, aloof entity. Another result is that all consequential electoral stakes reside at the center, hence periodic national elections are do-or-die affairs, literal struggles for control of national resources and for the power to distribute and withhold them.

Needless to say, this is a threat to democracy, any kind of democracy, but especially to the presidential winner-takes-all democracy practiced in Nigeria. The presidential system, coupled with an ill-fitting zero-sum democratic order, is unsuitable for a unitary state. Thus, in Nigeria, a structural problem was exacerbated by the importation of the wrong type of democracy.

There are three imperatives in light of this conundrum. First, there needs to be a constitutionally mandated reordering of the nation's architecture. There needs to be decentralization and devolution. Power, resource management, and developmental agency need to be devolved to subnational units. This would not solve all of Nigeria's problems as subnational units themselves are riddled with ethnic and other tensions, and as state executives, like the national ones, display a tendency towards usurpation and authoritarianism. Nonetheless, if decentralization and devolution trickle down to local government and district levels, the stakes of governance and electoral politics would become localized. Battles over accountability, representation, and governance are better and more effectively fought out at local levels than in distant national and state capitals.

This prescription is nothing new. It has been making cameo appearances in Nigerian political discourse under the lingo of restructuring since at least the 1990s. Many Nigerian intellectuals pitch it. Newspaper articles debate it. Nigerians on social media routinely discuss it. Decentralization through national restructuring has not gained much consequential purchase because standing in the way of it are the political elites for whom the current system provides both an alibi and a refuge from the expectations of constituents. As things stand, local political leaders can conveniently but plausibly blame the overbearing central government in Abuja for their failures. Thus, the unitary state not only stifles development and frustrates democracy; it is also the perfect exculpatory excuse for bad political leaders.

The second thing that needs to occur is a move from the presidential system to a parliamentary system of government. This will improve the representational dynamic and cut the cost of elections and democracy. There is no reason why Nigeria should have two legislative chambers other than the desire to ape the United States (from where the institutions of Nigeria's current democratic project were borrowed), so the senate should be scrapped. There is also no reason for a four-year election cycle other than the impulse to copy the United States, so a six- or seven-year single term should be adopted to save money and reduce election-induced instabilities and crises.

The Nigerian national question turns on the struggle of the country's various constituencies for representation and inclusion. The recurring agitational rhetoric of marginalization stems from

the failure to construct a system of representation considered fair and inclusive. This failure of inclusion produces both separatist aspirations and sociopolitical volatility and needs to be corrected. This correction can be effected by constitutionally mandating the rotation of elected public offices at the federal, state, and local government levels, where many groups feel that their minority status or their historical political marginality has shut them out of the state.

A notable example is the case of the Igbo people of the Southeast, one of the three most populous ethnic groups in the country. About fifty years after the defeat of their secessionist Republic of Biafra, Nigeria still treats the Igbo as untrustworthy pariahs and has not integrated them into key institutions of the state. The most poignant illustration of this post-civil war failure of national reconciliation and inclusion is the fact that the Igbo have not produced a president since the civil war ended in 1970. The twin phenomena of marginalization and secessionist mobilization coexist causally and symbiotically in the Southeast as a result.

The standard argument against rotation is that it is undemocratic, but that is precisely the problem because such a contention rests on a doctrinaire, rigid understanding of democracy and also results from the seduction of Western liberal democracy, which stresses the tyranny of majoritarian rule, a form of rule that alienates and excludes. Besides, Nigeria already practices a similar representational policy of inclusion called the federal character principle. Although compliance is uneven, the constitution requires that each state of the nation be represented in public job recruitment, admissions to federal high schools and colleges, in the bureaucracy, and in the federal cabinet. If this constitutional provision is deemed necessary for achieving national inclusion and representational fairness then there is no credible reason for not extending it to the realm of elective politics.

If Nigeria is going to make democracy an asset rather than a divisive burden, the practice needs to be domesticated. Seemingly sacrosanct principles of liberal democracy have to be rethought and Nigeria’s political elites have to get creative about the type of democracy they want to practice to suit Nigeria’s sociopolitical and cultural realities.

In this endeavor of reworking democracy, orthodox democratic principles imported uncritically from the West in the 1990s need to give way to pragmatic solutions even if these solutions run afoul of ideologies promoted by Western prodemocracy funders and activists.

Elections or no Elections?

There is one final problematic that needs to be broached. The triadic expression of democracy involves representation, accountability, and participation. I have spent the foregoing pages arguing that liberal democracy has failed to engender the first two values in Nigeria. When it comes to the third — participation — we tend to lazily posit elections as the only guarantor of it. Democratic participation is crudely reduced to voting in periodic elections.

Scholars and prodemocracy activists need to rethink the lionization of elections as the only instrument of democratic participation. As contrarian political theorists have contended, elections are a flawed mechanism for gauging democratic participation, not only because

electoral democracy disempowers non-elite voters and reinforces existing sociopolitical orders,[10] but also because democracy can thrive without periodic elections. Critics of liberal democratization processes have as a result of this antagonism between elections and democracy coined the idea of "elections without democracy."[11]

Since the argument on electoral inefficacy emerged, alternatives to voting have followed, proposed by those who desire to produce an egalitarian political field and give every citizen equal opportunity to obtain and exercise political power. The idea of random selection has gained recent currency. Nigerian scholar, Nimi Wariboko, has proposed the drawing of lots to "complement [Nigeria's] system of election," proposing that "one-third" of all federal and state legislative seats "be filled by lot."[12] This idea deserves serious consideration within a broader menu of new democratic innovations, for it would cut the financial and social costs of elections while ensuring a more egalitarian and thus more accountable leadership selection process.

My own provisional proposal is that Nigeria adopts a proportional electoral allocation process whereby elective public positions are distributed based on the number of votes gotten in an election. Under this proposal, there would be no winners and losers as the current winner-takes-all adversarial electoral model posits. Rather, there would be big winners and small winners. There would also be fewer electoral contests. A single election would produce multi-tiered winners. Candidates would go into elections knowing that even if they are not the top vote getters, they would end up with other, albeit lesser, public positions stipulated in a new electoral legislation.

For instance, if the top vote getter gets the office of president, the next top vote getter gets the office vice president, etc. On the legislative side, if the top vote getter gets the federal legislative seat for a constituency, the next top two or three vote getters get the state assembly seats, and the next top three vote getters get the local government legislative seats, etc.

Furthermore, the selection of leaders at small subnational units can be done without elections. Specifically, such selections could occur through informal community congresses where community groups under the guidance of traditional rulers and elders select representatives and leaders by consensus and popular acclamation on a rotational representational basis.

Concluding Remarks

If implemented these reform proposals would make elections less raucous, less costly, and less violent. They would make Nigeria's democratic system less adversarial and more consensual.

Such a reformed political structure would also reduce the anxieties of ethno-religious and regional representation and access, ensuring that every group — majority or minority — is represented in the country's leadership at all levels.

Since electoral volatility is a product of the understanding that exclusive, zero-sum access to state resources comes through total electoral victory and the exclusion of electoral losers, my

proposals would defuse the charged political rituals we call elections and remove the fears and anxieties invested into them in Nigeria and other African countries. They would additionally decentralize politics and contestations over its spoils and stakes, while reducing the zero-sum calculus that fuels rivalry, competing agitation, and political violence, all of which erode the stability of the state.

Notes

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[9] Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is not Working and Why there is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2009), 42.

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Brexit For Americans: A Left Brexiteer Perspective

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I find to my bemusement that many Americans seem to have strong views on Brexit, which most of them seem to oppose. What was an American friend imagining when he told me, on the day the outcome of the Brexit referendum became known, that I must be proud to be Scottish because a majority of my fellow Scots had voted to Remain within the EU?

Why is my confession that I would have voted for Brexit—for Lexit, actually, though this distinction is not widely understood on this side of the Atlantic— usually met with American incredulity, sometimes even with anger? Why are they taking Brexit so personally? And why do they never seem to have asked the question, what sort of thing is the EU? [1]

My speculation is that they, for the most part, saw and heard only quite one-sided accounts of Brexit before the referendum and that they are now seeing and hearing quite one-sided accounts of what the effecting of Brexit will occasion. With very few exceptions, should they be tuned in at all to what's going on in Britain, they are, so far as I can tell, tuned into what makes its way across the Atlantic authored by those who to their own self satisfaction are living in that great echo chamber quartered mainly in London and its cultural satellites. I would so characterize much of the commentary in the Guardian, hostile to Brexit (and, relatedly, to Jeremy Corbyn), which seems the go-to news source for Americans of the centre-left. Within the United States, a very occasional other voice is sometimes heard in the New York Times, say, or on NPR. But for the most part not.

I infer that the American sources of the sort I've mentioned are using Brexit at least in part to press forward their own political agenda in the United States. It is surely no accident that anti-Brexit Americans repeatedly link their views on Brexit to their views on Trump. [2] Their hostility to Brexit and their uncomprehending dismay over the extremely messy politics of effecting Brexit is surely joined to an apprehension that their own system is falling apart, to an anxiety that the United States is also bordering, to say the least, on political dysfunctionality.

Is the pervasive anti-Brexit stance of American commentary because Brexit is seen by those Americans who care volubly about such things as contrary to liberal-imperial American policy, especially at a time when that liberal-imperial approach to the world is rejected by some in high places in American public life? The interventions of both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, who each made a point of telling the British public to vote against Brexit, should, be seen in light of the question, what was it they were actually trying to defend? (That their interventions seem to have resulted, in Britain, in a growth of support for Brexit, does not

require much imagination to interpret.) It's also possible that they are embedded within the same ideology, which equates well-being with material well-being and which has downplayed any concern with the political ideas and arrangements which maintain and advance that particular sort of economic system and its outcomes—so deeply embedded that they cannot perceive the unnaturalness, the adventitiousness of their beliefs, yet having been made by so many recent events to feel insecure, they must deny anything which adds to their insecurity. And finally, perhaps what one reads and hears here in the United States—on how dysfunctional Britain now is, on how it's doing itself enormous harm—is simply another expression of disdain for things British dating back to before 1776?

Still, *de te fabula narratur*? Odd as it may perhaps seem to say so, since so much is now being written about 'the peculiarities of the English,' Brexit is not a phenomenon unique to the British Isles or even to the European Union though there are certainly many elements of Brexit unique to both places. But here I suggest that there are aspects of Brexit, of the causes of Brexit, which are in play far beyond Britain, far beyond Europe, and which are generating political disturbances elsewhere with their own local features. That is, however, a very large story I cannot address here. For the most part, I leave the drawing of parallels and the search for deeper, more comprehensive understandings to readers receptive to the notion that Brexit is a relatively local consequence of change going on at the global level. My task here is to depict Brexit in broader than now customary terms.

I should make clear that I do not defend every aspect of the politics of Brexit, whether at the referendum stage or at the stage of trying to put the will of the majority of the British voters into effect. In all political things, as in all human things, that there is pettiness, and silliness, and vindictiveness, and worse, cannot reasonably be denied. And then there are those who derive pleasure, maybe even advantage, from pointing out such cases. All this is especially so in the politic of Brexit. But that's not all there is. There are also conflicts over issues that matter at some very fundamental level to who and what we humans are as a species, especially to our desire to exercise some degree of control over our own lives.

By way of a parallel, recall the opposition to the trans-Pacific "trade policy" favored by Obama and, for a time by Hillary Clinton, until the strength of the Sanders Presidential primary campaign forced her to reconsider, which would have transferred yet more political power to the trans-national corporations (and would, incidentally, have imposed economic containment upon China). That opposition, too, may be viewed as rooted in an aspiration to block yet more de-democratization, de-politicization, even, of our lives. Brexit should not only be contemplated in these grand, more deeply fundamental terms, but it should not only be contemplated shallowly in ways that focus on our inadequacies or on our more trivial concerns.

The first point I raise spring from the question, did Brexit, the decision and the efforts to effect Britain's departure from the European Union, come from nowhere? Context is not quite everything, but there is more context relevant to understanding Brexit than is ordinarily noted. Much of Brexit's context is complex and has a lot of history to it so I can give it only a sketchy treatment. Another broad category concerns the criticisms directed at the way Brexit has been

pursued both in the referendum and since. In both these broad categories, I raise questions concerning the nature of the EU, not least how it has conducted itself during its divorce proceedings with Britain. I question the often idealized view of the EU so many Americans seem to cling to. They are not, of course, alone in their europhilia.

Finally, a word on terminology: I use EU as a convenient shorthand way to refer to whichever stage the European project had reached at whichever moment in its history, from its beginnings in the post-War years, from the Treaty of Rome, and before, down to the Treaty of Lisbon and beyond. In doing so, I am slighting the ways in which the European Project has moved "from [pursuing] federal social democracy to competitive 'adjustment' of national social protection and social life to global markets" —a shift many europhiles fail to appreciate has occurred. [3]

Contexts

The first context I must mention is obvious: It has to do with what we think we know about Brexit. It has to do with what we, most of us, have been told about it. It is a truth that in all discussions of political matters description and prescription are so deeply, inextricably interwoven, that one cannot put forward the facts of the case without explicitly or, as is often the case given the imperative to try to be or at least to seem to be objective, implicitly bringing in evaluations of these facts. I can only plead guilty to doing so here as well. I begin by acknowledging that I was and remain a supporter of Brexit, of the decision by the British voters that the United Kingdom should exit the European Union. Since I certainly want to dissociate myself from some of those who support Brexit, it would be more accurate to describe myself as a supporter of Lexit—Left Exit—one of the subdivisions of Leave which has received little acknowledgement in mainstream reporting and which, probably for tactical reasons, has received very little notice from the Remainers. Besides, it does seem that the left opposition to remaining within the EU has all along between a minority position, though perhaps not such a small minority as the inattention would imply. It is grounded in the political judgment that a certain sort of democratic politics, and certain sorts of policies, roughly and at a minimum social democratic ones, are more likely to be achievable in Britain outside the EU. Likely such an outcome will depend upon the weakening of transnational forces that oppose it, upon disruptions of the EU and global economic-political order—disruptions that presently seem under way and which Brexit may further.

I confess that my attitude to the European project, from the early Common Market to today's EU, has shifted several times. I recall arguing against British membership in the Common Market on a beach in Florida in 1961. I doubt I made much sense. But since I was arguing with Italians, Swedes, Norwegians, and others from Britain who were all, like me then, youngish students, I doubt any of us had really given much thought to such a worldly matter. At later times, as I became interested in the complexities of an emerging European system which might stand aside from Cold War bipolarities, I found myself supporting what seemed like an interesting political experiment. But later, as the emerging system, especially after the mid-1970s, fell into line with "globalization," with the effort to subject the entire world to

capitalism, I found myself opposed to it.

But why should I care? I am, I suppose, a reluctant emigrant. My passport is a British-European one. I still feel emotionally linked to that part of the world. Depending on the moment, over more than half a century I have identified myself as Scottish, as British, and as European. Yet having lived most of my life elsewhere, I am diffident about voicing opinions on decisions for which I will have to bear few, if any, substantial consequences. I regard it as a sort of political immorality to engage energetically in debates where the outcomes will hardly touch one's own life. On the other hand, since so many Americans seem to feel no restraint when it comes to expressing opinions on Brexit, I feel no hesitation in addressing them. Besides, I'm just one small voice among a great many voices making for a great flood of opinion, information, and attempts to construct persuasive frameworks of understanding.

Most of what was and is being written and said about Brexit, as about British politics in general, emanates from the urban literati, the metropolitan elite centered in London [4]; others elsewhere are parasitic on that. This segment of the British elite for the most part attends to political and economic power but does not possess it. It aspires to influence. Self-identifying, as I think many of them do, as socially and politically progressive, they imagine they say what the many would say if only they had the means and the skill to say it, supposedly backing with their intelligence the unintelligent sincerity of the masses. These condescending literati belong to that more highly educated portion of the population which voted against Brexit, which was horrified by the result, and which has become more and more hysterical as an actual Brexit looms ever closer, not least, perhaps, because they have discovered just how little attention and respect they are accorded in their own country.

Their hysteria is to some degree self-induced. For they inhabit a vast echo chamber where they keep hearing their own fears projected back upon themselves and where, to their amazement and horror they find that they are only listening to themselves. Neither the political and economic elites, who still nevertheless try to employ them for their own purposes, nor the general public pay these Brexit Cassandras any heed. The politicians have their own partly self-interested Brexit concerns which fit poorly with those of the literati. And so what they write and what they say seems to have had no discernible effect especially on those who voted for Brexit. How can this possibly be?

The answer is that those who voted to leave the EU did so for reasons that this metropolitan elite, which also thinks of itself as a cosmopolitan Euro-elite, equally at home in the job markets, restaurants, art galleries, and museums of London, Paris, Prague, etc., has never acknowledged as deserving of anything other than casual, contemptuous, or else angry dismissal, or else they are to have their strangeness explored in the ways that colonial anthropologists explored the otherness of Africans or Indians, in the ways that more recently in the U.S. Katharine Cramer explored the strange beings who inhabit rural Wisconsin, as Arlie Hochschild explored the otherness of Louisianans. The elite's anguish over Brexit is anguish over the loss of *their* Europe. But *their* EU is, it seems, irrelevant to many of those who are rejecting it. And their anguish is doubled, for it is not just their Europe they have lost, it is

also—to repeat—their loss of the cultural role, the ideological power, they imagined they had within Britain.

I understand this depiction of most reports and commentary on Brexit will seem contentious. But it links not only to the educational divide, it links also to the class divide detectable in that vote. Looking to the categories British social scientists customarily use to carve up the British population: of the managerial and professional classes (the 'ABs'), about 20 percent of the population, about 57 percent of them voted *against* Brexit; on the other side, about 66 percent of the C2, D, and E socio-economic groups, the British working classes, who account for almost half of the population, voted *for* Brexit; and about 51 percent of the clerical and junior managerial strata, which is to say, the lower middle classes, voted *for* Brexit [5]. Coming back to the elite discourse, although many of them imagine they are educating the Brexiteers and the Lexiteers, I think their lessons are falling on deaf ears or arousing hostility because, from the point of view of those whose experiences and understandings of the EU are so very different, the metropolitan literati just don't get it. In sum, what one reads and hears about Brexit, especially in Britain, cannot be objective, factual, neutral. It's all an expression of political purpose. There is no apolitical way of talking and thinking about Brexit. There are, next, contextualizing things to be noted about Britain's situation.

In principle, it used to be the case that Parliament could do anything it wanted, though in practice it has always had to attend to political realities. However, in joining the EU the United Kingdom transferred some policy-making capacities, and became subject in some cases to rulings by this or that EU agency. This is something the Parliament did to itself for its own reasons. More precisely, it's something the British Government did to itself, for although in the British system the government, the executive, depends from Parliament, over the course of time the Government has come to dominate the Parliament. One of the consequences of the Brexit referendum has been Parliament trying to claw back some of its powers to set limits on government. Yet this attempt to claw back really isn't surprising, for the outcome of the Brexit referendum was not the outcome the British government was expecting. It was an outcome which deeply upset the role the governments of Britain, of whichever ideological coloration, have long assigned to themselves.

We encounter two issues here: first, the grounds on which it is claimed Britain has lost some sovereignty; second, that the British Parliament could simply reject the outcome of the Brexit referendum. On this second point, I have seen it said that 75 percent of Members of the British House of Commons oppose exiting the EU. That Parliament hasn't voted to ignore the referendum result is surely in part because the political risk is deterring enough Members. But it also is in part because Brexit has so radically disrupted Britain's major political parties. The British political parties are clinging to life in a Europe where so many of the traditional political parties are endangered or have already passed out of existence.

Even before Brexit, the British parties, especially the Conservatives, were sites of major conflicts over the EU. In the case of the Labour Party, though the effort to make Jeremy Corbyn leader and keep him there against a fierce assault did result in an unusual growth in that Party,

it is now unclear whether that will continue to be so since Brexit is dividing Labour just as it is dividing Tories. All these divisions explain to some extent why the politics of effecting Brexit have been so chaotic and why Parliament has been so ineffective. [6]

Given the predicaments the government faces in Parliament and in the country, given the predicaments the Members of Parliament face in their parties and in their constituencies, the Remain campaign may be seen as not only an effort, likely a vain effort, to sway public opinion, it may also be seen as a way of providing cover for politicians to go against the outcome of the referendum by muddying the waters, by portraying everyone as so confused and anxious that 'only a resolute Parliament can save us.' That is, of course, speculation. But it's no more speculative than the talk of Brexit being the consequence of evil-doers and their dark money, of Russian computer hackers, and so on. What about the role of the British electorate in all this?

First, a generally acknowledged fact: the vote to Leave the EU was heavily supported by older British citizens and by those in the poorer areas. Now we know something about the political context in which older Britons came of political age. We know that those on the right-hand side of the spectrum were embedded in arguments that Britain should guarantee its economic future by reinforcing its links to the British Commonwealth, or that it should seek to construct an alternative economic program for Europe, EFTA, the European Free Trade Association; and where other aspects of Britain's foreign relations were concerned, that Britain should remain America's most loyal friend and should not tie itself too closely to alliances economic or otherwise with European countries. All this is traditional post-War conservative British thinking. And many came to political age, when these were formative political debates. As for the left side of the spectrum, back then the left, including the Labour Party, was solidly opposed to getting involved in the European project, which was dismissed as little more than a capitalist ploy. The favored term is now "neoliberalism," but that is capitalism in its present manifestation. On both the right and the left these criticisms of the EU still resonate.

An ageist dismissal of Britain's older voters is far from my intention. To the contrary. First, older voters, having come of political age before the imposition of neo-liberalism, have an experience-based critical perspective on it. Needless to say, this does not mean to say that every older voter believes that there is an alternative to what they might term Thatcherism. And also needless to say, their critical perspective might be outdated. But younger voters have never seen neo-liberalism challenged, certainly not to the degree it is now. This does not mean that they accept it; many may be engaged in critical action against it. (The support for Corbyn—as in the United States for Bernie Sanders—among the young is a sign of this.) Still, the younger voters face the difficulty that they have been embedded in a system which sought—with some success—to colonize their imaginations. Who can honestly claim to be entirely immune to the right-wing socio-economic propaganda of the last 50 years? That said, I think the attempt to pin generational labels on the opposing Brexit votes, something I've seen some Remainers do, could prove socially and politically destructive. Of course, the discussion of Brexit has become very intense and ugly things are being said on all sides. But I find the

ugly things being said by those who generally present themselves as living on a higher moral plane than the rest of us the more reprehensible.

Sadly, paralleling ageism, there are signs of hostility to the poor and to those who live in distressed areas: ‘So they’re going to suffer the most from the economic fallout from Brexit?—Good! They deserve it.’ These are areas abandoned by their supposed representative politicians, in particular by New Labour, which still has a dominant presence in the Parliamentary Labour Party though not in the Party as a whole. Neither are these distressed areas places the Tories support—in fact, they seem intent on running them into the ground. The EU has, in fact, been one of these areas’ few sources of support. Should their inhabitants be grateful? Perhaps. On the other hand, when they pose the question, why are we in this parlous condition, the EU isn’t necessarily off the hook.

Their decline began about the time Britain joined the EU, which does not prove a causal relationship, but the correlation is hard to overlook. And even should it be pointed out that their own British government imposed injurious policies on local economies and social safety nets, when contemplating how they might escape their plight, there is reason to think that the EU is not disposed to facilitate or even permit necessary economic change. Furthermore, given the histories of these distressed places, the people, especially those of a certain political generation, are inclined to tune in to the old left critique of the EU. And the referendum fortuitously provided them a unique opportunity to make their views known, something that has not been available to them since the early 1990s. I’m not trying to say that such people think of themselves as left-wing. New circumstances would require some translation of their old political dispositions. I am suggesting that vestiges of a politics now gone may lurk within them. Clearly, many people are at odds with representatives whose representativeness is now in question. This is particularly a problem for parliamentary Labour in its base constituencies.

The perceptions of the EU I’ve just alluded to is at odds with the high-flown intellectual justifications we usually hear: elaborate moral justifications emanating from various sorts of liberal idealism. It is at odds with thinking prevalent among Britain’s metropolitan elites. The latter is also a way of thinking of those who won past political struggles over the European project, or of those who align themselves with the victors perhaps because they have never known that there were other sides to the story. But political victories have a way of being temporary. And what I emphasize is that contrary ways of thinking continued to live on and that the Brexit referendum opened the door to their long-muted expression. Americans may begin to get a grip on the differences in attitude by thinking of the divergent attitudes in their own country towards NAFTA, towards the never concluded TransPacific trade deal, towards globalisation in general.

Although the British occupational structure underwent transformations during the last half century which call into question the notion of a Left in British politics closely linked to a large industrial working class, one must note that a large portion of the electorate still experiences vicissitudes of the sort that a classical working class was familiar with. These are not the experiences of vociferous Remainers who seem to occupy intermediate class positions,

positions of some, though not great, privilege. Many of them seem to have little or no sympathetic understanding that “The rhetoric of the desperate is likely to be a simplifying one reflective of a condition reduced to its essentials [whereas] a rhetoric of complexity . . . has found favor with those whose expectations are secure”. [7] It is, however, possible to talk more forgivingly about at least some of these, about what might be termed the Left Remainers, in a way that illuminates a vitl aspect of the divisions over Brexit.

I direct attention to the inescapable tension between immediate local experience and the attempt to put that experience in a larger framework appropriate not only to forming a general understanding but to constructing political alliances amongst a range of localities. This is well expressed in David Harvey’s essay, “Militant particularism and global ambition,” in which he explores his own experience and the parallel reflections of Raymond Williams. [8] It is an exploration of the relationship between working-class people and the working class’s organic intellectuals who are always struggling to inform and be informed by each other. This is an encounter between those living in different material, intellectual, and even temporal frameworks. Harvey stresses this is not an encounter “between parochialism and universalism.” It is an interchange “that derives from the kind of abstraction achievable given different ways of acquiring knowledge of the world.” Or, as Harvey quotes another author (Ingold), “The local is not more limited or narrowly focused apprehension than the global, it is one that rests on an altogether different mode of apprehension—one based on an active, perceptual engagement with components of the dwelt-in world, in the practical business of life, rather than on the detached, disinterested observation of a world apart.” Williams’s concern was, that “the brute ugliness of the realities of lived experience for the oppressed” may be ignored, as may be “the raw anger against injustice and exploitation that powers so much of the striving for social change.” But neither must “the creative thinking and practices necessary to achieve progressive social change” be ignored. The room for mutual misunderstanding is large. And the resulting tension is often expressed angrily: on the one side, “what you are really abusing is knowledge and reason”; on the other side, “what you now think . . . is no more than a projection of what suited you. The fact that for other’s each belief is substantial merely enabled you to deceive them” (Harvey quoting Williams). Williams’s advice that “everything will have to be done by negotiation, equitable negotiation, and it will have to be taken steadily along the way,” seems more honored in the breach, making it even more necessary to remember it. This analysis would also seem relevant to those cases where populism on the one hand and elitism on the other are derided. Deserving as some of these may be of the harshest criticism, one should not discard what might become usefully progressive possibilities.

The European Union provides another context. The European project has, since the formation of the European coal and steel community in 1951 and the formation of the six-member European Economic Community in 1957, grown in members, in complexity of organization, and in the range of matters that fall within its purview. Britain joined in 1973. I guess it’s fair to say that it joined reluctantly—for both the British public and the British ruling class were divided—and not all the core six members of the European Community were eager to let Britain in. Nevertheless, when the British public was asked in a 1975 referendum whether it should stay in the European Community it had recently joined, 67 percent voted yes.

Enlargement proceeded, as did its consequences. Greece joined in 1981, Spain and Portugal in 1986, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, and also Cyprus and Malta joined in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. All those seeking membership had to accept the EU's stated values: respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Supposedly, no country that does not recognize these values can belong to the Union—recent events in some member states permit doubt about that and these events also permit doubt that the EU can do much to rid itself of countries which flout these values. All this raises the question, when people in Europe and elsewhere, and especially when the Remainers put the EU on a pedestal, is it the idealised EU or the actual one?

Even were each member state a functioning democracy, is the EU itself organized as a democracy? Democracy may be an essentially contestable concept whose meanings exist only within an inescapable field of political argument, but its meanings are not entirely open to arbitrary definition. They must have something to do with a relationship where the people have a legitimate political role—they're citizens, not just inhabitants, free to interact to explore their interests and press to have them addressed, where those who formulate policies and make binding decisions are responsible in some non-trivial, non-arbitrary fashion to the citizens. Does some such definition of democracy describe, even approximately, how the EU functions? There are plausible grounds for maintaining that it does not.

Although since the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 there has been such a thing as European citizenship, it is a bit ambiguous. Typically in any country, in practical terms, influencing and reacting to government is linked to political organizations up to and including political parties. Yet there are no European-wide political organizations. The European Parliament consists of ad hoc groupings of somewhat ideologically similar political parties linked to a mechanism for distributing resources. There are no political mechanisms, certainly no moderately effective ones, for allowing the citizens of the EU to act together in relation to EU policies. At best, European citizenship, while it may make available freer travel and right of residence and free entry to many museums, would seem to be a very attenuated sort of citizenship. In particular, it is not linked to any organized processes whereby the citizens may express dissent from what the EU system produces as policies. And so, to repeat, just how democratic is the EU?

Another way to approach the question is to ask how EU policies are formulated and effected. A democratic system would have these things lodged in some meaningful way with those whom the citizens have chosen to act in their behalf. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 redefined how EU policies were decided. The Council of Ministers, which represents Member countries, is one of the two chambers of the EU's legislative branch—the other is the European Parliament. But the legislative initiative rests with the European Commission, which may be thought of as the European Civil Service, a body of technical and bureaucratic experts. Following Lisbon, although the procedure varies from policy area to policy area, the Council of Ministers requires only a Qualified Majority, but no longer unanimity, to approve a Commission proposal. In the Parliament, whose approval is also necessary, a simple majority is sufficient. The point to be made with respect to the Qualified Majority is that now, unlike in the past, no country can in

every instance veto a policy which it see as peculiarly affecting its national interest. This surely can be interpreted as an infringement of national sovereignty, as Brexiteers well know.

The European Parliament began life almost as an afterthought in the European project. Its members have since 1979 been elected but the citizens of Europe have never shown interest in an assembly that never had much power. The Parliament also has no powers of initiative. Although supposedly representative of citizens, the Council of Ministers, only an indirectly representative body, is the European Parliament's co-equal in judging policy initiatives of the Commission. Since the representatives of the government they elect in their own country may be outvoted in the Council of Ministers and since the body they constituted through their votes as European citizens has limited powers in relation both to the Council and to the European Commission, it is a sort of 'democracy' at odds with the democracy many are accustomed to in their own country. Note that it means that should the citizens of any country direct their government to reject some particular policy, their government would be unable to block it from going into effect.

The very way in which the Treaty of Lisbon came about reflects rather badly on how the EU proceeds. Lisbon had its origins in 2001 in a Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. Since this was a new treaty, all member states had to ratify it. Several countries put it to a referendum. In 2005, the proposed European constitution went down to defeat in France and the Netherlands. Tony Blair had announced there would be a referendum in Britain, but after the French and Dutch referenda, that became unnecessary. The Treaty of Lisbon, which was presented as a treaty to amend rather than an entirely new treaty, was a refashioned version of the defeated European constitution. But being a treaty to amend, it did not need a country's ratification procedure in most EU member states. Ireland, however, was required to put it to a referendum. There it too went down to defeat. Again, the necessary unanimity among the Member states was not achieved. But Ireland was then subjected to considerable pressure to re-do their referendum, and this second time it passed. There is an EU pattern here: keep pressing until the recalcitrant member comes up with the desired response. It is possible, in the case of Brexit that the EU is again playing a game that will give it the result it wants: Britain remains one way or another within the EU. There are those in Britain playing the same game.

In relation to this, there's an interesting insight into how the EU—which is at one level an inter-governmental organization and at another level a top heavy technocratic bureaucracy—responds to challenges. Note this opinion piece by a French writer Sylvie Kauffmann:

"But most of all, this process has taught us about the strength of the European Union in a way that we never suspected. . .

"The European Commission designated an affable Frenchman, Michel Barnier, as its chief negotiator and gave him a team of 60, drawn from 19 nationalities. A former center-right member of Parliament, government minister and union commissioner, Mr. Barnier viewed

Brexit as "a lose-lose case" and was determined that the union would lose as little as possible. He understood early that unity would be crucial and repeatedly toured the remaining 27 member countries to brief their leaders.

"[I]nstead of intra-European infighting and rivalry, London's negotiators met a solid wall of unity and sense of purpose. The European Union became so relevant that exiting it is not an issue anymore, even among the most Euroskeptic governments". [9]

This is something to be kept in mind when contemplating the shambles of official British attempts to negotiate how they might get out of Europe. The attempt to negotiate is quite one-sided. This is surely not going unperceived in Britain, especially by those who have for long suspected and opposed what that commentator says he did not suspect. And there is another direct link between the Lisbon Treaty and Brexit: Tony Blair and Gordon Brown said there would be a referendum. Then Gordon Brown, as Prime Minister, said there was no need. David Cameron criticised Labour for reneging. David Cameron, as Prime Minister, opposed a referendum until, for electoral purposes he miscalculated and called for one. The seeming bad faith of their political leaders with respect to EU matters surely also colored British attitudes towards the EU. The conflict over Europe and the related conflict over what sort of Europe it should be stretches back a long way. And not just in Britain. [10]

Why, if the European project has been such a hard sell, why if it has never aroused much enthusiasm, has it proceeded? There's actually a stream of analysis which answers that question by placing it within a framework which extends far beyond Europe. It's a context which helps explain why governments, or more generally, powerful groups among the political and economic elites, have been quite eager to push the European project forward even against the hostility or lukewarmness of their citizens and of members of their own political parties. What's been going on?

From a general point of view, there is, for example, Foucault's discussion in the late 1970s of German ordo-liberalism and American neoliberalism. The ordo-liberals sought to create a state on the foundation of economic liberty, a state where the market would occupy a very privileged place; their social-market economy was to be supported by political regulation. And having failed to effect that in Germany, so Wolfgang Streeck avers, they transferred their efforts to the European level where they achieved great success. The British—and American—neo-liberals inhabited well-established states. Their problem was to enlarge the role of the market beyond the confines of the economy, to make more and more of their societies and politics subject to economic rationality, to get the system and the people to replace questions of right or wrong, of just or unjust, with cost-benefit analysis and a widespread acceptance of corporate profitability as the be-all and end-all. These two approaches did find common ground in the fashioning of the EU at least after about the mid 1970s, if not before.

Since the EU was a system which emphasized the role in policy making and implementation of diplomats, bureaucrats, and technical experts and de-emphasized the role of the publics in member countries, it might be so, that ordo-/neo-liberalism fitted it like a glove. Like the rise of

capitalism itself, of which ordo-/neo-liberalism has been but a recent phase, even as it inexorably spread, it found a readier new home in some places than in others. Neo-liberalism is the ideology the EU was seeking, the justification for and the explanation of its earliest supervisorial practices, the explanation of and the justification for the extension of these practices into evermore areas of human activity, for it knows no bounds. The marginalization of a democratic element in its decision-making is thus perhaps no accident? The possible reform of the EU to insert a democratic element into its functioning may thus be an immensely difficult task. At the same time, the hope of reforming in a democratic direction, of rolling back the neo-liberal regimes which hold sway in the EU's member countries may not be great, especially in such a place as Britain, which may fairly be described as one of the birth places of neo-liberalism. Yet neo-liberalism is not inscribed in Britain in the very grain of its formal and informal constitutional arrangements, in its cultural forms and practices, in the memories of its people. In the EU, which lacks a history which might impose limits and generate counter-institutional arrangements, which was, I've suggested, born neo-liberal *avant la lettre*, there may well be less reason to hope for change of a generally liberating, empowering sort.

Note just how rapidly and successfully this neo-liberal ideology has come to dominate societies and individuals. The notion that there is no alternative to the market determination of all aspects of life invades the thinking even of those who wish and try to resist it. It is no wonder, then, that economistic and individualistic considerations weigh so heavily in the debates over Brexit. To have other concerns and to think in other ways, to repudiate what is now the dominant socio-political theory structuring and guiding the EU, as at least some of the Leavers do, strikes so many Remainers as unrealistic, irrational, fantastical. How can it be about anything other than the money? They seem to be unaware that the concerns they express with respect to the possible consequences of Brexit can come across to those who do not see the world in the same light as self-centered outrage at the potential loss to them of for the most part mere economic and cultural privilege.

In contemplating how this came about, in contemplating how the EU became an ordo-/neo-liberal bastion, the role of British governments led, first, by Margaret Thatcher and dominated after her departure by Thatcherism, a particularly harsh version of neo-liberalism, should not be minimized. Britain, with the aid of willing allies elsewhere in Europe, helped drive the EU towards becoming a region where politics was reduced to operating within a space defined by economics, where politics became ever more incapable of inhibiting economic excess. Neither should it be ignored that some of the drive for Brexit came and is coming from just those in the British economic and political elites for whom the EU's neo-liberalism was not harsh enough, who want to dominate an independent Britain to their own advantage, who want to link with the more uninhibited economic polity that is the United States. For people like me, that is a legitimate concern. On the other hand, to see the dominance of Britain's own neo-liberals as inevitable is to overlook two things: that support for Brexit has been more explicitly correlated with hostility to neo-liberalism than with support for a more extreme version of it; and that Brexit is, as was inevitable, transforming the whole space of domestic British politics—it is necessarily leading to a period of political upheaval and innovation, the outcome of which cannot be known in advance. That is both worrying and liberating, as is always be the case

when a settled way of doing things has become untenable.

In the case of Britain, to quote Peter Mair, an Irish political scientist who wrote, “Ruling the Void: The Hollowing out of Western Democracy,”

“Since the last years of the Thatcher government . . . the parties in Britain have rushed to the centre, with . . . New Labour’s ’Third Way’ in particular being promoted as a way of superseding ideology and partisanship as central forces in the process of policy-making. In place of the politics of party, and hence in place of the reversals and extremisms of the earlier system, there came what . . . has [been] identified as ‘the politics of depoliticization’—a governing strategy in which decision-making authority is passed over to ostensibly non-partisan bodies and in which binding rules are adopted which deny discretion to the government of the day. . . The [still competing political] parties . . . came to find themselves sharing the same broad commitments in government and confining themselves to the same ever-narrowing repertoire of policy-making”. [11]

In place of political decision-making there is EU regulation. Domestically, it’s tweedle-dum versus tweedle-dee. The two processes go hand in hand. Underlying this is that old anti-democratic fear of and hostility towards the supposedly ignorant masses; how could they ever contribute to rational decisions about very difficult and very important matters? The strategy has been to displace policy making to a place out of democratic reach and to put in place means for curbing whatever the demos, the almost neutered citizens might try to do. Consider, for example, the way in which particular international organizations block or even punish national efforts to try to salvage the natural environment or to limit privatization of such national institutions as universal health care or education systems. Again Mair:

“within party organizations, there has been a shift in the party centre of gravity towards those elements and actors that serve the needs of the party in parliament and government; . . .’those who control the government appear to be better able than in the past to also control from that position the whole party’. . . [T]he party organization outside the institutions of the polity, and the pary on the ground in all its various manifestations, gradually wither away. . . What remains is a governing class.”

. . .

“Citizens change from participants into spectators, while the elites win more and more space in which to pursue their own particular interests. The result is the beginning of a new form of democracy, one in which the citizens stay at home while the parties get on with governing.”

Primarily with an eye to the ways in which the governing arrangements of the United States had been changed, Sheldon Wolin voiced a similar concern:

“The ideology of ‘the economy’ and the positive role of the state in advancing capitalist societies share a common tendency towards the depoliticalization of society; or, stated more sharply, both are not only opposed to the redemocratization of society, they are committed to

reshaping the attenuated remains of democratic practices to accord with the needs of a corporate vision of politics". [12]

Often enough this has been done under the guise of internationalism, and who could possibly be against that, for, we hear again and again, internationalism is good, nationalism is bad. But here's what Streeck has to say,

"Ideologically the political-economic preemption of the nation state—of democratic national institutions in favour of technocratic supranational ones—makes use of certain positive normative connotations of internationalism, especially on the Left. . .. Using left internationalism for left disempowerment is a particularly ironic method to de-democratize a capitalist political economy, especially if deployed by the left itself. It comes with a moral denunciation of borders and protectionism tout cours in the name of a misunderstood cosmopolitanism, identifying 'globalization' with liberation, not just of capital, but of life in general"

All this helps one understand just why Brexit is arousing vociferous dismay in certain circles: A political and economic elite project supported by a recently emerged (and subordinate) cultural elite is faced with repudiation. Neither should it be overlooked that some are locked into the EU as they pursued their single issues or their identities, for the EU arena was where decision-making respecting their particular concerns had become increasingly lodged, and they are, with some cause, desperately afraid that their concerns will be ignored or injured should Brexit go into effect.

All of this has been going forward, at least until recently, with the encouragement of the world's major actor, the United States. While it wasn't the sole factor in the framing and fashioning of the European project, there is no question that American urgings are among the things that brought the EU into being. With respect to Brexit, two US-related points have to be noted: the end of the Cold War and then before too long the difficulties the American empire began to experience, both at home and abroad, in consequence of the great surge of imperial hubris which attended the realization (or was it always a delusion) that it was the sole superpower. There has been since 1989 an expansionary thrust, in which the EU has been implicated, and there has been a mounting perception, abroad as well as at home, that US imperial ambitions were outstripping its capacities. The drive to become more encompassing has become tied to perceptions that it was weakening. Athens went to Sicily, with a well-known result. America has been going almost everywhere.

While the EU is implicated in globalization, in the process to integrate the world into a capitalist network of production and distribution, globalization is American led. American interests predominate, no matter that privileging them may not harmonize with the interests of others. The EU, while it is more or less an American ally, is also an American competitor. Of consequence for Brexit, there are those among Britain's elites more inclined to look across the Atlantic than across the English Channel when contemplating their future. A range of

responses come into play when the globalizing drive seems to be weakening, especially when an American government is seen to be narrowly pursuing its own economic interests. Those in Britain whose interests are more closely aligned with American ones found themselves more than ever drawn away from the EU.

What did the end of the Cold War have to do with Brexit? With the end of the Cold War Eastern Europe was in a sense cut loose. One of the first consequences was to all intents and purposes the unilateral decision of West Germany to unify with East Germany, no matter the cost, no matter how this might impact the EU and its other members. Here it needs to be remembered that one of the imperatives of the European project from its beginning was to contain Germany. Reunification as well as another German action I'll come to in a moment, insofar as they influenced perceptions of the EU, cannot be ignored when considering Brexit.

What to do about other cut-loose eastern European countries? There was internal EU discussion whether or not to bring them on board. In the broadening versus deepening debate: should the EU include more members, even though those that might be included were poorer countries—for note, the poorest EU member, Greece, was richer than the richest cut-loose entity, Slovenia, which might become a member; or should the EU put its energies and its resources into deepening the economic, social, cultural, and political relationships among its already existing members? Although not the only factor, American pressure contributed to the decision to expand into Eastern Europe.

This expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe was coordinated with the expansion of NATO to include some of the same countries. Both EU expansion and NATO expansion are aspects of an American policy to advance its power closer to Russia and to assure continued dominance over Western Europe. It's a whole other subject for discussion, this policy, pursued under both Republican and Democratic direction. But it is relevant to the contextualization of Brexit to note that, no matter that since 1941 both Labour and Conservative governments supported U.S. foreign policies, it cannot be assumed that the British people all were happy about it.

And worse was to come, for another consequence of the ending of the Cold War was the break-up of Yugoslavia. Under the Cold War system, both the eastern and western European countries were tightly constrained by their overlords, the US and the Soviet Union. After 1989, these constraints lessened. Although Yugoslavia occupied a unique, awkward-to-define place within Cold War Europe, nevertheless, its own internal developments now took place in a new context. What's significant so far as the EU and Brexit are concerned is the part Germany played. Unilaterally, it recognized the independence of Slovenia and pressured its EU colleagues to go along, which helped trigger the violent unraveling of Yugoslavia. That Germany had again acted unilaterally provoked outrage and anxiety concerning how Germany's future role in Europe. That NATO and the EU were injected into the Yugoslavian conflicts in a one-sided way also provoked anger, for not everyone interpreted what was going on there in the way that their governments did.

So far as the EU is at issue, the engagement in a war within Europe raised serious questions

about what had been one, perhaps the most widely supported argument in favor of European unification, that it would bring a halt to the wars which had ravaged Europe for centuries, and especially to wars prompted by great power rivalries among the French, the British and the Germans. That Germany would open the door to the horrors of Sarajevo, ethnic massacres, and the like, raised fears, never dormant in Europe, especially never dormant in Britain, that the EU was incapable of fulfilling one of its primary functions, namely, that it constrain Germany. To jump forward a few years, the extraordinary harshness with which the EU dealt with Greece's financial difficulties was also seen justly by many as being German-led, as done primarily to protect German financial interests and Germany's economic system. Again this raised the question, what is the EU and who or what is it designed to benefit? Could the EU control its most powerful member to the benefit of all the EU member countries? Or was the EU becoming slowly subject to German hegemony? Again, so far as Brexit is concerned, new fears of Germany found ready resonance with some old fears embedded more deeply though not exclusively in Britain's older people.

The post-Cold War extension of EU membership also had consequences, for they became free to make use of what membership made available, including so-called "freedom of movement." What is relevant for Brexit is that, unlike most countries in the EU, Britain failed to put in place measures that would put some brakes on the flow of working people into Britain out of places such as Poland eager to advance themselves economically in the richer West. What must be recognized about this influx of eastern European workers is they for the most part found only some parts and places in the British economy accessible to them on account of their education and skills. In other words, the impact of the influx was experienced differentially. Some parts of Britain experienced little impact. I have seen a BBC estimate of over 1 million immigrants of this sort—about 2 percent of the British population, which has to be translated into a much larger percentage of the working-age population, and into very much higher percentages in particular categories of economic activity and in particular places. The British government, led by Tony Blair, clearly bears responsibility. But it is also clear that it would not have happened had Britain not been a member of the EU.

So far I've reviewed the political context within which the Brexit referendum took place. And I've pointed to the disappearance of another enduring political framework of relevance to the Brexit vote, the ending of the Cold War. And I suggested how these affected that vote. I now want to draw attention to another obvious framework for Brexit—the massive economic collapse of 2008-9, a collapse which cannot be viewed apart from American-led globalization. The EU has not recovered from that collapse to the degree other places have. Rather, dominated by neo-liberal thinking, the Eurozone has adhered to a punishing regime of austerity. Britain, outside the Eurozone, but still dominated by its own neoliberals, has also pursued austerity, but has managed to recover rather better than other parts of the EU. Greece is not the only country to find itself subjected to economic requirements and conditionalities which poorly fit their own circumstances. Spain, Portugal, and Ireland, among others, may be mentioned here too. Inevitably, especially since the policies of austerity have a differential impact both on the different countries of Europe but also on the populations of these countries, the notion that the EU is an engine for creating economic betterment has fallen into question.

It has lent credibility to the notion that economic betterment might be better pursued outside the EU. It is relatively easy, I think, to see how this perception finds ready allies among those for whom the EU has never been experienced as a source of betterment.

Besides, it is widely acknowledged tha economic inequality has grown significantly in Britain as well as elsewhere. We know that whatever the benefits of EU membership may have been, these have not been distributed uniformly. It may have been a bit unfair for Brexiteers to broadcast under the title “40 years of EU rule”, “Railways—sold, electricity—sold; water—sold, the Royal Mail—sold; the National Health Service—being sold,” because these were policies pushed by Britain’s ruling class. But these policies met no opposition from the EU. And more to the present point, where left critics are concerned, given the economic ideas which dominate within the EU we suspect that any attempt by a British government to reverse privatization would be ruled out of order by the EU. Let me just add that the re-nationalization of Britain’s railways is now widely advocated. And the NHS—the National Health Service—has been, like Social Security in the United States, the third rail in British politics, yet its privatization seems to be proceeding in dribs and drabs under the rules of “fair competition” [13]; the EU is not where to look if one wants to find support for opposition to the privatization of basic social services.

To return to the arguments of Mair and Streeck, among others: the project to put elite policy making in the place of democratic policy making derived such legitimacy as it enjoyed only from its apparent success, for it was justified as a way of making sound decisions about matters the citizenry were not qualified to deal with and to provide these citizens with economic and other sorts of security they could not otherwise be provided. In a number of ways, elite decision-making instead has demonstrated its inadequacies. It was elite decision-making that collaborated in seemingly endless wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, in the thrust towards Russia. It was elite decision-making which, by helping to make life intolerably dangerous elsewhere in the world, made the mass migration of desperate people seeking safety a problem. It was elite economic decision-making which has sought to deal with the consequences of the economic disaster of a decade ago by imposing austerity and which has put in place policies which are allowing a few to become obscenely rich while the many are being returned to a socio-economic and cultural poverty preceding the good years, the two generations during which many enjoyed the benefits of something like social democracy.

That Britain’s Tory government wants to exploit austerity to squash social provision, to deprive desolated urban areas of resources and weaken them as sites of opposition, to privatize what remains of the welfare state—and that many of those who think this way support Brexit because it may allow them to pursue these anti-people projects more vigorously—should not cause anyone to imagine that the EU is their friend. There are those who reckon that the EU might be reformed into becoming a friend, but there are others who judge that the EU is less reformable than an independent Britain. In my opinion, whichever of these judgments might have been the more plausible prior to the Brexit referendum, it almost certainly strengthened all that makes the EU less than people friendly, for should Brexit fail to come to pass, or worse, should it come to pass in ways that subject Britain to new sorts of EU constraints, there is

surely in some higher places a desire to punish Britain for its temerity joined to a desire to discourage others from pursuing a similar path out.

As the process of transferring legitimacy to supra-national organizations was going forward, simultaneously some legitimacy was withdrawn from states. Increasingly, people were told, there are matters your government is incapable of dealing with. But what happens when the supranational organization to which powers have been transferred begins to be seen as less than competent to deal with policy areas transferred to it, policy areas we have been assured are significant? What happens when the EU begins to seem less legitimate, as has been happening across Europe. All that are left, it seems, are entities, national governments which have also through their own earlier actions lost legitimacy. And as the EU has, I think, made very clear in the case of Brexit, the costs of leaving can be made extremely great. The space within which confusion may reign has become very large. This is perhaps why one now hears it being said that both Britain and the EU need rebuilding. But this is not, I think, what one hears from the adamantine Remainers for whom the EU continues to be an ideal and for whom Britain is a dark region harboring all sorts of backward and vicious tendencies only an enlightened Europe can hold in check.

None of this can be ignored when one is trying to understand Brexit. The causes of Brexit are many, historically rooted, multiply interconnected, and ultimately deeply political. Brexit is not adequately to be understood as some kind of irrational spasm, as something which suddenly emerged out of nowhere.

Criticisms?

Brexit is xenophobic, ignorant, nationalistic, economically misguided, etc. Although presented as unarguable facts, they are at best problematical assumptions, misrepresentations, or manipulative in intent. All this and more will be familiar to those who know something of the history of democracy's enemies. At the same time, few critics feel any need to accompany their criticisms of Brexit with a defense of the EU. Their EU, to borrow from 1066 and All That, simply is "a good thing." It is almost as if there are no valid or plausible criticisms of the EU, as if the EU was not, as it has since the great financial crisis a decade ago, riddled with problems. For some Europeans, in the richer as well as the poorer EU member states, it should be remembered that economic difficulties preceded the crisis. Yet it's as if Remainers had never heard of "Europe's disappearing middle class." [14] One conclusion of that study is surely relevant to British attitudes towards Brexit:

"Rather than the crisis, long-term transformations in industrial relations and labour markets seem to explain the growth of the low-pay segment and the erosion of the middle class in countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy" (p. 43).

It's also noteworthy, given the emphasis on migration in the Brexit discussions, that according to this report,

"The changes in the world of work that we describe in this volume for some southern countries

– such as real wage falls, weakened collective bargaining, cuts in employment and wages in the public sector and reduced expenditure in health and education – have led many middle-class employees to emigrate to seek better employment and wage conditions. Emigration of middle-class public sector employees could also be observed from southern countries to northern countries. The ILO documented the illustrative case of a middle-class employee from the Portuguese state administration who decided to emigrate to Switzerland to work as a cleaning lady to earn more income and ensure the coverage of her family needs. A high number of doctors have emigrated from Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, but also Spain and Greece, to work in northern countries (pp. 41-42)."

There has, in other words, been 'brain drain' going on. If Britain has benefitted from immigration, some of the benefits have been at the expense of poorer EU countries. But that's no concern of ours? That's not something ever mentioned in Brexit debates. And where defenses are put forward, they're in the form of unsupported assertions concerning the benefits the EU has supposedly brought to Europeans, including the British. For the Remainers, for the most part, the EU is an unexaminable object, a sacred object.

One of the most frequently heard charges is that an unprepared and ignorant British public was suddenly asked to vote on a very complex matter and that the campaign around that referendum was uninformative and misleading. What this disregards is that in fact: (1) the referendum was initiated because the EU was already and had been for several decades a most contentious, much discussed issue. (2) The multi-faceted opposition within Britain to the EU has been enduring. Here's a comment from a 2009 Eurobarometer: "Respondents were divided about the 'image' of the EU: of those taking a position, about half had a rather positive image of the EU (37%), while the other half took the opposite view (40%)" (Note the inherent duplicity in referring to 37% and 40% as being "about half," but then, these surveys are conducted in the service of determining where and how the EU needs to be buttressed. (3) Britain is not unique in harboring opposition to the EU. An analyst at the Robert Schuman Foundation—another organization devoted to defending the EU—concluded in 2013

"Since 2007 Europeans' attitudes about the European Union have constantly worsened. Image, confidence, optimism about the Union's future – these three indicators in the Eurobarometer have plummeted sharply. As we explain this downturn we immediately turn to the financial and economic crisis. But a national analysis illustrates that the key factors in attitudes to Europe are not just economic. Increasingly Europeans are being tempted by a type of national withdrawal and this phenomenon is clearly linked to a weakening in support to the European Union." [15]

In short, the Brexit referendum was not injected into a political vacuum. Rather, the referendum was injected into a political space filled with a great deal of political argument, going back to the 1960s, about the pros and cons of EU membership. The public voting in the referendum was not ignorant. It was, however, a public—a diverse public, I should emphasize—which suddenly found itself with an effective political voice on a matter about which for a long time it had had little or no say. Imagine if there was, in the United States, a

referendum in, say, three months time on, say, the right to terminate a pregnancy or the right to own guns. Although it's all too easy to imagine that the losers in such a referendum would claim that the public had been given too little time to think the matter through, surely these issues have been discussed for many years. Would it really be accurate to say that the American people were voting out of ignorance?

Another charge is that the referendum vote—about 52 percent in support of Leave, about 48 percent for Remain—was too close to provide a basis for such a consequential action. Leave received the support of a little over 37 percent of the entire electorate. In fact a great many elections have been decided by similar or even smaller levels of support:

1. The great reforming Labour government of 1945 came into office with the support of about 35 percent of the electorate; their opponents got less;
2. In 1951, the Conservatives swept Labour from office with the support of about 39 percent of the electorate; defeated Labour won 40 percent;
3. In 1964, Labour ended 13 years of Tory rule by winning the support of 34 percent of the electorate; the Tories got 33 percent;
4. In 1979, the fact that Thatcher's Tory party won the support of only about 33 percent of the electorate was not regarded as deligitimisation for her policies; the main opposition got 28 percent; a second opposition party got a bit more than 10 percent; her opponents got over 2 million more votes than Thatcher's Tories;
5. In 1997, the Labour Party was swept into office with 43.2 percent of the vote, with the support of only about 30 percent of the electorate, outvoted by the two leading opposition parties, who together got almost 2.5 million more votes than did Labour;
6. And in 2010, the Conservatives came back into power with the support of 23 percent of the electorate, with 36.1 percent of the votes cast, outvoted this time by close to 5 million votes for the two main opposition parties.

If the vote to Leave lacks electoral legitimacy, then every British government since World War Two, and most before, lacked electoral legitimacy. And these were not governments making inconsequential decisions. To put it in American perspective, in 2000 George W. Bush became President with 47.9 percent [26 percent of the voting age population], returned to office in 2004 with 50.7 percent [30 percent], that in 2008 Barack Obama became President with 52.9 percent [33 percent], and returned to office in 2012 with 50.9 percent of the vote [30 percent]. If the Brexit vote lacks legitimacy, then so too does the election of these US Presidents.

Next charge: The Brexit vote was a much-to-be-regretted expression of nationalism.In some respects, that is so. But before we lapse into condemnation, it's necessary to scrutinize nationalism, for it comes in different varieties, and some varieties were in favor of remaining. The first type of Remain nationalism is that which talks about how the EU will allow Britain to play a greater role in the world. It's not exactly "Make Britain great again" nationalism, but it can be said to be "Make Britain greater than it will otherwise be" nationalism. It's the sort of nationalism where the EU is regarded as a vehicle for British international ambitions. It's a nationalism one comes across in other member European states. A second type of Remain

nationalism is what might be referred to as Euro-nationalism, the notion that the EU permits Europeans to play a larger role in the world than they might otherwise, a larger role that is their birthright as the inheritors of European civilization. (For a very recent example of this see Emmanuel Macron's letter, "Dear Europe, Brexit is a lesson for all of us: it's time for renewal". [16]) If the nationalism of the Leavers makes their desire to Leave morally and politically suspect, the motives of some Remainers surely also must be held suspect. We've gone from black and white to shades of gray.

Although not all Remainers are internationalists, internationalism is often juxtaposed to nationalism in Remain versus Leave arguments. But internationalism comes in at least two varieties. There is the sort of internationalism associated with various sorts of socialism. But before, during, and after left internationalism there has also been capitalist internationalism. It's surely true that some left internationalists want to Remain. But it's also true that some touting the EU's internationalist credentials are the opposite of left internationalists. This is the sort of internationalism which has driven globalization during the last few generations—and too often people who should know better, who should be more suspicious, are led astray by the term internationalist when they should be critically examining what sort of internationalism is on offer.

But isn't the support for Brexit driven by xenophobia? That there is anti-immigrant xenophobia cannot be disputed, but for present purposes it is convenient to mention Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speeches against West Indian immigrants in the 1950s, hostility to immigrant Pakistanis and Africans (I once possessed a Manchester police helmet inside which was written "Paki basher"), and more recently the expressions of anti-Islam linked to mass migration out of the Middle East. Followers of the Brexit debates too casually assume that these are what are at issue in Brexit. While it is plausible that one sort of anti-immigrancy feeds another sort, what needs to be clarified is (1) why the EU became the focus of today's hostility to foreigners, (2) whether other concerns are being bundled into a grab-bag labeled in a way which carries negative connotations. The answers to both these questions have a bearing on the legitimacy of components of the Brexit vote. They cannot be explored without taking note of so-called "freedom of movement" within the EU.

"Freedom of movement" within the EU is debatable on a number of grounds, but the one of relevance here arose with the expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe. To quote the BBC

"Most EU countries imposed temporary labour market restrictions on workers from the eight East European states which joined in 2004, but the UK, Republic of Ireland and Sweden did not. The UK saw an unexpected surge in migrants from those states – the majority from Poland. Net migration from those states to the UK reached nearly 400,000 in 2004-2011, and a UK census in 2011 suggested about 1.1 million residents were born in those countries. The concentration of migrants in certain areas has put extra pressure on services such as schools and hospitals". [17]

As this BBC report goes on to explain, “social dumping,” i.e., importing cheap workers from poorer countries who undercut local workers and even deprive locals of jobs, is a related problem. So is the fact that companies are allowed to pay required social contributions in the workers’ countries of origin, where these contributions are generally lower. In short, the mechanisms of the EU freedom of movement of working people are perceived especially in areas highly impacted by migrant labour, and by quite a number of trades unions, to undermine rights that working people won for themselves over generations of struggle. Neither major British political party came to the defense of workers who found their conditions of work degraded, their jobs even eliminated. This surely figures into why the vote in favor of Brexit was so strong in parts of Britain. It also explains why the vote to Remain was strong in other parts of Britain—the nature of their economies, especially in a place like London and the South-East, is such that immigrant workers are for the most part unlikely to seek employment there since they for the most part lack the basic qualifications. And it helps explain why the major parties have been finding it difficult to contain and exploit Brexit.

Both in the run-up to the referendum and in the political conflicts of the post-referendum period we’re now in, the complexities I’ve just sketched have all too often been dismissed as “anti-immigrant xenophobia.” This is just confirming for many of those who voted as they did, for Brexit, that their opponents, the Remainers, have no interest in understanding their plight. We’re talking about those geographical and socio-economic locations in Britain where the support for Brexit was greatest, where poverty has been on the rise for a generation and more, where their towns and cities are blighted, where their children have access only to increasingly inadequate schooling, where the National Health Service is being run into the ground. In short, while the anti-immigrant charge has some validity, it is inadequately understood for what it often is, all too often being categorized as mere racist bigotry.

This is an opportune moment to look to the charge that Brexit will prove harmful to Britain. Since it’s clear that the EU is unwilling or is incapable of working out some friendly, no fault divorce with Britain, there’s reason to expect that there will be considerable economic costs attached to Brexit. Given the socio-economic divisions within British society, there is every reason to expect that these costs will be inequitably distributed. On the other hand, many British people are already experiencing economic tribulation. They’re not unaware that their lot has been increasingly unpleasant and not just in consequence of the economic crash a decade ago. They know that economic inequality has grown over the last half century, roughly the period during which Britain has been in the EU. For them, the EU is a part of their problem not a part of the solution to their problem. They see that the guiding ideology of the EU means that staying in the EU will mean more of the same for them.

Often enough, of course, people have been advised that their general standard of living has improved. Recall, however, the report cited above on the decline of the European, including the British middle class since at least the mid-1990s. And note, too, British historian Edward Thompson’s conclusion to his in depth analysis of an earlier period of great economic transformation,

"It is perfectly possible to maintain two propositions which, on a casual view, appear to be contradictory. Over the period 1790-1840 there was a slight improvement in average material standards. Over the same period there was intensified exploitation, greater insecurity, and increasing human misery. By 1840 most people were 'better off' than their forerunners had been fifty years before, but they had suffered and continued to suffer this slight improvement as a catastrophic experience". [18]

In other words, there is no single story to be told of the British people, of how they have experienced and how they evaluate life in the EU, and of how they will experience and evaluate the consequences of Brexit.

But the charge that Brexit will be economically damaging to Britain and its people must also be viewed in another light. For it presumes, in fairly typical neo-liberal fashion, that the EU is simply all about economics. What it ignores is that the EU is much more than that. It is a political entity that happens to have been constructed to make primary, dominant, a certain kind of economic judgment—the sort of judgment capitalist markets favor. It is, in fact, what has been termed an economic polity, a political system within which politics is secondary to and the servitor of the economic system and those dominant within it. But though one would not know it from the endless harping on the economic costs of Brexit, Brexit is intended, at least in the minds of some supporters, to bring a variety of other *political considerations* to bear, considerations that are not at all co-aligned, some of which I happen to be very opposed to. What ought to be kept in mind, however, is that no matter how those in favor of Brexit disagree over who should have political power and to what ends political power should be directed, they see the issue as one of taking power away from the EU system which they all in their different ways see as limiting or injuring them in non-economic as well as economic ways.

Brexit is only secondarily an economic matter; it is primarily a political matter, even for those who desperately want to be in control of a neo-liberal Britain. While the economic injury it may impose shouldn't be and isn't universally trivialised by those who support Brexit, those seeking some sort of redistribution of political power within Britain and within Europe, with an eye to pursuing goals they see the EU as inhibiting, are more concerned about more fundamental things, such as the processes by which economic decisions are made and the assumptions which guide those who operate these processes.

Another charge one hears is that the referendum process was corrupted by "dark money" and by malign "Russian intervention." Interestingly, these are charges that seem borrowed from similar charges voiced in the US with respect to the 2016 Presidential election. In the case of the Brexit referendum, the assumption underlying such charges is a common, elitist, anti-democratic perception that most people, since they lack any sound understanding of an issue and even of their own conditions, can in the space of a few weeks or months be led to vote in ways that hidden puppet masters wish. I don't for a moment doubt that over the longer term a great deal of quite successful mind shaping goes on—though much of that is carried out openly by those closer to London than to Moscow. But such models of political propaganda assume that the public is a passive, moldable object which offers little or no resistance to attempts to

manipulate it. As to the role of money from strange sources, I'd be more receptive were mention made of the foreign banks which donated to Britain Stronger in Europe. [19]

Besides, all attempts to manipulate the Brexit referendum, from whichever direction, certainly encountered a public in which there were already strong opinions regarding the EU. Whether such interventions would have been sufficient to affect the outcome can only be a matter of opinion and can probably never become a matter of fact, no matter that many will treat them as if they were facts. In attending to the propaganda model, it's surely appropriate to take note of all attempts to shape how people think.

Finally, there's the charge of British incompetence. This charge rests on certain assumptions. Would the charge hold up if negotiations between the British government and the EU were not conducted in good faith? Might not incompetence be better understood as symptomatic of something else? On the British side, it isn't beyond possibility to imagine that Theresa May, an opponent of Brexit who was landed with the job of effecting Brexit, is not eager to effect it; it isn't sheer fantasy to perceive that some within Labour see the politics of Brexit as a means to get rid of a leader with policies and a following they have never accepted; it isn't beyond possibility that the British Civil Service, another technocratic bureaucratic organization, has been working to thwart Brexit. I don't mean to be at all conspiratorial, but there are certainly a number of ways to derail Brexit, to deny those who voted to Leave the outcome they voted for, and to simultaneously pursue other political goals. It would be naive fantasy to think that there are not an awful lot of mixed motives and goals haunting Brexit. But that's just a small part, a small possible part of the Parliamentary and diplomatic process in which Brexit is entangled. One may be sure that all kinds of calculations are being made about how to gain political advantage in the parliamentary parties, in the country-wide political parties, in all sorts of political arenas. It's both fascinating and confusing, difficult to keep track of and to analyze.

Still with an eye to negotiating in good faith, one also has to attend to the sort of organization the EU is. Here I quote the director of the Centre for European Reform, a British Remainer:

"However, two and a half years after Britain's referendum, some lessons of the Brexit process are becoming clear. One is that leaving the EU is like joining it. Countries wanting to join engage in "accession negotiations", but that is a misnomer. The accession process in fact involves the EU imposing its terms on the country concerned. If it does not like those terms it does not have to join. The details can be debated, but not the basic deal that the EU offers. Every country that has joined the EU has put up with this unequal "negotiation" in order to get into the club.

"Leaving the EU is a similar process. Once the departing country has set its red lines for the future relationship, the EU decides what kind of deal will work. Then the exiting country has to accept those terms – if it wants a deal, and it will, since leaving without one would be hugely damaging to any state". [20]

That pretty much explains why the negotiations have been going nowhere. In some respects, I

see British-EU negotiations as mirroring the Greece-EU negotiations of a few years ago, as described by Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister. (I must add that Varoufakis opposed Brexit because he believed and still believes that the EU—and, indeed, the encompassing global economic system—can only and should be reformed from within. But that, too, is a possibly mistaken political judgment.) This sort of reform of the EU will depend on the prior reformation of the European left, on the overcoming of that left's own neoliberal ideological and institutional elements—something the present quandaries of Britain's Labour Party indicate will be no easy thing to accomplish. [21]) Surely at least part the political turmoil within Britain should be contemplated in light of the question, how do negotiations proceed if one party to these negotiations is obdurate? Whether that obduracy is the consequence of its institutional arrangements or an expression of the arrogance of power, that hardly places the EU in a flattering light.

Conclusion

Since at this moment of writing, Brexit has neither been effected nor discarded, it is premature to present a conclusion. It is not premature to conclude that, whatever comes about, Britain and its contexts have all been irrevocably changed. In Britain Brexit has already disrupted and will continue to disrupt its constitutional arrangements, its socio-political alignments, and more. The departure of a number of parliamentarians, both Labour and Conservative, from the political parties that made their elections possible is one indication of this. To be sure, those who have departed have long been disenchanted with their parties' programs and leaderships. But pleading Brexit makes plausible their claim to be acting on principle. [22] This will surely prove to be one of the lesser disruptions.

Brexit has already disturbed the EU's ideological and institutional arrangements. And its efforts to contain these disturbances are likely to fail, no matter whether, how, or when Brexit is achieved, for, on the one hand, in defending itself it will likely become more oriented in its institutionalization and behavior towards inhibiting more challenges, yet voice and exit denied, loyalty is hardly likely to result. On the other hand, both that and the way in which it has engaged with Brexit—as it previously engaged with Syriza, with Greece—will likely also encourage more reluctant acquiescence and more outright hostility.

Looking further afield: given the small role Britain now actually plays in the American-led global system, Brexit is unlikely to much disturb that. Only, support for Brexit is not the only sign that globalisation of a liberal-imperial kind is being rejected either consciously or in effect. It is being repudiated in a most significant fashion within the USA itself. There the contest has only recently been joined between liberal imperialism (which pursues its ends, including its primary goal of eternal dominance, through the more or less judicious use of carrots and sticks, of 'soft power' and 'hard power') and nationalist imperialism (which regards 'soft power' as an illusion and a sign of weakness, and which pursues the same ends by being coercive, even in relation to its 'friends' and 'allies'), and where American global dominance, though rejected by some, has not yet, and perhaps never will, give rise to a powerful, consciously anti-imperial political force within the United States—too often even the best intentioned define their

policies as having “the aim of [making the U.S.] the undisputed international leader”. As to whether Britain will continue to pursue its imaginary ‘special relationship’ with the USA even as the latter seeks to construct a harsher hegemonic global order, or whether it will seek some alternative, that too remains to be seen. What Britain does post-Brexit will be determined in part by political struggles within Britain, the outcomes of which cannot be predicted given the changes underway in Britain. But they will also be determined by political struggles elsewhere, especially within the USA, where the contest between the liberal imperialists, the nationalist imperialists, and others continues.

Some opponents of Brexit view the EU as a bastion against a global order dominated by the USA in either of these ways, and there is perhaps some justice in that. At the same time, since the EU shares the neo-liberal assumptions and priorities of the liberal-imperialist system, the barrier it presents to that sort of globalisation is not very high or strong. And should nationalist imperialism come to dominate in the United States, it must then be pondered how the relatively weaker EU will respond. That the EU will develop a military capacity sufficient to check the coercion of American nationalist imperialism, though presently unlikely, is a frightening prospect since there are few if any arrangements in place to inhibit and limit the violent resolution of differences. (One may here contemplate how the conflict between the liberal imperialist Clintonites and the nationalist imperialist Trumpites would have played out in the absence of constitutional expectations and constraints—and as some fear it will be played out, traditional constraints being discarded in the process, should Trump be defeated in 2020.) A halfway house divided, as the EU presently is, provides little assurance of an outcome favorable to Europeans.

It is possible to view American nationalist imperialism in a somewhat different light, as a desperate effort to salvage something from a perceptibly increasingly endangered liberal imperial order. It itself, possibly with Britain, if led by its right-wing Brexiteers, in tow, does not necessarily have much of a future. For, although the EU is in no position to do much about it, domination through undisguised coercion will surely engender resistance backed up by the capacity to employ equally violent means. One way or another, through recognizing its own limits or through being forced to acknowledge its own limits, American nationalist imperialism is likely to define a global order only in the short run. In the longer run it will likely come to be seen as an indicator that Pax Americana is approaching its terminus. It is, that is to say, better viewed as another sign that the liberal imperial order is unraveling.

And so back finally again to Brexit: make no mistake, all these large British, European, and global issues are the ground upon which Brexit rests. And Brexit, whatever its consequences, is, to me, a welcome sign that the present order of things can be and is being challenged. Should these words of mine do no more than provoke others to step back, if only for a moment, from what has become mainstream orthodoxy, to explore Brexit in critical ways, I shall be satisfied, no matter what flaws they may detect in my arguments.

Notes

1. Much of a euro-critical nature has actually been and continues to be written on this question. To mention but a few:

Perry Anderson, “Depicting Europe,” London Review of Books vol. 29, No. 18, 20 September 2007 (accessed at https://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n18/perry-anderson/depicting-europe)

John R. Gillingham, The EU: An Obituary (London, Verso, 2016). (See also the generally positive review of this “Thatcherite historian[’s]” book by Christopher Kissane accessed at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/26/the-eu-an-obituary-john-r-gillingham-review)

Wofgang Streeck, “The European Union is a liberal empire, and it is about to fall” (accessed at https://wolfgangstreeck.com/category/languages/english-sprachen/).

—and an amendment to the foregoing—

Peter Ramsay, “The EU is a default empire of nations in denial” (accessed at https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/03/14/the-eu-is-a-default-empire-of-nations-in-denial/

2. See, e.g., the comments attached to such NYT columns as “What’s the plan for Brexit? There is no plan,” accessed 18 February 2019 at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/opinion/brexit-theresa-may.html. Similar examples are not in short supply.
3. Wolfgang Streeck, “European Social Policy: Progressive Regression,” accessed at https://www.mpifg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/2018/dp18-11.pdf
4. There are some noteworthy exceptions to my crude generalisation. See, e.g., several pieces by Anthony Barnett at opendemocracy.net; also https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/23/beyond-brexit-james-meek

5. These numbers are taken from Susan Watkins, “Casting Off,” New Left Review 100 (July-August, 2016), accessed at https://newleftreview.org/II/100/susan-watkins-casting-off
6. There is a fascinating series of graphics plotting the shifting clusterings of every Member over the course of every Parliamentary vote respecting the Brexit deal at https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2019/feb/15/how-brexit-revealed-four-new-political-factions, accessed 15 February 2019.
7. Sheldon Wolin, “The Liberal/Democratic Divide: On Rawls’s Political Liberalism,” Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays (Princeton, 2016), ch. 13

8. David Harvey, The Ways of the World (Oxford, 2016), pp. 214-244.

9. Sylvie Kauffmann, “Watching Brexit Fall Apart,” NYT 23 January 2019
10. See, e.g., Philippe C. Schmitter and Zoe Lefkofridi, “Neo-Functionalism as a Theory of Disintegration,” Figure 6, “Perceived Benefit from EU Membership.” In 2007, less than 50 percent of the people of eight member countries—Sweden, Finland, Cyprus, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, UK, Latvia—thought “EU membership is good.” In 2011, 15 countries—Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, UK, Latvia—were in the disapprovong category. (Accessed at https://www.eui.eu/Documents/DepartmentsCentres/SPS/Profiles/Schmitter/Neo-F-Disintegration.final.pdf)
11. Accessed on-line at New York Public Library.
12. Wolin
13. See, e.g., James Meek, Private Island: Why Britain Now Belongs To Someone Else, esp. ch. 5, on the NHS.
14. Part title of a 2016 ILO report based on “evidence from the world of work,” edited by Daniel Vaughan-Whitehead, accessed at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_630642.pdf; referenced in the Business Section of the NY Times, 16 February 2018.
15. I quote from the Abstract of “The Europeans’ Attitudes About Europe: A Downturn Linked Only To the Crisis” (Policy Paper, Foundation Robert Schuman, No. 277, 2013), accessed at https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-277-en.pdf
16. Accessed at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/04/europe-brexit-uk

Macron calls, inter alia, for “protecting our continent” by having all EU members recognise the same “stringent border controls” and “a single asylum policy” to be placed “under the authority of a European Council for Internal Security.” He wants “to take Europe forward and to defend its model.” Increased spending and a European security council would be part of this project. Moving from the institutional to the ideological, he exhorts his readers that “Europe is not a second-tier power. Europe in its entirety is a vanguard: it has always defined the standards of progress.” “It is for you,” he urges, “to decide whether Europe and the values of progress that it embodies are to be more than just a passing episode in history.” Imagine had similar sentiments come from a Brexiteer!

17. Accessed at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25237742
18. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Vintage, 1963), p. 212.
19. See, e.g., reports that Citigroup, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, and J.P. Morgan donated sizeable sums of money to Britain Stronger in Europe (accessed at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/11/official-pro-european-union-campaign-is-part-funded-by-goldman-s/)
20. Accessed at https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/brexit/2019/01/search-lost-brexit-how-uk-re

peatedly-weakened-its-own-negotiating-position

21. See, e.g., D. Nicol, 'Is Another Europe Possible?' U.K. Const. L. Blog (29th Feb 2016) (available at https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/)
22. See, e.g., https://www.lrb.co.uk/v41/n05/tom-crewe/short-cuts.

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“Anarchy is For Lovers”: On Progress and Conflict, Friendship and Fighting: Winter Social Movement Reading, between Adorno and Benjamin, Women’s Marches, and a Few Notes on This Moment

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On my way home from one of the crazy trips I took to DC over the Kavanaugh confirmation battle in the fall of 2018, I wondered about all the years of actions in DC.

Our trips to fight wars, presidents, and looming fascism, to try to make democracy work for people. Most of the time, the best conversations of the day take place after we are arrested, in booking, or waiting to be released, the adrenaline receding as we find time to reflect on what we’re doing. Sometimes we talk all the way home; others we nap or read on the bus. Usually, I bring a paperback. Sarah Schulman’s *People in Trouble*, about the early AIDS years, saved me after an AIDS action that fell apart in 2005. The bus broke down on the way to the action. By the time we arrived, the action was over. And all I wanted to do was turn around and read my paperback. “People don’t become what they were brought up to be, people become themselves,” Schulman wrote, reminding me these actions were a part of something I hoped we could become –a bit less invested in the apartheids of sex or gender, a bit more abundant, more inclusive.[1]

On the way home from one of those trips last fall, I picked up a copy of my friend L.A. Kauffman’s new book, *How to Read a Protest*, in which Kaufman compares the top down 1963 March on Washington to the bottom-up style of the Women’s March of 2017 – a thrilling story from someone who has been present through my years of activism in New York. L.A. and I had been at the Supreme Court a couple of days before the confirmation of Kavanaugh, standing by. We were both feeling physically sick about the rightward tilt of the court, as we sat in the sweltering DC heat. Speeches were droning on. Plan A, to go to the Capitol, fell apart. Finally, a group of us from Rise and Resist went to plan B, an act of civil disobedience inside the Senate office building. Inside some of my heroes, activists I’ve known for literally decades, acted up, screaming our lungs out about what was happening. We were eventually arrested. After processing, the first person to greet me was Kauffman. We chatted about the day, the actions, and where it was going, extending a conversation which we had been having for years now.

Our actions are like community gardens, Kauffman imagined in 2003. “Protests gain in power if

they reflect the world we want to create," L.A. Kauffman elaborated as the optimism of the global justice movement was ebbing into a peace and justice movement. "And I, for one, want to create a world that is full of color and life and creativity and art and music and dance. It's a celebration of life against the forces of greed and death." Rather than "the angry shouting shrill position," which simply offers opposition, "having a carnival is a way of saying yes. Actions thrive when they grow organically, with lots of color, life, and creativity.[2] There are a lot of ways to bringing these sentiments to bear, reconciling the darkness and the light, the connections and separations, the things we oppose and hope to create. Friends such as Kauffman, novels by Schulman, they remind us, stories and friendships overlapping.

"My dissent is cheer / a thankless disposition," confessed Grace Paley. The struggle is omnipresent.

The following is a review essay about some recent works on and experiences in social movements, books that have been piling up in my room, reflections on the debates about friendship and fascism, the meaning of conflict, the limits of our models, critical theory, and the hope to achieve something more sustainable, in between it all, the rocks we roll up the hill over and over throughout our lives. Several of these works are by activist writers, a few of whom I have known for decades in the streets, in collectives long passed, others I have never met. In their own way, each asks:

How do we stay engaged?

What of the friends, hopes, and conflicts?

Can we reconcile differences and imagine better worlds together?

How do we handle the schisms?

Writer and activist Grace Paley suggests: "When you write, you illuminate what's hidden, and that's a political act".[3] This act of imagining, of creating is very much what activism and writing are all about, dreaming with a cohort of likeminded comrades. "The buoyancy, the noise, the saltiness" of feminism informed Paley's writing and activism, providing a community of support. She "required three or four best women friends" observes Alexandra Schwartz in a recent profile in *The New Yorker*; these were confidants she could "tell every personal fact and then discuss on the widest, deepest, and most hopeless level the economy, the constant, unbeatable, cruel war economy, the slavery of the American worker." This theme of kindship – of friendships that "deepen or become strained with age" – can be traced throughout her writing.[4] Yet, why do some friendships deepen, while others become strained? Why do some follow one direction vs another?

In *Conflict is Not Abuse*, Sarah Schulman posits that: "Like authentic, conscious relationships, truly progressive communities, responsible citizenship, and real friendship… the peace-making that all these require," asks "that you be interactive."[5] Certainly, this can be said of the rebel friendships traced throughout this review. Friendships take shape in just such an interactive,

dialectical manner, through cycles of formation, inevitable conflict and questions about resolution. Some end up in a rupture, others with a stronger foundation, born of the process of creating the cheerful dissent Paley describes.[6]

"…[S]ometimes walking with a friend I forget the world," writes Paley, her liberatory imagination dueling with imperatives of survival, contradicting forces dancing through the possibilities of the everyday.[7]

For almost a decade I drafted notes for my book *Rebel Friendships: 'Outsider' Networks and Social Movements,* exploring the meanings of friendship, groups organized around affinity, rather than the kinds of institution that encircle us in the "iron cage of despair" that Max Weber described. Over time, many of the affinity groups and direct action groups I was a part of came and went, falling prey to familiar organizational tensions and inevitable downturns in the life cycle of community organizations that typically last little longer than two or three years. After that, all that is solid melts away posited my old mentor Stanley Aronowitz, who suggested we build institutions and organizations, not just the incremental activist wins I was stacking up with comrades such as Kauffman and Kelly Moore, my biking, union, and ACT UP buddies. But why did the groups I was working with fall apart? Could we have handled the conflicts we endured in a more productive way?

In community organizing class last fall, I asked students what they wanted to see in their world. One student in a hijab raised her hand.

"Less conflict," she insisted.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Less conflicts between people, between groups, countries. Less conflict."

Another student, also in a hijab, said she did not agree:

"There is no way around conflict. It can't be avoided."

It is these sorts of interactions that create change argued another student. Progress is built through clashes, conflicts, oppressions and antagonisms, destroying and creating. Like waves of water on the beach, forces intersecting and contradicting themselves.

"I may have liked you then but I really like you now," noted Aretha before she died.

Clashes are just part of the life and the process of social change. Mark Anderson, one of the authors of *We Are The Clash: Reagan, Thatcher, and the Last Stand of a Band That Mattered* (cowritten with Ralph Heibutzki), described the dynamic during a talk at the Howard Zinn bookfair in December 2018, referring to one of my favorite bands, The Clash. The group crumbled, "in a paradox of revolutionary conviction, ambition, and drive, crash[ing] headlong into a wall of internal contradictions," explained Anderson. "George Orwell's 1984 loomed. The

world teetered on edge of the nuclear abyss. British miners waged a life-or-death strike, tens of thousands died from US guns in Central America, members of the band were fighting. The band shattered just as its controversial final album, *Cut the Crap*, was emerging," Anderson reminded us. I bought the first single from the record in 1985. And played it over and over again. But something was amiss. The band was over, but the clash remained, its meanings reverberating, as a crash of music, when two guitars clash, between the ideal vs the real, what is and what could be. Paul thought of the name. He saw the word in the news, the riots in Brixton. It's not just music. It's not just a look. It's this big idea: The clash between generations, between the rulers and the ruled, black and white, colonizers and the colonized. It started as a reaction, an antithesis to all that was plastic, rejecting monoculture in favor of world beats. The group's lead musicians were not sure where music was going: toward more guitars or beats? We'd spend the rest of our lives listening, moving backwards and forwards, between the records and CDs, live bands and tracks on Spotify. But few of us could quite make sense of the conflict the band named.

"Another way to think about conflict," argues social movement theorist and activist Kelly Moore, "is that it is indeed the means of creating something else." The passion to destroy is also a passion to create Bakunin famously put it in 1842.

In the years to come, we'd see the clash in T-shirts, music, protests, anarchism, and even in ourselves. I found the process uneasy, especially within the countless schisms within the social movements in which I took part. The clashes were everywhere. Revolted with top down, bureaucratic organizations, I idealized movements based on affinity groups, later watching them dissolve after conflicts. Even a cursory look at the history of social movements suggests this is a common experience. People fight over everything. ACT UP nearly split when treatment activists cut a deal with drug companies in the early 1990s. People fight about ideology and control, process and direction, strategies and tactics. Bayard Rustin was purged from the Civil Rights Movement over homophobia in the 1950s, only to be invited back in in the early 1960s.

Eldridge Cleaver and Huey P. Newton publicly clashed, airing their grievances about the future of the Black Panther Party, trading invective and threats in a COINTELPRO fueled fight over who was included, who was to be excluded from the movement during the early 1970s.[8] The conflict was never resolved.

In *Beautiful Trouble*, veteran troublemakers Andrew Boyd and company succinctly identify a few of the debates among organizers:

> "Everyone is an artist -vs- Auteurs make things rock
> Be the change you want to see -vs- By any means necessary
> Just do it! -vs- More theory needed
> Clicktivism can save the world -vs- The revolution will not be tweeted
> Long march through the institutions -vs- The revolution will not be elected
> The problem is inside ourselves -vs- The problem is in the world around us
> Identity politics -vs- Class politics."[9]

Reflecting on these conflicts, Boyd et al suggest: “In political life, some debates, after much struggle, finally get settled: Is slavery an absolute moral evil? Yes. Should only people with penises get to vote? No. Other debates — for example, ‘Do the ends justify the means?’ or ‘Do you try to change the system from the inside or the outside?’ — remain eternal. These debates are less right vs. wrong than they are a recognition that the truth usually lies somewhere in between, in an artful synthesis that takes into account the specifics of the given context. These debates express two sides of an important, often dialectical question, two poles of a ‘design tension’ that must be constantly considered, navigated, and wrestled with.” At some point or other, every organizer is forced to contend with them. “Is the controversy dysfunctional? Or is it useful for coming to some kind of greater understanding?” wonder Boyd and company.[10]

The Duty to Stand Aside?

Still, we are only as strong as our social ties. Inevitably, movements are forced to contend with dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, friendship and self-interest. Each friendship has a certain dialectical quality, beginning with a formation and growth, followed by inevitable tension and conflict. The question is what happens during that conflict. Do those involved cast aspersions, or do they learn from each other and watch ties extend as result of the catharsis? I’ve experienced the former and the latter. I’m not sure of the best way to handle these moments. So I read the books in this essay, following up with countless interviews with other activists about these dynamics.

“If you are interested in getting involved in community work, you are going to spend time more time on conflicts than creating something. That is that,” lamented a friend, in a wild under estimation.

In her autobiography, Eleanor Roosevelt posits smart people talk about ideas not people.[11] I must admit there are some days I am better at this than others. I love gossip, particularly a good story, and even some schadenfreude. I love our movements and the groups propelling them. I regularly find myself in the middle of online fights. I try to avoid them, with varying degrees of success.

For me, the friends make the process fun and more often than not, perhaps the most concrete outcome of movement involvement. But there is more to it than that. These friendships also become strained in the face of large historic forces, of moral and philosophical conflict when people assume there is a clearly a right and a wrong way. It’s not always easy to keep things light in debates about war and fascism. I experienced this early in the Trump administration. A friend commented on Facebook that he felt like people who do not support militant antifascism are in essence, to borrow Orwell’s parlance, “objectively pro fascist”. His page blew up with comments, many agreeing. Others disagreeing. What about a diversity of tactics? I wondered, referring to the debates about violence after the Battle of Seattle, supporting multiple points of engagement, from lobbying to direct action, occasional property destruction and non-violent civil disobedience. My friend’s dismissal of less militant tactics struck me as a betrayal of this

principle. We need more approaches to engagement, not less. This was certainly the spirit after Seattle in 1999 when a conversation about civil disobedience expanded into this debate about diversity of tactics, anarchism, situationism, anti-capitalism, reform vs revolution, historical materialism, and so on as a new generation engaged in a theory and practice of activism dovetailing between decades of movements. Yet, like so many things with this movement, they become cloudy as history intervened.

"[N]ew forms of civil resistance embody a critique of prevailing forms of organization, participation, representation, and action in Canadian social movements," writes Janet Conway.[12] "Respect for diversity of tactics emerged as a non-negotiable basis of unity in this context." Yet, "by June 2002, this stance had hardened into an ideology that functioned to restrict genuine diversity and threatened democracy and pluralism in the movement." This rigidity was part of what I was feeling about this notion that we were either militants or "objectively pro fascist."

Kelly Moore suggests we do everything we can to support movement cultures which include multiple tactics, considered with open-mindedness and flexibility. "For this simple reason: depending on constitutionalism to save us (i.e., law) is what is most at threat at this point, and we need all hands on (the not-slave ship) on deck. Example: it is absolutely critical for people to be in the streets, even if they don't vote or do anything else. We NEED To know that others think like us. And it is critical that we vote and call and all that, as a means of harm reduction. And create poetry and dance (they come for the artists first—remember the frenetic and sick cop destruction of puppets in Philly at the 2000 Republican National Convention) and make love and ride bikes and file lawsuits. We are in deep right now, and we need to keep pushing on many fronts, if not with love for other people, at least with the continual reminder that we are fragile, imperfect and joyful beings."
"More than ever, the movement and the world needs the creativity and courage of this new generation of activists in advancing non-violent strategies for social transformation," writes Janet Conway. "But in the face of unprecedented forces of power and domination, we also need to nurture the movement as a space of freedom and democracy, genuine diversity and pluralism, respect for life, and a love of peace in prefiguring the world we want."[13]

While anarchists have long resisted forms of "oppressive or destructive authority" even among revolutionaries, there are those who suggest pacifism is not enough, especially in the face of particularly violent opposition.[14] Militant condemnation of pacifism has long roots. We saw it in the late 1960s when the SDS splintered and the Weather Underground contemplated deploying more controversial tactics, including sacrificing some of their principles of nonviolence. Bill Ayers' memoir *Fugitive Days* offers a detailed account of the difficult turn away from Ghandian principles. The shift began with a number of quiet conversations. Why don't we really bring the war home? Because if you use violence you became what you are fighting, the oppressed become the oppressors. "You know you can catch the very disease you are fighting…you want to stop the war, you become warlike. You want to fight inhumanity, and you become inhumane. It's a contagion through combat," Diana Oughton, Ayers longtime lover, advised, ever the voice of reason. But in the face of the political assassination of Martin Luther

King, Jr. and a still escalating war abroad, the idea of bringing the war home never lost steam. Tom Hayden and the better part of the old SDS leadership called for activists to expose the violence of American democracy at the Chicago Democratic Convention in 1968, and the results were spectacular. The whole world watched. Nixon was elected, the Vietnam war continued, and the secret domestic war (COINTELPRO) by the U.S. secret police forces, both FBI and CIA, moved into high gear. The tension mounted everywhere, and most of all within that faction of SDS now committed to the project of "bringing the war home." A year later, Ayers led a rampage through the streets of Chicago during the "Days of Rage," smashing police cars and being beaten by the police. Ayers paints a picture of losing himself as an adrenaline junky, "I was on a freedom high, and all I needed to feed my habit was one more bit of action." Yet, by the time he started losing friends to this pursuit, the jittery buzz became a "high octane combination of panic and pain."[15] Along the way, his role in the movement shifts from struggling for America's hearts and minds to being part of a guerrilla war. Friends were incarcerated and people died. Oughton, whom Ayers had known since his days at the Children's Community, was blown up in the February 1970 townhouse explosion on Greenwich Village's West 11th Street, along with Weathermen Terry Robbins and David Gold. And no one really knows what happened. Bombs were being made, and it seems clear that the intended victims were not war criminals but anonymous citizens. Before this crime could be committed, the bombs went off. Did Oughton ignite them early to avert looming disaster? In the years to come, those who eschewed principles of non-violence would spend more and more time in jail.[16] I'd see it here in New York.

Debates about the merits of pacifism have deep roots. Sometimes the conflicts can be very personal. In *The Duty to Stand Aside*, Eric Laursen traces one such clash, the conflict between libertarian socialist George Orwell and anarchist pacifist Alex Comfort, over the appropriate response to the war with Nazi Germany. "[T]he heart of this story is the relationship between two passionately committed defenders of freedom, the unexpected twists and turns it took in the years after the war, and its strange and long hidden end in the years after the war," writes Laursen.[17] *A story about friendship, Laursen's book* traces the story of a little-known but fascinating literary-political feud: the arguments that divided Orwell, future author of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Comfort, poet, biologist, anarchist-pacifist, and future author of the international bestseller *The Joy of Sex*. "[B]oth… grasped the larger implications of their government's actions in World War II but took opposite sides in the debate over how critics should respond," writes Laursen,[18] an anarchist who I met as the world was taking sides over how to respond to claims that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction." We agreed to disagree about tactics, especially when a group of us, including one of the writers considered here, charged certain sects who uncritically supported all those opposed to the US, no matter how extreme, forming a group tongue and cheekily dubbing itself, "International Authoritarians Who Cozy Up to Genocidal Dictators for Peace.com." We tried to find some humor in the clash.[19] The same could not be said of Orwell and his debate with Comfort.

"[T]he two men attacked each repeatedly in print," writes Laursen. Comfort, who opposed militarism, "distrusted his government's intentions," finding himself one of the enemies Orwell labelled "objectively pro fascist." For Orwell, standing aside, opposing the war against fascism,

was essentially an endorsement of fascism. On the other hand, Comfort suggested those who failed to denounce their own government's atrocities—in Britain's case, saturation bombing of civilian population centers—had "sacrificed their responsible attitude to humanity". Heavy charges for a political debate, but the kind one hears leveled in anti-authoritarian organizing circles today, especially if one disagrees with certain anti-authoritarian tactics. Examining their debate, Laursen offers us a meditation on conflict that transcends time. About WWII, it could be a story about today or tomorrow. Even as they attacked each other, their underlying political concerns were coming into synch: especially over the meaning of the increasing power the State, as Stalinism gained influence and the Cold War raged. Orwell got things started with a review of Comfort's first novel. The dialogue continued in *Partisan Review, Tribune*, and later in the form of verse in 1943, "that became a minor classic in English polemic poetry". All the while the two corresponded. Gradually, "they developed a cautious friendship based on Orwell's admiration for Comfort's poetry… and Comfort's respect for Orwell's incisive political commentary as well as his conduct as a Loyalist volunteer in the Spanish Civil War". And, "[t]heir friendship grew into an active collaboration when the government began persecuting anarchists and anti-militarists toward the end of the war. It cooled when the Cold War again highlighted their ideological differences. Still, it endured, at least so far as Comfort knew, until just before Orwell's death in 1950".[20] Comfort lived another half century, deeply admiring Orwell, "as a friend."

Over time, Comfort confessed he regretted the tone of their long-term quarrel, coming to see the two as fellow travelers. "But in the 1990s, it became known that … Orwell drew up a list of notable individuals he believed had pro-Soviet or insufficiently anti-Soviet tendencies. He entrusted the list to an employee in the propaganda branch of the Foreign Office. Included were writers and economists, political activists and broadcasters, and celebrities such as Charlie Chaplin and Michel Redgrave." Sadly, Laursen writes: "One of the names was that of Alex Comfort," who Orwell described as "pacifist-anarchist… Main emphasis anti-British. Subjectively pro-German during war, appears temperamentally pro-totalitarian. Not morally courageous. Has a crippled hand. Very talented."[21] Laursen's book says as much about our era – as war is replaced by undeclared "conflicts," civilian bombing is even more enthusiastically practiced, and moral choices between two sides are rarely straightforward – as it does the 1940s. In the final years of his life, Orwell would come closer and closer to Comfort's anarchist-pacifist position. "Orwell and Comfort both, for similar reasons, dreaded the world that would follow the war almost as much as the war itself. They were right," concludes Laursen.[22] Like Benjamin and Adorno, Comfort and Orwell grappled with the moral and philosophical questions about – war and peace, pacifism and anarchism, aesthetics and social change and a debate about very nature of conflict, their dialogue exposing the best and worst of what friendships could become.

"more speech, not less"

Reading about Orwell and Comfort's fight, it's hard not to think of our current moment. A few weeks into the Trump Administration, the same friend who was quoting Orwell earlier in the year, noted that he was tired of hearing that ACT UP style organizing was going to lead the

resistance. I had just gotten back from DC, taking parts in the direct action to disrupt the inauguration with my comrades from Rise and Resist, with many veterans of ACT UP and the Yes Men. My friend felt a more explicit, militant style anti-fascist form of engagement, including deplatforming and research on speakers, was needed. If the state was not going to stop neo-Nazi's, activists would respond with force. My friend recoiled at the idea that ACT UP and its offspring Rise and Resist would birth a new kind of movement up for the task. Or maybe he just didn't want to be told. Unlike past quibbles – we'd had many that were usually resolved over honest conversation and a few beers over the previous decade – solutions and compromises were not forthcoming, not this time. We talked past each other. Over the next few months, I congratulated him when he went to Charlotsville to face down the Nazis. But I wanted to learn more about the issue and talk it through. I was of two minds about deplatforming. On the one hand, I was around when Robert Mappelthorpe and David Wojnarowicz saw their work censored. And I didn't want to see justifications for restrictions on speech, even by the left. Just as I protested the Smithsonian keeping David Wojnarowicz out of its portrait show a few years prior, I didn't feel comfortable with activists deciding what kinds of speech were appropriate or justifying restrictions on speech. That can cut both ways, often leading to less speech, not more. It can also backfire adding unwanted publicity. The alt-right had a right to speak and we had a right to throw tomatoes and ridicule or ignore. But what do you do when a president openly spews venom, inciting racist, nativist rhetoric, seemingly condoning violence, undermining protections for speech, and attacks on your friends? Many people I greatly respected support more militant approaches, including deplatforming, to take on the rise of what looked like fascism. But the process could be messy.

Mayday of 2017, I rode my bike to Union Square where conflicting forces were bubbling, immigrants and the Black Bloc. The police were out blaring their sound system warning people not to step into the street or they'd face arrest, policing the space, watching the walk signs and crosswalks like their lives depended upon it. A group in black masks started jeering at a blond journalist. "She's a fascist. Get out of here!!!" they screamed, policing the space like anything but forces of liberation. It looked like a group of dudes screaming at a woman. A healthy society tolerates wide ranges of opinions. Donald Trump has called for restrictions on the First Amendment. Arguments that certain people should not have platforms to speak, seem to echo the administration's calls for restrictions on speech. The answer to offensive speech is more speech, not less, more debate, not less. As Sarah Schulman put it on her list of things she hopes will happen in the Trump age: "Confused American leftists realize that stopping people from talking is not as effective a tactic as saying what kind of world we DO want to live in."

"[M]y take on all efforts at destroying the humanness of anyone we disagree with: a Trumpian, neoliberal, masculinist form that emerged from (fill in all efforts at violent othering)," argues Kelly Moore. "A winner-take-all vision of society, one in which 'even' on the left (which, after all, has PLENTY of experience with using the dehumanization and humiliation of others as a method) enables and expresses the disgusting hope and dream that somehow, by "Calling out" and "making others accountable" and resorting to carceral feminisms (#metoo folks, I mean you), we might be noticed for our own suffering and hopes and dreams for the future. NO."[23]

Rather than dehumanize opponents, or take hard and fast ideological sides, I hope we can embrace a flexible, less ideological position open to multiple forms of engagement. We need everyone out there doing all sorts of organizing, respecting the different ways people contribute. Some people make calls and others put their bodies on the lines. Some resist with direct action. Others take part in permitted actions.

In July 2017, activists around the country, including Housing Works, ACT UP, National ADAPT, Rise and Resist, disability activists, and liberals put all their skills together to stop the bills to kill the Affordable Care Act.

L.A. Kauffman posted a note congratulating them: "Wow, let's hear it for the heroes who won this health-care fight and showed not only that resistance works, but HOW it works. I'm thinking of the disabled people from National ADAPT who were the first to put their bodies on the line to block these hateful bills, and who took bold action time and time again. I'm thinking of the people with HIV and the people who rely on Medicaid, organized through CPD Action, Housing Works Inc., Rise and Resist, and other groups, who lobbied and sat in over and over again to fight for all of us. This was a battle led and won by the most vulnerable among us: disabled people, queer folks, HIV+ folks. One key organizer told me she estimates that women made up 70% of those on the frontlines — and a great many of the men who joined them were either gay or HIV+ or disabled or all of the above. They got on buses in the middle of the night, put their bodies directly right in the way of a government hellbent on depriving us of basic care, endured miserable hours in police custody, and then returned to do it all again. All the phone calls and all the local protests around the country played a big and crucial part, too, but direct action set the tone and led the way. I am in awe of all who fought so hard, and so grateful."

The organizing served as a useful testament to the utility of open, engaged direct action. There is no one right way to respond to the crazy position we find ourselves in. But with a democracy deficit, a little more democratic engagement does not hurt. There are multiple ways to engage and support each other. We need people putting their bodies on the line, picketing, making phone calls, keeping their sense of humor and pranking. We need ACT UP zapping and antifa taking on the fascists when they meet in public. We need masses of bodies resisting. Activism is situational. The Seattle WTO meetings two decades ago – in which activists in black masks broke windows of corporate targets, in coalition with environmentalists and trade union activists – opened a space. But quite often such actions close space. The White Night Riots of four decades prior – in which activists burnt police cars signaling a willingness to fight back – opened space. Afterall, my friend Rachel wrote, 'there is a place for rage.' But there are limits. Still we show up. The activists who showed up Charlottesville in August of 2017 to face down the Unite the Right rally were courageous and heroic, literally putting their bodies and lives on the line. We can all take countless approaches, thanking militants, appreciating varied approaches, and engaging in multiple positions, recognizing that violence and peacefulness are never singular answers.

Over the next year, the actions continued, trip after trip to DC, around New York.

Sometimes all it took was a phone call or a personal email to get someone to come to a rally.

Checking my email an hour after getting off the plane from London in August of 2018, I saw a message from my buddy Monica inviting me to join a creative bloc in DC to counter-protest the alt-right rally scheduled for Sunday. On August 10th, 2018 she wrote:

"I would not exist today if my Polish grandfather hadn't escaped from a concentration camp and hid on a ship headed to New York City. Nazis are still around- different name, same ugly thing. They are having a rally in Charlottesville and DC this weekend, on the anniversary of Heather Heyer's death, the young activist who was run over at the last big white supremacist rally. In 2017 several US states tried to pass bills which would protect drivers who kill protestors. Thankfully all those bills died on the floor but some frightening anti-protest laws did pass. If you don't use your rights, you lose them. #KnowYourRights I won't strongly encourage you to join the protest because it could be dangerous. But if you are willing and able, if, like me, you can use your white privilege to stand up against hate, fear and ignorance, there are ways to get involved this weekend. Stay safe, friends. in solidarity and love."

I'd spend the next two days mulling over going. Sure, the rally could and would be fine without me and I was tired from travelling. But this is my country too. And I happen to love this place that calls the Statue of Liberty home, the one that supports freedom of assembly, diversity, and democracy, not the country that says not today, get in the back of the bus, immigrants not welcome, forget about slavery. Still an amnesia grasps it. We forget about the historic fights against fascism that our grandparents fought, or the civil war our great great grandparents fought, whose lessons seem to elude us. Generation after generation, wars get fought, kids starve, and the collateral damage gets forgotten.

On August 11th – 12th, 2018 a group of racist alt-right, white nationalists would be holding a march and a rally in Washington DC. And activists vowed to stop them. I drove up from NYC that morning, parking at Union Station. The taxi driver who brought me from Union Station to the rally cheered me on: "Go remind them this is wrong. When I first came to the US it was paradise. Everyone was welcome. Now, I don't know what has happened."

I arrived as the march was just getting started, strolling about greeting friends. A man was carrying a sign declaring: "Make America Kind Again." Another sign quoted from Martin Luther King's Nobel Prize Acceptance speech: "I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality…"

Marching to Lafayette Park, cohorts of socialists and Black Lives Matter activists, Quakers, young queers, and countless others joined.

> "Stop Pretending Your Racisim is Patriotism!!! #OneLove!"
>
> "Love, not hate, that makes America great" chanted the crowd.

> “Hate has no home here, Black Lives Matter!”
>
> “Get up, get down, take the Nazis out of town!”
>
> “No borders, no nations, stop the deportations!”

One man was carrying a sign referring to the old Dead Kennedys song: “Nazi Punks Fuck Off,” declaring: “Nazi Trumps Fuck Off!” In the middle of it all, the crowd started singing “Stand By Me” as a homage to solidarity, something we need deeply. “We are not afraid,” declared two black men walking arm and arm. “We are not afraid.” While most of the crowd appeared ready to maintain commitments to non-violence, many were also ready to pop a few Nazis if they had a chance.

> “We are many, they are few. It starts right now. It’s up to you!” chanted the socialists.
>
> “Black Lives They Matter!” screamed everyone. “I love being black. Whose lives matter? Black Lives Matter!”
>
> “No Nazis No KKK, No Fascist USA!”

By the time we got to Lafayette Park, we were completely separated from the alt-right rally.

Monica and Jessica suggested there was about a one to 500 ratio of alt righters to counter protesters.

“There they are!” laughed one woman, pointing to a dozen or so other white people across the park, who the police had escorted by way of the subway, I wondered why the alt-right were getting a police escort. Certainly, everyone has a right to speak out. But if your views are so extreme – hostile to communities of immigrants, queers, people of color – that you put your life on the line for saying them, it might be time to rethink things or at least to face the communities you are threatening. And you certainly need to face them. But none of that was happening. The DC cops were separating the groups with a fence.

Walking out of the park, a couple of young activists offered free cold water.

“Free snacks for solidarity,” said their sign. “Thanks so much,” I said to them. “I really appreciate it.” And kept on walking over to Pennsylvania Ave and 17th, where the antifa were lined up, dressed in black, with gas masks. Singing, “Solidarity Forever” they waited on the corner in front of a sign declaring, “It Takes a Bullet to Bash Fash!” “Anti-fascists in the rain,” they chanted, looking like they are getting amped up for a football game, ready for a fight. Everyone was milling about waiting for the alt-right rally to exit.

“Those statues are the reason we are in this shit today,” noted one man, referring to the Confederate statues still up around the US. In Germany it’s illegal to put up Nazi swag. In the US, we accept statues of those who support slavery who lost our greatest war. “We were too

soft on the South after the Civil War, just getting back to business. And now we're in this boat."

A commotion ensued with everyone rushing up to the black bloc in the middle of the square.

"Any time, any place, punch a Nazi in the face," chanting the activists starting to burn a confederate flag.

"Spread the love," noted a couple of black activists. "Spread the love everyone. If you use violence you are just as bad as them."

"We kindov missed an opportunity here," lamented Lisa Fithian, the veteran direct-action trainer. "We could have stopped them even getting to the park." We talked about why they would never depart from this exit, in a direct confrontation. Police sirens start blaring. The antifa crowd start to light flares shooting them in the air, with lots of smoke and cracks, creating a spectacle.

"You are protesting the wrong people," noted one black activist. "The police are staying calm for now."

"They are getting an escort," a couple of activists screamed at the cops. Gradually we find out the activists have left via subway, escorted to and from the action. For a day, it looks like the alt-right were not united or able to mobilize. Tyrants thrive on secrecy. Without it, they were not willing to show up, apparently too ashamed to show their faces. And we're all still out in the street, riding the ebb and tide of history.

Later that night, Lisa Fithian reflected. "Today about 10,000 people turned out in Washington DC to say no to Nazi's. Only about two dozen Nazi's showed up and needed an escort by DC police to get anywhere. Why are the police escorting Nazi's? The people were clear… "You are not welcome here." It was a good day – no one hurt, no one arrested. We completely overwhelmed them. It felt great to be out in the streets with so many people from all walks of life standing so strong. So glad I was here! Another world is possible and we are making it every day!"

It's very difficult to argue that militant anti-fascism isn't the reason the far right has largely lost much of its street-level army and organizing presence. Make racists scared again, many declared that day. Germany outlawed Nazi images after WWII. Yet, the US condones our US swastika, the Confederate flag, symbolizing sympathy for lynching, that people put their lives on the line to stop. And people continued to do so.

Scott Crow, the author of *Black Flags and Windmills*, puts it: "The idea in Antifa is that we go where they (right-wingers) go." Crow specifically addressed the issue of prefiguration, the active process of creating a world of the new within the shell of the old. "There is a place for violence. Is that the world that we want to live in? No. Is it the world we want to inhabit? No. Is it the world we want to create? No. But will we push back? Yes," argues Crow.[24] And certainly the pushback is valuable.

“[F]olks don’t always want to play nice with others they suspect,” notes Kelly Moore. “I feel the same way, at times, about some men.”

The coalition of anarchists and sanctuary activists that beat back the alt-right that afternoon in DC serve as a testament to the things activist coalitions can achieve together. Still, the conversation about tactics and unintended consequences that I wanted to have did not happen. I invited my friend out for drinks to talk. He ignored my requests and unfriended me on Facebook. Friends from high school football stopped corresponding over my opposition to the Trump-Pence regime. And these conflicts are certainly not new or unique. Yet, the dynamic suggests there is something about power and differences of opinion that bears reflection.

“Not Sufficiently Dialectical?”

Such debates date back decades even centuries. Karl Marx learned about politics, as Hegelians clashed with Hegelians – right, center and left – critiques flying, with former comrades accusing each other of this or that philosophical failure, orthodox Marxists clashing with Marxist humanists, liberal reformers squabbling with anarchists, who have their own histories of replicating larger social dynamics.[25] The conversation would continue over the years, the clashes becoming central to debates among Critical Theorists,[26] with discussions and papers about whose interpretation was too rigid or doctrinaire, economically determined, too orthodox or not orthodox enough still being written.[27] Alex Ross (2014) suggests: “The worst that one Frankfurt School theorist could say of another was that his work was insufficiently dialectical. In 1938, Adorno said it of Benjamin, who fell into a months-long depression.” Ross notes the word “causes endless problems for people who are not German, and even for some who are. In a way, it is both a philosophical concept and a literary style. Derived from the ancient Greek term for the art of debate, it indicates an argument that maneuvers between contradictory points. It “mediates,” to use a favorite Frankfurt School word. And it gravitates toward doubt, demonstrating the “power of negative thinking,” as Herbert Marcuse once put it. Part of the appeal of the term is that it informs our understanding that history is not static. All good has a grain of bad; no one of us are ideologically pure. Without certainty, we grapple for meaning however we can find it. And not everyone is magnanimous about these contests over meaning.

“Texans like a degree of certainty,” posits philosopher Fred Sontag, reflecting on the political dynamic in the US. “They think they have it, and they want to stand for it. That’s a very nice thing, but if it gets you so you can’t be co-operative, you can’t stand to compromise with ideas that are different from yours, then you’ve got a problem. It’s always been a problem in the U.S., but we have managed pretty well. We have tolerated a lot. Seems to me we need to get back more to that.”[28]

“There is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as ‘moral indignation,’ which permits envy or hate to be acted out under the guise of virtue,” writes Eric Fromm.[29] We find it everywhere today. Life is full of contradictions; humans are both a part of and separate from nature, and by extension, each other. Out of these interconnections and multitudes, contradictions and connections, debates take shape, some of which are productive,

many are not. Fromm was a part of the Frankfurt School of Social Research, which included members such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin.[30] In their own ways, each of these writers sought to make sense of the contradictions of their time. They aspired to socialism and found themselves coping with National Socialism. They looked to Hegelian philosophy to help make meaning of these contradictions, tracing a history of ideas through debates about the nature of living, theology, philosophy and faith. Dialectical thinking helped them come to grips with the history of thinking. Progress is an unfinished project, noted Adorno in *Critical Models*. It signals humanity has arrived, ever dueling between notions of reconciliation, redemption, and cancer-like regression. The split is everywhere, the clash between what is and what could be becoming increasingly vexing. Countless movements and ideas would grow out of this tension.

The experience of the Frankfurt School theorists, who conceptualized and wrote under the extreme pressures of developing world fascism, has important lessons to teach us. Humanity is a work in progress, notes Adorno. To get there is going to be messy. Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse all imbibed the lesson of the Nazis, noted Stanley Aronowitz in a reading group in the fall of 2018. If you can have Beethoven and Hitler from the same country, then you have a problem. Set to Schiller's poem 'Ode to Joy', the 9th Symphony brought choral and vocal soloists, a first for the genre, suggesting a notion of progress, a "universal brotherhood," that humanity had moved forward; "kiss to the entire world" – welcome everyone.[31] The composer was unable to hear the roars of applause for his startling work. Yet, a hundred years after its first performance on the 7th of May, 1824, the National Socialist German Workers' Party, generally referred to as the Nazi Party, was making legislative strides, elected into power by 1933, pointing to a world that condemned outsiders, pointing to how far we had come. After the war, many wondered if we'd stepped forward. For Adorno, progress was a process. "Progress means: to step out of the magic shell, even out of the spell of progress that is itself nature," he posits, seeming to offer a warning about the ecological impact of humans on our natural habitat; "humanity becomes aware of its own inbred nature and brings to a halt the domination it extracts upon nature and through which domination by nature continues. In this way it could be said that progress begins where it ends."[32] Even in 1963, Adorno was aware that the domination of nature, the depletion of natural resources, especially in the Western capitalist world did not offer a sustainable future. Alex Ross suggests that for Frankfurt theorists, "the genocidal state was not merely a German problem, something that resulted from listening to too much Wagner; it was a Western problem, rooted in the Enlightenment urge to dominate nature." It was an idea rooted in culture. "Anti-Semitism was, from this perspective, not merely a manifestation of hatred but a means to an end—a 'spearhead' of societal control," posits Ross. "Therefore, the defeat of Mussolini and Hitler, in 1945, fell short of a final defeat of Fascism: the totalitarian mind lurked everywhere, and America was hardly free of its influence."[33] One could see it in our cultural institutions, the perpetual war machine, the influence of corporations on democracy. Adorno could see it in the idea of progress in our social and cultural lives: "In this experience of terror, the terror of the system forcibly coalesces into appearance; the more the system expands, the more it hardens into what it has always been," writes Adorno. "What Benjamin called "dialectics at a standstill" is surely less a Platonizing residue than the attempt to raise such paradoxes to philosophical

consciousness. Dialectical images: these are the historically-objective archetypes of that antagonistic unity of standstill and movement that defines the most universal bourgeois concept of progress."[34]

It is hard to read Adorno refer to Benjamin, who perished on his way to the Pyrenees as the Nazis moved through France. When the border with Spain closed, Benjamin took his own life in 1940. The next day the border opened. There are some who suggest Adorno could have done more to get Benjamin out of trouble and into a secure full time position in academe, perhaps at Institute for Social Research, itself. (At the time of his death, he had a US entry visa, that the Institute had procured for his passage). There are no simple explanations for suicide.

In the years before, the two maintained a dynamic correspondence, which served a centerpiece of the debates within German Marxism in the years before Benjamin's death. "Your dialectic is lacking one thing: mediation. You show a prevailing tendency to relate the pragmatic contents of Baudelaire's work directly and immediately to adjacent features in the social history, and, whenever possible, the economic features, of the time," Adorno wrote Benjamin on the 10th of November, 1938, in a severe, cutting letter.[35] The two met in grade school. At first, Adorno admired Benjamin, who looked for praise from Adorno; gradually they became friends who fought.[36] Benjamin and Adorno grew together through their mutual dialogue. "Adorno acted like a Benjamin disciple, virtuosically interrogating culture high and low," notes Ross. "Later, he behaved more as master than as follower." Adorno came to the United States in 1945 with Horkheimer. For Adorno, the dialectic assumes conflict, oppression and antagonism, destroy and create, moving toward praxis. For Benjamin, the impact of dehumanization, of people dominated by machines, dialectics stand still with progress, with reforms that make life tolerable in capitalism. Aronowitz points out that from 1945-1973, the US enjoyed a business labor accord which produced increasing wages, reductions in poverty, and improvements in public health[37] (although many of the most vibrant and important movements erupted in the 1960s in the 1970s were composed of individuals largely left out of that accord, particularly women and folks of color). Yet for the last 46 years these advances have been deteriorating, with wages remaining stagnant, as poverty rates increase, and ice caps melt, as conflict ebbs and flows. Can we find a way out?

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. And quite often, it is resolved with more not less of it, sometimes spilling into physical violence. Yet, why? Why not a chess game? Why this reflection of anger? Watching the violence inflicted on black people, Michael Brown and Eric Garner's murders at the hands of the police, Ray Rice's brutal assault on his wife, the mass murder of 2000 civilians in Gaza, Sarah Schulman argues: "The methods we have developed collectively, to date, to understand these kinds of actions in order to avoid them, are not adequate."[38]

All the while, the US teeters on the verge of fascism, locking up children, panicking about the other, embracing cruelty as official policy. One step up, two steps back, the "cultural evolution of late capitalism" is best seen "dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together" posits Fredric Jameson. [39]

Still we linger, contending with questions about the how we got here and what we are to become. What will democracy become? We are more interconnected than ever. Yet, can we learn to see what is unique in the stranger or the friend? I and thou, can we see the interconnection between ourselves and others? “No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation,” writes Martin Buber in *I and Thou*. “Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur… Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity.”[40] Can we learn from the conflict, seeing the part of ourselves moved by the other in the fight? The subject needs the object, just as the city needs the outsider. The subject produces the object, posits Adorno. Yin and yang, you cannot know the object until we have made it, until we have created the other.

“You will do foolish things,” Collette gushed, “… do them with enthusiasm.”

It’s never easy becoming an active subject in history. That was Stanley’s point, leading us through a reading of Adorno’s essay “On Subject and Object” in *Critical Models.* What’s the point of the essay? Mediating between subject and object, me and you, us and something out there – you and me, subject object. With history and material conditions mediating what goes on between us. Our world is shaped in our ever becoming, our observing. Between the yin of you and yang of me, ever reversing. Pregnant with their opposites, shadow play between puppets and reflections. What is real, never quite revealing itself, ever differentiating. “The distinction between subject and object is both real and illusory” writes Adorno.[41] It’s his great defense of historical materialism, notes Stanley, connecting generations of Critical Theory.

“The act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object” argues Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness.****[42]*** For Lukács, regular people only find a route beyond reification through struggle with a means of production, a cultural system, creating art, writing novels, performing, telling stories. Instead of merely seeing ourselves as individuals, separate from the totality of our world, alienated from our means of production, we engage a totality of concrete history, finding ourselves as active subjects, mediating differentiation without domination. Doing so, we become a part of the object, seeing the subject in the object, getting to the totality. Easier said than done. The challenge is to “be objective toward oneself and subjective toward all others,” counsels Søren Kierkegaard. Instead of lapsing into reification, can we see the other and learn from their subjectivity? Can we learn from the stranger or the person with whom we are fighting? Can we have democracy under capitalism? The primacy of the object doesn’t exist. We are both object and subject, like the shadow play, with its illusions, blurring lines between subjects and objects, ever the subjects of history.

In *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Shaping Worlds,* Adrienne Marie Brown reminds us that we emerge through an ongoing engagement between what we hope to be and what we are. Hopefully there is a love in this emerging strategy, a little flavor, some color, some spice. How do we listen to others as if they were our teachers, she asks. How do we practice new futures together? Brown’s parents showed her: “And it was quick – a noticing each other, a flirting without words, talking, laughing, and, four months later, eloping. I showed up a year

and half later. Love overcame racist socialization, creating more possibilities between two people who had been taught the other was dangerous.…"[43] Reading the book with my reading group, none of us were really sure what this emergent strategy was, but we all felt inspired. I have danced with most of my friends, most of my tribe at one point or another. When we dance together, we become subjects, even as the city tries to turn us into objects, even as it commodifies our dissent. Reification is everywhere. But the brass bands we shake to convey the negative. They remind us, bouncing up and down into the air, we are more powerful and purposeful. Our ridiculousness is our weapon, especially as our world retreats from the business labor accord through an ever-eroding shift from a welfare to a warfare state, to borrow Marcuse's 1964 argument in *One Dimensional Man*.[44] The end of history is either crisis or the achievement of living democracy in capitalism. Yet, can we have friendships here? As the economy shifts, our lives become more routinized and our interactions with computers increase. No one interacts with a machine without being changed. Alienation increases. People bowl alone. Yet, no one is an island; we all grapple to comprehend a totality of social relations. The struggle for unity and survival seem to depend on each other. We need the protection for our own survival. Victor Frankly reminds, we need each other to survive. Yet, we do not always treat each other well, especially in this period of high capitalism when people look at each other in transactional ways, as commodities, wondering who can help who benefit, rejecting the other, the stranger.[45]

Benjamin died before his debates with Adorno could be sufficiently resolved. "Perhaps, on a peaceful day, they would have accepted the compromise devised by Fredric Jameson," wonders Alex Ross, wondering if state regulated capital and social democracy could coexist. Still, progress feels elusive.[46]

We need mutual aid more than ever, even if the practice feels elusive. Mutual aid, that concept so deeply developed and explored by the anarchist prince, Kropotkin (1987 [1902]): "[T]here is in Nature *the law of Mutual Aid,* which, for the success of the struggle for life, and especially for the progressive evolution of the species, is far more important than the law of mutual contest."[47] It is one of the great ideas of the anti-authoritarian social movements. And yet it is not only elusive, but often tossed away and lost.

Anarchy is for lovers…

Walking down the street the other day, I saw a piece of graffiti declaring, "Anarchy is for Lovers!!!!" Is it, I thought, reflecting on the violence, assassinations, and abundance of this anti-authoritarian movement. It has not felt like that lately. I love the history of the movement and its moments of wanderlust and irreverence, the beautiful non-violent anarchist revolution of the Living Theater, the Sex – Pols, the mujeres libres of the Spain, free lovers, and countless other manifestations of anarchism I've seen in New York City (Goyens, 2017). I recalled laughing singing "We all live in a Military State, a Military State, a Military State," to the tune of the Beatles anthem "Yellow Submarine," when we were surrounded by police during the World Economic Forum protests in 2002. While the people called for increased expression, the police called for repression. Faced with a police force that had betrayed every guarantee it had

made in negotiations prior to the action, the crowd of anarchists lead the crowd in a collective, playful jeer. We all felt alive. I loved its image of a more abundant alternative, instead of shrill opposition.

During the Clinton years, I railed against the right wing, and the global justice movement helped us reimagine what social relations could be – all power to the imagination. During the Bush II years, I railed against the liberals who cozied up to the president, passing the Patriot Act and authorizing war. During Obama, we cycled, imagined sustainable urbanism, shared mutual aid in Zuccotti park, occupied and fought each other. Under Trump, I've seen the models of mutual aid we'd sustained come crumbling apart as we battle each other. Solidarity is our solution when we find it. But it can be elusive. Some chose to Rise and Resist; others tried to shut things down, condemning and rejecting long established tenets, such as respect for diversity of tactics. Instead of creating a world we wanted, one community garden and squat at a time, we shut things down. Friendships frayed.

"I do not know if the liberation of humanity depends on the success of the anarchist movement," Kristian Williams writes in his timely tome *Whither Anarchism*.[48] "On the whole, I hope that it does not. For that movement at present does not serve its cause well. It is insular, directionless, and often delusional, characterized internally by purity tests and fractional fights, externally by ineffectual militancy and moral outrage." He wonders: "How do we prevent new tyrannies from arising, especially tyrannies established in the name of liberté, *égalité*, *fraternité*?"[49] Anti-authoritarian movements find themselves dominated by authoritarian tendencies "[T]he society that our present 'anarchist communities' would seem to prefigure is not on the whole a place where sensitive people would want to live. Such scenes are as status-obsessed, gossip-ridden, and cliquish as any private school, as prying and sanctimonious as any country church, as prone to splits and purges as the most rigid Leninist sect. Their chief virtues are that they are too small and disorganized to actually succeed in being particularly oppressive. … Trying to simply will the new society into being by means of personal virtue and exemplary group process, we become harsh with each other for the smallest missteps. Each moment, every action, every word, every thought takes on an outsized importance, and a philosophy of total liberation produces instead a kind of totalitarianism writ small."[50]

"Certainly, a lot of this same critique could be made about every white-dominated protest-politics movement of the past 50-plus years, from sectarian Marxists to the SDS to segments of the environmental movement to post-Seattle activists, whether they identified as anarchists or not," notes Eric Laursen. "As activists we struggle in a state-capitalist system that pressures us in countless, often very subtle ways. Additionally, in many circles, anarchism itself has changed and, anarchism is far more open to people of color. We wouldn't be discussing anarchism at all if anarchist thinking, forms of organizing, etc, hadn't affected (in many positive ways) the organizing that a wide range of activists do today." Still the purity tests and blind spots remain. "You can blame structurelessness," concludes Laursen. "But only so much?"

From time to time, all groups are subject to the tyranny of structureless that Jo Freeman once

worried concealed power dynamics. “A ‘laissez-faire’ group is about as realistic as a ‘laissez faire’ society,” writes Freeman. “… the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others… Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power.”[51] And systems close. Dialogue ends. For Freeman, informal structures are the problem: “As long as friendship groups are the main means of organizational activity, elitism becomes institutionalized.”[52] Friendship obviously has its limitations as an organizational model. To some degree, most movements oscillate between formal and informal structures, some more open than others to dialogue. On the one hand, many, including myself, mostly organize through networks based on affinity, seeing the vitality of friendships as mechanisms for social change; on the other hand, I see that the process leads to informal leadership networks which can preclude others, excluding those outside these networks. Affinity groups remain a vital part of organizing, especially as spaces to where people with differing points of view remain committed to communicating through problems and differences of view. Ideally healthy movements support such engagement.

“Healthy movements nurture intellectual growth,” Williams concludes. “They also need it. If anarchism is to thrive, either as a political force or as a body of thought, we will first need to take on the arduous task of creating circumstances under which honesty is possible, and decency is expected, and critical thinking part of the common work of the movement.”[53]

“Reading Kristian Williams’ *Whither Anarchism?* has inspired a great deal of reflection and soul-searching on my part,” wrote Nathan Jun, August 28, 2018 on Facebook. “Although I didn’t explicitly self-identify as an “anarchist” until about 2001 or so, I have been involved with radical politics in some form or fashion for about 20 years. Throughout that time intermittent sparks of revolutionary fervor have punctuated the escalating horrors of the neoliberal world order—many of which were inspired to varying degrees by anarchist(ic) politics. Why is it, then, that the anarchist “movement” itself—at least in the United States—has largely failed to evolve, let alone gain appreciable ground?” Jun wonders about the “the political vision that motivates them implicitly or explicitly abjures “activism” and “movement-building” in favor of “attack” or “exodus.” I do not doubt that this vision reflects sincere anti-authoritarian sentiments that have some degree of affinity, however superficial, with the anarchism of yore. But does it actually oppose—authority, domination, oppression, etc. in practice?” Rather, he suggests, “it is difficult to view them as anything other than symbolic *displays* of opposition.rather than genuine threats to the existing order..[I]n what relevant sense is *retreat* a form of opposition—let alone RADICAL opposition? Indeed, how is it anything other than defeatism and capitulation? There is considerable daylight between aspiring to build a mass anarchist movement, on the one hand, and relegating anarchism to ineffectual subcultural ghettoes, on the other… Anarchists who organize with non-anarchists around concrete issues in their local communities may not be explicitly preaching “anarchy” or self-consciously marshaling their activism in the service of “the Revolution”—but if we consider the issue historically, on the few occasions that anarchists have succeeded at building genuine movements (or came close to it), it is precisely because they were engaged in activism of this sort…Even so, if organizing in one’s community can actually make people in that community a little more free, a little less oppressed, isn’t that better than cloistering oneself in a self-

absorbed radical ghetto and doing nothing? …there can be no such thing as "failure" for those who pursue them patiently, block by block, house by house, shop by shop, in ways that make people better off than they would be otherwise…."

And certainly these quirky collaborations take place in countless forms, between anti-authoritarian and immigration activists practicing mutual aid, fighting off deportations, gardeners and neighborhood activists, building and defending community, offering free meals, sharing space. Afterall, a 'diversity of tactics' means allowance for not just militancy but also non-militant approaches – but even those who argue "we don't make demands" are usually involved in movement work in some sense. And this is part of the ongoing work of building a more inclusive movement, yet there has to be a space for dialogue about differences of strategy and tactics. There's a need for good faith on all sides of these debates.

Jun's comment generated a large number of comments, including my sentiment that, part of the problem is that "people treat each other like shit." Ben Brucato followed noting, "Anarchists include among them a few of the better people I've ever known, and many of the opposite… Nathan replied, "Benjamin: I would like that comment a hundred times if I could. You wouldn't believe some of the stuff I've had to endure (or, then again, maybe you would!)"

Still, the need for subcultural movements remains imperative. "I know a lot of people who felt isolated and whose lives have been saved by finding a political subculture group that made them feel like they weren't alone, they were strong, and could make a difference," noted Eric Laursen. "I suspect that a lot of vibrant political movements started out as subcultures. What is an extended circle of friends if not a subculture?"

New York City activist Craig Hughes and I referred to some of this debate during an interview. We discussed the ways anarchists seem to replicate existing power hierarchies. "I've seen that a lot over the last couple of decades. I remember after Occupy some anarchists were really dismissive and had pretty reactionary takes on the really terrible ways homeless people were often treated in Zuccotti," he told me. "I remember feeling a lot, particularly after Occupy where there was so much discussion of wealth inequality, that some anarchists were missing how class composition and activist-ism were actually playing out and had developed. Like, here, involved in these struggles in this park, you have a ton of folks who've been excluded from access to much of the formal economy, some of whom are surviving at the intersections of criminalization and mental illness, for example, and they're being treated in these really fucked up and dismissive ways by other, more middle class activists, and by some activist/academics, who wrote and spoke loudly about the liberatory potentials developing. Like, many of the folks on the margins were being seen as a problem or contributing to a problem, rather than an asset and key part of movement projects. You could see a sort of synchronicity between the *Daily News* or the *Post* condemning homeless people, or people struggling with clear mental health difficulties, and what some of these more middle-class activists were doing. And that was really a key weakness in the class composition of Occupy – the powerful cracks between the more middle class activists who had more recently *lost* access or were scared of losing access to their status and quality of life, and many of those who never had access in the first

place, or had been struggling to survive on the margins in New York for years before Zuccotti was occupied. Some of those replicating that dynamic were anarchists. And it was illustrative to me. I've often thought anarchists replicate very judgmental, hyper-moralistic, very conservative mainstream social dynamics that miss the nuance of people's humanness, the complexity of coping with the world as it is, and who are, to put it simply, too open to discarding people off to the four winds."

And certainly, the anarchists are not the only movement contending with these dynamics. As Sarah Schulman writes: "The trajectory from oppressed to oppressor is central to the content of this book. Just as unresolved, formerly subordinated or traumatized individuals can collude with or identify with bullies, so can unresolved, formerly subordinated or traumatized groups of people identify with the supremacy of the state. In both cases the lack of recognition that the past is not the present leads to the newly acquired power to punish rather than to the self-transformatory necessary to resolve conflict and produce justice."[54]

Our Activist Informed Reading Group discussion of Adrienne Marie Brown's insightful tome, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Shaping Worlds*, took countless turns at these themes. The writer addressed the theme of "call out culture" – a dynamic in which people identify political errors of others publicly.

"I have never seen activists shit on each other so much," noted Emily reflecting on Occupy Wall Street, of which she was a participant. "Why do activists have to take each other down?" She paused, "I remember hearing people bragging about getting arrested in occupy," she continued, referring to how people fetishize one tactic at the expense of everything else. Yet, these conflicts were anything but unique, repeating themselves over and over again through the years. Process and tactics seemed more important than a larger conversation about strategy. She read a section from *Emergent Strategy* entitled:

"We Are Still Beginning," writes Brown, "I've been thinking a lot about transformative justice lately.

In the past few months I've been to a couple of gatherings I was really excited about, and then found myself disappointed, not because drama kicked up, which is inevitable, but because of how we as participants and organizers and people handled those dramas.

Simultaneously I've watched several public takedowns, call-outs, and other grievances take place on social and mainstream media. Some of those have been of strangers, but recently I've had the experience of seeing people I know and love targeted and taken down. In most cases, very complex realities get watered down into one flawed aspect of these people's personalities, or one mistake or misunderstanding. A mob mentality takes over then, as evisceration of character that is punitive, traumatizing, and isolating.

This has happened with increasing frequency over the past year, such that I'm wondering if those of us with an intention of transforming the world have a common understanding of the kind of justice we want to practice, now and in the future.

What we do now if find out someone or some group had done (or may have done) something out of alignment with our values. Some of the transgressions are small – saying something fucked up, being disrespectful in a group process. Some are massive – false identity, sexual assault.

We then tear that person to shreds in a way that affirms our values. We create memes, reducing someone to the laughingstock of the internet that day. We write think-pieces on how we are not like this person, and obviously wouldn't make the same mistakes they have made. We deconstruct them as thinkers, activists, groups, bodies, partners, parents, children – finding all the contradictions and limitations and shining bright light on them. When we are satisfied that that person or group is destroyed, we move on. Or sometimes we just move on because the next scandal has arrived, the smell of fresh meat overwhelming our interest in finishing the take-down."[55]

Certainly, this could have been written word for word in 1969 or 1971. For the purposes of this essay, it opens up a host of questions: Why haven't we learned? What role does racism, middle class background play? What role does the larger state-capitalist social order, and the pressures it exerts, play? While one can't blame anarchism, capitalism, or structurelessness, for the whole these dynamics, one can wonder why activists feel comfortable tearing each other to shreds over and over again? Why do some movement cultures emphasize that some ideas are right and others are wrong, without room for dialogue about the messy spaces in between? Maybe it has to do with the old point by Morris Berman: "An idea is something you have; an ideology is something that has you". They grip at us, holding us, leaving us unable to adapt.

Responding to these dynamics, Li Dahlstrom, aptly argues: "By making these public attacks on each other, we are engaging in the same disposability politics of capitalism and the prison industrial complex that we purport to be against while feeding into state surveillance tactics that are monitoring how we are tearing each other down. Enough is enough. We need each other now more than ever."

For Kelly Moore; "[t]he attacks on the humaness of people, the effort to humiliate as a form of power and discipline, again, long history + Clinton/Obama/Bushes/Trump's rejection of care for others (no more nanny state: welcome soldier-citizen! get ready to have your ass kicked, and then do some "self-care" to responsibilize your self back into the battlefield)…" The stuff of relationship building, the practice of friendship is urgently needed. "[I]t is that relationship–the not knowing, the not liking, and disagreeing, the feelings of anger, rage, shame, powerlessness, etc.—that we super need to work out how, foundationally, we relate to each other as imperfect and lovely and muddled and creative beings." Afterall, posits Moore, "the slagging on individuals: that is, indeed, how power keeps us down."

In Brown's facilitation and mediation work, she has found three questions which help around such issues.

"'Why?' Listen with 'why' as a framework?"

"Ask ourselves: what can I/we learn from this?"

'How can my real-time actions contribute to transforming this situation?"[56]

Brown sees emergent strategy as "a way of describing [a] relational leadership model…. that relies on the strength of relationship for adaptation…"[57]. This model of "dialectical humanism" opens space for a "cycle of collective transformation of beliefs…" As we listen, we open ourselves to "understand and hold position[s] that we previously believed to be wrong…" The key is a willingness to listen. Doing so, we grow in relationship with others. "[R]elationships are everything" [58]

Pleasure activism and the joy of protest?

Brown was a friend of my old comrade Keith Cylar, a legendary AIDS /harm reduction activist who taught us all to be pleasure activists. "It has expanded for me over the years as I have come to believe that facts, guilt, and shame are limited motivations for creating change, even though these are the primary forces we use in our organizing work," writes Brown, reflecting on the philosophy of pleasure activism. "I suspect that to really transform our society, we will need to make justice one of the most pleasurable experiences we can have."[59]

Yet, can rebellion feel compelling? Can social eros spread in the streets, connecting possibilities, actions and movements, as George Katsiafakis saw?[60] "H]ow does everyday resistance express the desires of those who are exploited and oppressed, dominated and controlled by capitalism and the state?" wonders Team Colors Collective member Kevin Van Meter in an interview with Shane Burley for *Viewpoint Magazine.* For most of us, the "beloved community" we aspire to is a space with joy and justice, community and abundance, with less pain and exclusion. Getting there, we organize collectively, hopefully with a joy and patience for countless points of view.

Yet, we're all human. Egos get in the way. Some become stars. Activists market themselves and their issues, gathering twitter followings, writing grants, opening consulting groups for their efforts, identity and indignation expanding, hashtags and brands reifying messages and ideas, commodifying our dissent.

People differ in their visions, plans and tactics. Reflecting on struggles before the 1963 March on Washington Movement historian L.A. Kaufman (2018) draws a distinction between top down and bottom up approaches in *How to Read a Protest*. Every sign was controlled for the 1963 march. Every message, in a tight discipline that both created space and restricted it. Activists responded in varying ways. Many shrugged and got on the bus. Others recoiled at the top down directives. For example, Malcolm X, "characterized the handling of the signs as one of numerous reasons why he decided to boycott the [1963] march."[61] Direct action groups were disappointed with plans to cancel acts of civil disobedience. "Malcolm X went much further, emphatically refusing to participate in an event that allowed so little political autonomy. There

wasn't a single logistical aspect that went uncontrolled,' he explained in his 1964 autobiography. 'The marchers had been instructed to bring no signs – signs were provided… They had been told how to arrive, when, where to arrive, where to assemble, when to start marching, the route to march.' He had a point. The sea of uniform signs at the March on Washington reflected a certain key quality to the march organizing: a directive leadership style that in many respects stood at odds, quite deliberately, with the impatient and restive grassroots."[62]

In contrast, Kaufman points out leaders of the 2017 Women's March "eschewed top-down structures and charismatic leadership in favor of more collaborative approaches," embracing a "leaderful movement where there isn't a single person whose vision creates the strategy, but rather many people who can be visionary leaders" writes Kauffman.[63] The first Women's March in Washington DC the day after Trump's inauguration was one of the most powerful actions I have ever seen. The mall was literally filled shoulder to should with people of all walks of life, all genders, colors, signs a splendor. The same thing the next year when I attended the New York City march, but we were even more penned in. By march three this January, fractions started showing. Conflicts arose over questions of inclusion and exclusion, interpretations of oppression, leading to dueling 2019 Women's Marches. Talking with people the day of the march, everyone had an opinion about which of the three marches to attend and what was wrong with the others. I lost track of competing arguments, walking to the closest one to our house. One of the women I spoke with at Foley Square suggested the conversation stunk of the sort of COINTELPRO inspired clash that haunted the Black Panthers almost five decades prior, as agents and provocateurs sowed division within the movement. Others suggested the splits within the Women's March movement between able and otherwise abled bodies people, people of color and white activists were serious and denoted problems that have festered in the women's movement for many years without being fully addressed. To chalk them all up to COINTELPRO was trivializing.

Throughout January, debate roared forward and three marches were planned for New York. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *a founding editor of Ms. Magazine, sent a letter to the New York Times, responding to the earlier Times article,* "Anti-Semitism Accusations Roil Women's March" (front page, Dec. 24): "For more than 35 years I've witnessed leftists form a firing squad in a circle while our mutual enemies ride off into the sunset unscathed," she wrote aptly highlighting the dynamic. "In 1982 I wrote an investigative article for *Ms. Magazine* that detailed many of the same fevered schisms among Jewish women and women of color that your article discussed… Some Women's March leaders say they've been educating themselves about the evils of anti-Semitism, as if they missed the memo until Jewish women expressed pain and shock at their exclusion from organizing efforts and their omission from the published "unity principles" enumerating which groups of women in particular should be "free." "[R]acism and anti-Semitism are the same toxic madness split at the root…" concludes Pogrebin.[64]

Others would point out that this was nothing knew. The women's movement has long had blind spots around the specific issues that women of color face, just as it once had them around those of sexual outsiders. Recall American feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson contending that

lesbianism was antithetical to the feminist agenda because it "involves roleplaying and, more important, because it is based on the primary assumption of male oppression".[65] By the early 1980s, attempts by one branch of the women's movement to weed out oppressive patterns, sexual abuse, and sexism were seen as stifling another segment's need for creativity, experimentation, and play.[66] Still women kept on organizing, coping as conflicts on class, race, and gender lines popped up again in the Women's March, much as the organizers wanted to paper them over in the interest of forming a united front against Trump.[67] Despite the controversies, "the impact of the Women's March on America is undeniable," notes Anna North. "The march established women as leaders of the opposition to Trump, and helped set the stage for the wave of female candidates who ran and won in 2018. It also introduced the concept of intersectional feminism — the idea that women's equality is interconnected with justice for other marginalized groups — to a wider audience and helped make it a part of mainstream left-wing politics. And it helped strengthen a movement of women agitating for the civil rights of all people that, the Women's March and its critics agree, will continue no matter what happens with the latest scandal."[68]

All the while, the debates about how to define and operationalize intersectionality would intensify,. In *when they call you a terrorist: a black lives matter memoir*, Patrice Khan -Cullors and Asha Bandele Asha aptly identify guiding principles for the movement, including: "embodying and practicing justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with others." Still, how we get there counts. One step up, two steps back. But to err is to be human. There has to be a place for radical forgiveness and seeing the innocence in our mistakes.[69]

In *Conflict is Not Abuse*, Sarah Schulman posits: "Conflict, after all, is rooted in difference and people are and always will be different. …[M]ost of the pain, destruction, waste, and neglect towards human life that we create on this planet and beyond, are consequences of our overreaction to difference. This is expressed through our resistance to facing and resolving problems, which is overwhelmingly a refusal to change how we see ourselves in order to be accountable. Therefore how we understand Conflict, how we respond to Conflict, and how we behave as by standards in the face of other people's Conflict determines whether or how we have collective justice or peace…" For Schulman, "the community surrounding the Conflict that is the source of the resolution."[70]

Community is the source for our solutions, it's the politics of living in a city together. Can we can learn from each other and identify new possibilities, new emergent strategies? We have to. After all, Adrienne Marie Brown suggests, "The *crisis* is *everywhere*, *massive massive massive*. And *we* are *small*. *But emergence notices* the *way small actions* and *connections create complex systems*, *patterns* that *become ecosystems* and *societies*. *Emergence* is *our inheritance* as *a part* of this *universe*; it is how *we change…* how *we intentionally change* in *ways* that *grow our capacity* to *embody* the *just* and *liberated worlds we long* for, plans of action, personal practices and collective… Small is good, small is all (The large is reflection of the small… When you pour *water* in a bottle, *it* becomes the bottle… Change is constant. (Be like water)."

The Judean People's Front vs the People's Front of Judea

Hopefully, there is a place to laugh at ourselves and our ageless squabbles. At movie nights at my house, two of the all-time crowd pleasers are the philosopher's soccer match and the *Life of Brian,* both from Monty's Python. Early in *The Life of Brian*,four members of the Judean People's Front meet Brian in the forum, discussing politics, ridiculing their splinter group, the People's Front of Judea, the camera panning to a lone person sitting two rows away looking bitter. Later the Judean People's Front plans a top secret raid against the Romans. To their surprise, another anti-imperial group, the Campaign for Free Galilee have been planning the same thing. The groups start fighting.

"Brothers, brothers! We should be struggling together!" declares Brian.

"We are!"

"We mustn't fight each other! Surely we should unite against the common enemy," Brian follows.

"The Judean People's Front," they scream in unison, echoing the left's proclivity to bicker instead of finding common ground.

"No the Romans," Brian replies.[71]

I guess we're always fighting the Judean People's Front.

As this essay concludes, we're left with what seems more questions than answers. Reflecting on these conflicts, I wonder: How do we cope with the eternal debates Boyd and the others identify, the conflict in movements, in our lives, watching our friends come and go, our movements cycle through time? Why do some friendships thrive and sustain us, while others recede?

"How do organizers express the desires of those who are exploited and oppressed?" as Kevin Van Meter wonders.

Movements form in countless ways.

"[T]he waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly," writes Melville toward the end of *Moby Dick*. "[M]illions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumb." No one can conquer nature. It is better we dance with mixed shades and shadows.[72]

We all do.

Friends elevate and pull at us, lulling and reminding us of our limits.

"[W]ho of you are capable of friendship?" wonders Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

"…There is comradeship: may there be friendship!" [73]

What we come to see are cycles of groups and movements, ideas and people, aspirations and conflicts, steps toward resolution, stumbles backward, and still more questions. Grace Paley describes these cycles through her body of work, wondering how we protect those we love from stumbling or "falling onto the hard floor of man-made time", shuffling through this life, friendship ebbing and receding.[74] "Some adored children, raised by parents committed to giving them a better world, are lost to drugs, or jail, or even to … political extremism; others thrive…Men and women keep driving each other crazy in bed and in the head, but with more mutual sympathy and gentleness. Political urgency rattles the soul. And then, like life, it all abruptly ends," concludes Alexandra Schwartz, writing about Paley. So what are we to do or feel?[75] How do we make sense of what it all meant? We still have so much more to learn about each other, if we can be open, if we can be curious. After all, each other has something to teach us.

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“Fragments of Paradise . . .” A Conversation with Jonas Mekas

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On January 23, 2019, the Lithuanian filmmaker, poet, critic, and curator, Jonas Mekas, passed away. Mekas arrived in the United States in 1949 after having spent years in forced labor camps in Nazi Germany and, following the War, displaced persons camps. He went on to help establish major institutions of American avant-garde cinema, including Anthology Film Archives, Film Culture magazine, and the Filmakers’ Cooperative. He is best known for his films Guns of the Trees, Walden, Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania, and Lost, Lost, Lost. A longtime member of Logos’ editorial advisory board and supporter of the journal, he was also a recipient of Logos’ first Siegfried Kracauer Lifetime Achievement Award for Film Criticism for his work as the founder of the film column of the Village Voice. The following interview with Mekas was conducted by the editor of Logos, Michael J. Thompson, in 2004 at Anthology Film Archives in New York City.

Q: As I was preparing for this interview, I was going through some of your older writings, some of your diaries, and I came across something that you wrote back in the 1960s and you wrote: “The official cinema all over the world is running out of breath, is morally corrupt, aesthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring.” Today, isn’t it the same situation?

A: One could use the same rhetoric, I guess, today. I mean, let’s face it, it was, shall I say, not a clash but a rebellious attitude of those who were just coming in directed against those who were there and established so those kinds of statements were the incoming powers and were never one hundred percent rational or just. They’re just in the context of the time, I mean, emotional, they’re not necessarily rational. Today, well, you could say that about cinema but one could say that about all of the arts all over the world. You see, that’s why one thing you could find in the New York of the 1960s in the world a very concentrated, very emotional, very very intense groups of people that stood out and everybody noticed. If you look today, they were times when one would say “this place is the capital of the arts,” but New York really was in the sixties and seventies and everyone was looking at it from other continents also as the center of something exciting happening there, as the capital of the arts.

You cannot say that today, there is no visible, intense movement in any city in any country so in that sense one could apply what I said that the breath has run out of, the enthusiasm, there is no great temperament visible anywhere. But the reasons may be different. I think the reasons are that the world, because of the sciences, communication technologies have become more unified in a sense so it’s dissipated. Admittedly something happens here, something there, say in Tokyo, in Melbourne, in São Paulo. They begin the dress the same way, buy the same shoes, so it’s this democratization. The negative, I’d say they’re the negative effects of

democratization…

Q: And globalization….

A: And globalization, which we did not have then.

Q: But you did have, if not a global kind of sensibility you still had an avant-garde movement that had some kind of affinities with one another in placed like Germany, France, New York, Japan. There were still painters and writers, even surrealism or abstract expressionism…

A: It was like, to us in 1960, that was history, that was past, not present. As far as the present was going, in New York, in America there was the avant-garde, or experimental film by some twenty people, not much more than twenty and we knew everybody and then there was Hollywood. Of course there was developing something else in between like thirty-five independents and feature lengths, so that's it. So, French realists, that was in Europe and long ago; Dadaism, that was maybe thirty some years ago in 1960, maybe thirty-five – that was history. It's difficult for me to sometimes put, I mean, when I begin to think that what we did was thirty-five, forty years ago, that's history.

Q: That's interesting, because it seems to me, when I look back at the twentieth century and I put New York avant-garde or underground film movement in some kind of context, what I think of is dates like 1908, 1916, Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, Schoenberg's music, the poetry of Celan in the 1950's, but in every case it seems to me the avant-garde was supposed to break with what you just described—conformity. The avant-garde was trying in some way to break through commodification…

A: That's what between 1955 and 1965, the artists, filmmakers, were doing and that's how we felt. That's why we started *Film Culture* magazine and it's there that John Cage at the beginning comes in and the Happening theatre and the music there, beginning '58, '59 and there you begin to see that and they were all doing something opposite, something completely different, not rebelling but you could call it rebellion. Or literature, I mean, when Allen called the poets of the first anthology "The New American Poets"

Q: Allen Ginsberg?

A: No, Allen is the last name, John Allen. Allen was the editor of the anthology for "The New American Poets" and that's where I took the new American cinema. As a guess, there is a new American poet, but there is also a new American cinema. The "new" meant they were really breaking out, there were all the others but "we are the new," these are the new and it was a really ground-breaking anthology.

Q: So now there's nothing new because…?

A: There must be something new…

Q: Maybe there's something new but there's no movement…

A: No there's no book that becomes suddenly or slowly visible and they would speak for themselves and everybody would write articles you know in all the papers like they did in the sixties but there was Warhol, there was the underground. I mean, there were always headlines…

Q: So you mean there's nothing sensational?

A: Now maybe they made it into sensation but we did not do it for sensational reasons.

Q: But it became sensational to the outside.

A: Maybe rappers come closest to it. In painting there is nothing, there is nothing, nothing exciting. There was something happening in the installation art which of course goes back to the sixties, but there was nothing there exciting either. Now, is there any visible excitement in literature at this point? I haven't heard about it, maybe on the internet, maybe there is something. They would probably say we are now a different civilization, different technologies and we are looking for excitement in the wrong places. I'd say that is a possibility. Even those who were not of the same generation made all those exciting things in the sixties, even the older generation noticed it and they were looking into it, rejecting, accepting or criticizing but there was nothing of "ok, I'm in a different generation, I'm trying to search, I'm not a doctor, I don't see it." Maybe things are happening in the sciences and maybe in music. There's a lot of activity in music, I think.

Q: What about, you mentioned before different civilizations…what about literature and film that's coming out of cultures that are outside of the west, say Asia or Africa, Latin America. I mean, this may not be anything formally experimental, but is there something new there?

A: As far as I know it's not happening in South America. I think Africa in music, according to some people who I have been following, African music was very exciting twenty years ago. Now some of them became so successful that they became commercial. So in independent cinema, in the avant-garde, like when I go to Paris as I've been for the last five years it's been much more exciting than New York, much more. And it was very close to the excitement that existed in the New York in the early sixties, they have their own lab developing and all are not unimportant all over France. So, in publication there are many more books and various other publications that come out in Europe, France especially. But in New York, in the United States, there's not much published here at all.

Q: What about some of the other things that you've written about that I've seen for decades, that I've noticed you've picked out time and time again. Is identifying Hollywood as this kind of institutional and cultural problem, because of the problem of commodification, now my question is has the avant-garde maybe, or parts of the avant-garde been taken up into the machine, into the commodification machine? I mean, Greg and I were talking before and he mentioned how you could have a shower curtain with Jackson Pollock on it, I mean you could

have a Mondrian's work became…

A: The closest that the avant-garde has come to is, I think that in principle it can never become a commodity. It's the same as poetry can never become as popular as prose. They cannot exploit it. It's unexploitable. Criterion Collection issued a package on DVD so it's more accessible. They packaged Joseph Cornell, because Cornell is known as an artist. He has much wider appeal, but those are exceptions.

Q: Ok, that's an exception, but does the whole phenomenon of DVDs for example, does that lead to the destruction of the experience of film?

A: In the sixties when they came out with the original, they came out with Super 8; everybody thought that now we can make copies everyone will buy and that will be cheap and that included Warhol, it included everybody. We made some copies, nothing happened, there was just an excitement and after a few months we realized….when video came then again some filmmakers said thought that now we can put it all over the world. In a sense, some of these films cannot be put on video; they lose their color and entertainment. Now DVDs rectify this a little bit, they approximate the original.

Q; Well we're sitting here in Anthology Film Archives where people come to experience these films in a group setting…

A: If seven people come to see Brakhage's films, it's a big deal and whenever I bring *Echoes of Silence* there is always one person.

Q: So is there any kind of social experience in seeing cinema anymore? Is that important?

A: That is what is lacking. We can put Brakhage and some other films on DVD but there is no network similar to that of commercial film/video network to disseminate these films. They won't put money into it. It's still expensive to produce a digital copy and nobody wants to put that kind of money in because who will buy it? So there are limitations, very simple economic limitations. That's why the print quality is still in six hundred copies, twelve hundred copies not twelve thousand because who will buy it? How do you promote poetry? I think that there are certain dramas, certain arts that are more limited in appeal because they appeal to more subtle aspects of our existence, being, mind and they cannot be promoted. They resist promotion. Promotion would destroy them. Some forms of modern contemporary dance cannot be.

Q: *I think of the music of Luciano Berio, he combines music and theatre and how listening to it on DVD is impossible, you actually have to be there and experience it in an attempt to prevent commodification. Is that the case too with avant-garde film, that it just resists inherently being sucked up into the machine of commercialism?*

A: I think the language, the content of the avant-garde film, creative film does not appeal to

masses. It requires a certain kind of, not education, but familiarity. You have to learn the language of film.

It's like a little joke I have. I grew up in this little Lithuanian village. At home, we spoke a local dialect, but there was already the official written Lithuanian language. So I went to the primary school and I had to learn the official accepted Lithuanian dialect. Then, at the same time at the gymnasium, high school I guess you would say, I had to learn Latin and French. Then the Russian army rolls in and they say Latin is totally unnecessary and French is unnecessary, now you learn Russian! So we all learned Russian. And then two years later Germany comes in and the Germans occupy Lithuania and now Russian is no good, the German is good. So we begin learning German. During the War, I end up in a forced labor camp near Hamburg. I lived together with Italian war prisoners and French war prisoners and so I think it is a good occasion to improve my German. So I begin to learn local German and there I discovered that even some Germans don't understand local German, they speak Platdeutsch. Then I begin to learn Italian and discover from talking to other Italian colleagues that I'm really learning not Sicilian but Roma dialect of Italian. And so it went until the American army comes and now we are learning English. By the time I end up in New York, I had enough of all those languages because I learned a lot of languages. Now I will learn the language of cinema. That's what I did in Germany in the displaced persons camps. My brother and I got interested in cinema because now we can talk in a language that everybody will understand. So we come to New York, we get a Bolex and we begin to film. We went to screenings and shows. Then we begin to show our work to others and the others say, "what is this? We don't understand you. This is not cinema." So then I realized I learned the wrong language of cinema, so now I've written on cinema in whatever language I want. That's the end of the joke.

Modern poetry was one thing in the nineteenth century. It changed with poets like Ezra Pound. Different language, different content, different film. One can be educated into something, but one has to already desire it – have an inclination – a movement towards it otherwise there will be a block. You cannot educate somebody to read well. One has to want, one has to desire movement then you can begin to educate. Otherwise, it's empty.

Q: Does this reflect, this gets into a couple of different issues, I mean, say the days of Beethoven or the way Beethoven was understood and appreciated or Mozart or say even in Greece with Greek theatre, the way that it was art the entire community could understand and it engaged the entire community. Is the avant-garde the result of a kind of shattered culture, fragmented? People like Adorno talking about the culture industry, kind of dividing everyone up into different groups and segments, is the avant-garde the result of this kind of aesthetic elite that's keeping alive some kind of sensibility.

A: Maybe in the Middle Ages the elite existed only on a social level, elites were those very educated, richness also meant availability of education. I mean, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth centuries there was a prince but this prince could also write symphonies and now wealth and social class is only money and no education. So those were times where you'd meet someone else who was maybe writing poetry that you would like or making music that you

would like, you would have to go by carriage, it would take weeks to meet them or across the ocean two months. I am just thinking of all those Americans who went to Paris by boat, so it was more difficult for those little groups to emerge. I think it's much easier now. I think it has something to do with advance of civilization, communication that some groups of, say, musicians, poets begin to communicate and get together. Little special groups emerge that differ very much from the general, wider group, the accepted the culture. You can call those little groups you elitist. They are concentrated, intense centers of advancement in various arts.

Q: So in that case, has the avant-garde served a function only for those who participated in it?

A: What is the avant-garde in cinema? People say Maya Deren was a mother of the avant-garde, but she was the close to the end. She was not the beginning, she was the end. She was educated in Switzerland, in Europe and we don't even know yet what she has seen there but she brought the tradition of the European avant-garde and she knew them all and she closes the first European avant-garde. And after that comes Markopoulos and Brakhage and all the new American avant-garde come in not only, but with a different content, a different language. It was the same with painting. De Kooning and all those guys developed a different language for painting at around the same time.

In the sixties, some filmmakers got very, very angry. Markopoulos used to say that "television is stealing some of our techniques we should sue them." No, the changing language becomes intellectual property of the whole culture, for everybody, all the people. You cannot legislate it, so the avant-garde, those that are really interested in poetry and cinema in the avant-garde of course we look at those films and look again and again and you read poetry. For all the others, only some aspects appeal. Not only television but some of the techniques have been accepted in narrative cinema, the fast cuts and sort of shorter takes. That has become part of the new language of narrative cinema. If you look at Douglas Sirk and if you look at any contemporary narrative filmmaker, I mean there's a huge influence of the avant-garde.

Q: So the avant-garde then only wanted to change the language?

A: No, no, for the film avant-garde I think there is different content. Brakhage maybe was the most radical, we always say he really contributed most to changing the language of cinema. When he started making his *Songs* on 8mm film, they were very different from his 16mm films. He started them because his 16mm camera was stolen. He ended up with 8mm because he was thinking about what this camera could do. What can I do because it's more impressionistic, no detail there on 8mm. As opposed to let's say fifteen hundred dots per frame, you only have one hundred dots per frame so it had to be very personal. His films showed just little reactions, little songs about himself. The technology determines the content and the form. It's very difficult to determine what came first. I think that first Brakhage had something in his mind, some idea, and then comes the question of how to do it, the form. You cannot create Brakhage's *Songs* with a 35mm camera, it. You cannot move as freely. The image is different. So I think that at the very beginning there is the content, which is a very nebulous kind of

thing, you can't even describe when *Dog Star Man* was finished, you can't tell exactly what the content of that film is. There's moving, climbing, struggle, it's still very poetic.

Q: So the avant-garde equals simply experimentation?

A: No. This is one of my heretical statements: the avant-garde, experimental film, has nothing to do with experimentation, absolutely nothing to do with it. There is much more experimentation in Hollywood. We go to the center. When Kenneth Anger made *Fireworks*, he was driven, he knew exactly what he wanted. The film was done, I think, in one evening, something like that. He just had to do it, and he did it as he felt he had to do it. When Stan Brakhage does something, he knows exactly what he is doing. It's like the woodworm burrowing through. The only difference is if the woodworm finds some hotspots, he goes around them, that's a Manny Farber's theory. It's very natural and there's no experimentation. In Hollywood, sometimes they try this, then that. Even when the film is finished, they show it to the audience and listen to what they have to say. If the audience says, "we don't like that," they cut it out. If you cut one millimeter of a Brakhage film, it will break. There is no experimentation, there is only execution. You don't experiment when you write a poem, you just write. There's no experimentation. These are all terms imposed on this area of cinema and they don't make much sense.

Q: So then John Cage…

A: Did not experiment. He executed certain ideas

Q: He just thought differently, experienced the world differently.

A: Very radically and drastically so. Experienced it for first time in a new way. Again, the literal meaning of the avant-garde is the first line, those that are first hit by the bullets.

Q: So with the fading of the avant-garde in terms of its energy, what happens now?

A: That means there are no great, no drastic, no new ideas that come from the spheres of arts.

Q: And when they don't come what happens?

A: People have become very pragmatic. Just think of the growth of the film schools, all those thousands and thousands of students who just want to go and make something in the industry. All those grants that are being given, like the Jerome Hill foundation. Hill was a friend and helped us to really make avant-garde film visible. When he died, the Foundation was taken over by practical bureaucrats and now the Foundation is giving grants every year. I just looked at who they gave grants to, they gave I think five grants in the spring session and there was not a single avant-garde film. One was a social documentary, one was feminist, one was something for minorities. The films have to be practical, serve the community and not antagonize anyone. These choices, I thought, showed how Jerome was betrayed by those who followed. This money exists now just to help graduating film students to make films, but not for the avant-garde.

Q: So it's interesting you say that these films were something that had to serve the community, don't antagonize, don't be radical, don't be different.

A: It's like this: to apply for a grant for instance, you have to know what you're doing, what the film is called, this and that. How can one who is doing a poem with a camera submit it? So, they have the grants. Ok, I want a grant, but I cannot tell you myself what my film will be. It may just be a failure. Give me a grant because of my past achievements, trust me. That's how it should be. The Jerome Hill Foundation for instance should change their guidelines completely. They should give grants based on past achievement, not because someone is able to write an interesting presentation.

Q: This gets into the issue of technology and how this impacts form. This impacts the artistic impulse. Wouldn't the inexpensive growth of digital film, editing equipment, and the fact that you can do all this work on the computer make it easier for those people who are up and coming?

A: But it was always easy. It was always easy and difficult. The classic body of the American avant-garde between 1945 and 1970 was created without grants or support. The American avant-garde was created without the grant system establishment. The fact that something was easier makes no difference. It actually just makes it easier for all the bad work. It increases the production of bad cinema. It should be difficult. It should be a little bit difficult, that it takes an effort. You really have to want to make a film so that you put an effort. You slave to get some money, you go and steal the camera, steal the film and that's how it has been done. And when everything becomes easy then nothing is important.

Q: There's a line that I picked out from Walter Benjamin and it says "A magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work an actual distance from reality, a camera penetrates deeply into its web." There's something unique about cinema as opposed to other arts.

A: But I don't see such a difference. The painter penetrates into reality and most of the filmmakers remain on the surface. I mean, I think he was too enthusiastic. He got carried away talking about cinema

Q: But isn't there something about movement, dynamism, isn't there something about that? You have centuries and centuries of painting, but there's something so dynamic about film itself.

A: Yeah, but there are some who say there have been moving images for thousands of years in development. We're talking about surface and penetration. I mean Jung and Freud are working around the same time that cinema emerges. Jung, you could say, would say that you can tell everything from the surface and Freud will say you can tell everything from the dreams. Jung is dealing with the surface and the symbols that are expressed. Freud is penetrating deeper.

Q: Can I bring up something you told me about when you were talking about your own films? In

another interview, while discussing your diary films, you said you weren't merely recording events, but that just by virtue of your approach through the camera you were actually changing the event

A: There was a period when I was still following the old language of documentary film. I filmed in longer little cuts, takes of five seconds, ten seconds. At some point, it did not satisfy me. I had to break down reality. I had to introduce myself into it. When I film, *I* am looking at something. *I* have to look at that specific thing. There's a reason why I'm filming it now and the object has to reflect that reason otherwise it will be just a thing out there. I have to introduce myself by breaking it down into single frames and by changing light varieties and speeds. That introduces the state I was in when I wanted to film it. So in other words I'm filming the tree but still I'm putting myself, merging myself with it so that when you see the state I was in when I perceived it.

Q: So why is it important to do that?

A: For years I filmed the snow, snowing and snow and I was always unhappy. I kept something going, the same subject until I thought, "ahh, I've got it, this is what I feel, this is what I feel when I see snow." So, it's not just straight filming. It's filming in a certain way, merging myself with the subject and the instrument that I'm using. Of course, what I'm filming is my memories. There's some reason and I don't know that reason, but it comes from the past. I will give you one anecdote: I used to visit Richard Foreman some summers. We would drive and look for the places where we could stop. We would drive around for sometimes half an hour and nothing would appeal to us. I realized that we were looking for places that seemed familiar, but that meant that we were not discovering anything new. We were only stopping because it was familiar to our memories or dreams. So, we decided that we would use our watches and decide to randomly stop at fixed times no matter what. We eliminated memory and familiarity and had a great time. You stop and discover something new and different. Very often we just keep relying on memory.

Q: So why is that important?

A: I just have no choice. It's like an obsession. That's how I am, I just have to. I admire poets like Jackson MacLowe**,** that period where he was very mathematical. He had a system. His feelings, memories, emotions are bracketed. I don't know if you are familiar with what he did in the sixties, seventies in his poetry. He applied mathematical systems to his poetry. It's totally mechanical but it's great. I don't do that. I guess my past has something to do with it. I was so rooted in my village, so much in my community when I grew up. I was so deep in it that, when I was uprooted by the War, I was pulled away from it so abruptly. To tell the truth, only now am I beginning to come to a point where I'm a little bit more free.

Q: This interests me because of what you were saying before about filming, about yourself, about the way you see it changing the object. This reminds me of Wordsworth with the poem Tinturn Abby when he talks about how my vision actually changes the object and the result is

the poem.

A: Those who do experiment change the context.

Q: So is your conception then more romantic, the idea that the human being, the emotions take precedent over any kind of abstraction?

A: Yes, I think I am walking a very, very delicate, very dangerous balancing line like a tightrope walker. When I was watching my most recent film, *As I was Moving Ahead Occasionally I saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*, I became very conscious of that because when you work with material that is so close to you, in this case my family, then it is very easy to fall off into being too romantic, too sentimental, too emotional. But I think I have managed to keep across that stretch without falling down, but it was an effort. I cut out for instance a lot of material consciously that would have dragged. It's very, very close to falling down. That is what one has to be conscious of. That is a problem with this kind of diary film.

Q: You have spoken often of your films as "efforts to preserve bits of paradise."

A: Again, I think it comes to my childhood. I think I had a very happy childhood. I enjoyed the nature and the work. Now, when I go through my life with my camera, be it film or video, there are certain moods, there are certain situations, that awakens those feelings. Some memory of something familiar is awoken. So it is still connected with my childhood. But then it gets more complicated because then you see what I came to believe in, what humanity is all about, what my function here is, that belief doesn't have to be so pronounced, it's maybe in the background somewhere. Often examples come from eating and drinking. It could also come from poetry.

I feel one of my duties is to try to preserve what has been achieved already by those who lived before me. I have to do everything to help it remain here and preserve for those who will come after me. I consider it a duty almost. I'm more and more aware now of those who lived in other centuries. I would be betraying them, the best minds of humanity. I have to help continue their works.

Q: Especially during this ebb.

A: Yes, yes. I just finished this project called Utopia Station. A dozen artists from all over the world were invited to present reports on the subject that could be exhibited. In segment number four, I pledged to all those who lived before me not to betray their work but continue their work. Those are the fragments of paradise.

Review Essay: Robert Plomin, Blueprint: How DNA Makes Us Who We Are. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018

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The primary paradigm for psychiatry at the moment is founded on the premise that mental disorders are largely a result of genetic, biologic causes, and therefore treatment rationales and understanding of mental illness are firmly rooted in this paradigm. Genetic research purports to demonstrate the truth of its premise.

This research however, is beginning to show some serious cracks, with genome wide association studies providing endless correlations for behavioral geneticists to chew on, but little of substance after two decades of time and expense.

If the recent book *Blueprint* by Robert Plomin is any indication, researchers are desperately trying to repackage genome wide associations studies (GWAS) under the auspices of "polygenic scores," effectively doubling down on the GWAS failure as Plomin defiantly claims, "DNA is the only thing that makes a substantial systematic difference… related to psychological traits." He goes on to make even more dubious assertions in the book, suggesting that, "Genetics offers a causal basis for predicting disorders, rather than waiting for symptoms to appear," and that elite schools should admit students based on their polygenic score for intelligence. This kind of dystopian science fiction is, thankfully, fiction. Like their GWAS parent, polygenic score hype is already beginning to crumble.

I can only assume that Plomin is part of a collective denial of the fact that the end is nigh. These heavily funded studies have not produced the hoped-for results. The endless rationalizations for that have run their course. They've spent two decades trying to spin these failures into seeming successes. It is time to acknowledge that they were barking up the wrong tree. They simply aren't going to find genetic causes for mental disorders, personality traits or intelligence. Hopefully, this will be a wake-up call to psychiatry. It should be an interesting and awkward time for the field. This might seem upsetting to some, but it is, in my view, the basis for optimism and a chance to get back to our roots. The prospect is, frankly, exciting to me. As a recently retired psychiatrist, it might seem like I'm jumping on the last life boat on the Titanic with a smiling wave to those still on the ship, but here I am, hoping to witness exactly this collapse. Let me explain.

I started Psychiatry Residency training in the mid-1990s. While I found much of medical school disappointing, I was drawn to the field of psychiatry, which was the one specialty that inspired

me to read books for my own interest, rather than clinical requirements. It seemed far more intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking than the algorithmic nature of most of the traditional medical specialties. I imagined that any professional psychiatric setting would include philosophical discussion and debate about the nature of mental illnesses, with attention paid to the unconscious and essential aspects of our human experiences, “Jungians” arguing with “Freudians,” etc. There was some of that but, for the most part, the field was on the verge of ideological and economic overhaul led by the pharmaceutical industry and “managed care” insurance companies. As the bank robber Willie Sutton said when asked why he robbed banks, “That’s where the money is.”

This ushered in a draconian, mental health-for-profit system, where psychiatrists earned revenue for the health care entity and salary for themselves, by juggling as many patient/customers as possible and cranking out drug prescriptions. The idea of working within a psychoanalytic model, that is, perceiving a human being as a complex, interdependent person and attempting to get to the root of a predicament or malady, was effectively abandoned by the profession. By the time I completed my psychiatric residency, I was left with unsatisfying, albeit well paying, job options.

Of course, such a consequential shift in the field needs some additional scientific justification beyond just a better financial model. A large part of that justification comes from genetic research related to mental disorders, which is why the field of genetics dominates psychiatric/psychological research and continues to do so. If we view mental illness as a genetic disorder, or at least significantly influenced by genetics, then it is not much of a leap to say that these are effectively physical disorders that should be treated in much the same way as, say, diabetes or coronary artery disease. This provides a useful justification for the medicalization of psychiatry. It is a reductive and simplistic understanding of the mind, in my view, while harkening back to eugenic ideas that I had assumed were a dark point in our history, never to return.

Psychiatrists do not spend a lot of time discussing this kind of research, so it might not be obvious on the surface what a far-reaching effect it has had on our practice. If you are comfortably operating under the assumption that you are treating genetically based disorders, there is little you need to do other than prescribe the “right” medication. If the research purports to show that mental disorders, personality traits and intelligence are genetically based, then the paradigm will go unquestioned. As I progressed in my residency and the early years of my career as a psychiatrist, it was clear that this view was held by most of my colleagues, leaving me to cringe when I heard fellow psychiatrists say, both amongst themselves and to patients, things like, “Depression is from a lack of serotonin in the brain and Prozac makes up the deficit,” or, “Mental illnesses are biological disorders rooted in genetics.”

My arguments against these claims, and in support of a more dynamic view of the human mind, generally fell on deaf ears. “The studies are proving this,” they would say. Even when the studies didn’t make such bold claims, by the time they were picked up by mainstream media sources, one would see headlines like, “Genes for Schizophrenia Discovered,” and,

“Depression: It’s in Your Genes.” Few people actually read the studies, so whatever the abstract and news stories claimed was accepted as the truth. For that reason, I decided to read these dry studies to see just how definitive these findings were.

For those unfamiliar with these studies, they generally involve a “scan” of thousands of human genes (these studies are now called “genome-wide association studies” [GWAS]), looking for slight variations of genes that are found to be more common for people possessing whatever trait you are looking at (schizophrenia, depression, IQ, ADHD, etc.). If these variations (single nucleotide polymorphisms [SNP]) are found significantly more frequently in the group with the trait, then it is presumed to be related to the trait, somehow. Generally, in the early days, they would find a few genetic variants that were more common for a particular trait. However, when I looked through the literature to review these results, I noticed something peculiar. One study would find a few genes related to a trait, but the follow-up study would find entirely different genes, with the genes from the previous study not reproduced. This is a problem, since you want your findings to be “replicated” in follow-up studies.

So, for example, you might have a GWAS that purported to find SNPs that were more common in people with depression, maybe even making the front page of major newspapers, then the next study would find entirely different genes associated with depression, yet none of the previous genes were found to be associated with depression in this new study. Rather than retract the previous findings, the new findings would also make a splash, creating the perpetual impression that genes for these disorders were being discovered left and right. This seemed like a shell game of sorts, so I set out to challenge the studies by writing letters to the various psychiatric journals, challenging the results and suggesting they wouldn’t replicate. The journals initially were reasonably abiding, probably because I seemed to be the only one taking on the science of these studies directly, and the only other dissent was the occasional letter from a psychoanalyst, who they would humor like some old haberdasher complaining about the declining quality of men’s clothing.

The letters were not well received in a research community that believed they were on the verge of unmasking the secrets to mental illness, intelligence, criminality, personality traits, etc. Generally, my letters were dismissed without addressing their merit and my points were not taken seriously. My supervisors even hinted that perhaps these letters were not so good for my career, a point underscored by the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, when they declined to publish one of my letters unless I could get two other psychiatrists to vouch for my character in writing. The practicalities of life left me with little choice but to abandon my quixotic opposition to something that was, in my view, impeding and destroying the potential worth and evolution of psychiatry.

Fortunately, during my hiatus, there was a burgeoning backlash towards these genetic studies due to a “replication crisis”, and they were brought into question by some leaders in the field, even fading somewhat from the literature. My hope was that this trend would continue and that we could move on to a more dynamic view of the human mind, which turned out to be naïve. I underestimated the driving force of this materialistic view, especially when coupled with the

massively expanded genetic databases available to researchers through commercial enterprises like Ancestry.com and 23andMe, as well as other genetic database programs like the UK Biobank. The rationale was that the original studies did not have enough people in them and these bigger databases would make it possible to elucidate the “right” genes. Thus, the studies caught a second wind.

Some of the current researchers are holdouts from the early 2000s, like Robert Plomin noted above, and Stephen Faraone, clinging to what one might assume are entrenched views of the human mind as genetic arbiter, despite the failure of evidence to back it up. There is always the light at the end of the tunnel and the assumption that the current research is vindicating their unbridled enthusiasm. While I might criticize the validity of these claims, their persistence in making the claim and indefatigable ability to ward off failures has admittedly paid off in allowing them to win the turf war for psychiatric/psychological research. In reality, psychological research is arduous and often ambiguous, thus in addition to the financial incentive to generate research viewing mental health as physical phenomena, genetic studies have the benefit of providing a lot of hard, numerical data, which gives it an air of authenticity, regardless of the qualitative value of the data.

In addition to the old-timers, though, there is a whole new crop of young researchers with backgrounds in economics, statistics, and genetic subspecialties, who have little patience or interest in delving into the human mind beyond which gene they might correlate for which trait. The idea of exploring any deeper psychological principles, much less philosophy or metaphysics, probably seems quaint and even absurd to many of them. There is only interest in finding statistical correlations between a genetic variant and whatever trait they are searching for, whether it’s depression, schizophrenia, IQ, church attendance, risk-taking behavior, loneliness, your preferred flavor of ice cream, or just about anything you can quantify in a brief questionnaire. They have unwavering faith in their cause and no doubt the positive feedback received from published studies only enhances their zeal.

At first, these newer, larger studies seemed to be meeting with some success. With massive amounts of data at one’s fingertips, a strong belief in one’s cause and the ability to analyze data in any number of ways, one is able to make some statistical correlations for anything you wish. Instead of just a few genes for a trait, now they were “discovering” hundreds. This has given us a boundless supply of studies claiming genetic correlations and fanciful claims of trait predictions based on the number of particular genetic variants one has (polygenic scores). However, despite the larger database sizes with which these researchers have to work, and the multitude of alleged correlations, they have had little more success than their predecessors in finding an actual cause or mechanism for much of anything. Just like in the past, the studies open with a lot of fanfare (now bolstered even more by social media), then seem to fade before anything of utility can be garnered from them, leaving the impression that something “important” was discovered, but with little meat to it.

Much as has happened in the physical sciences, there has been an abandonment of the philosophical roots of the field, as if everyone from Plato to Freud, to Jung, to Adler to Kubler

Ross, had little to offer and, arrogantly, we could start with a clean slate. Thus, there is little room for philosophy, the unconscious, dreams, and certainly no room for metaphysics. We have, instead, a bizarre reductionism in which the human mind is now entirely conflated with the human brain, with researchers trying to elucidate through genetic studies, MRI's, EEG's, etc., what makes humans human. This is likely to be as successful as someone trying to understand the functioning of a car by looking only at the electrical wiring.

Thus, mental illness is viewed as some sort of miswiring of the brain, or a bad combination of genetic variants that in some unknown way cause the mind to work "abnormally." Although there is little concrete evidence to back up this medical model of psychiatry, it holds the field hostage to a kind of regressive formalism. Under its [smug] aegis, psychiatry has atrophied, replaced with a facile form of psycho-pharmacology. The inherent fatalism of this view not only effects psychiatry, but has seeped both consciously and unconsciously into the public domain and these views pervade many aspects of lives, such as our educational system, our understanding of criminality and punishment, and even our understanding of life's meaning. What we have been given is an overly individualistic view of society, where our failures are viewed in terms of genetic, biologic deficiencies, rather than turning the microscope back onto the world we have created. When we start talking about genes for ADHD, or PTSD, or anorexia nervosa, I think we are running away from a reality of our own creation.

Unfortunately, that is the direction that we continue to follow. The promise is always that we are on the verge of some big discoveries and that this paradigm will be verified and elucidated. Yet, what I'm seeing is that this whole façade appears to be crumbling. These genome-wide associations studies or their stepchild, "polygenic scores," are again being called into question, with the suggestion that much of it is overreach and possibly just false positive results infusing some noise into otherwise useless studies. As neuroscientist and author, Kevin Mitchell, summed it up recently:

"*Simply put, nothing really definitive comes out. In fact, the strongest result from these studies is a general one, and it is "negative": there are no convergent patterns of gene expression in adult brain that characterise these various psychiatric conditions…we can now say it has strong empirical support.*"

In other words, "back to the drawing board." And while this won't dissuade scientists from abandoning a reductionist model of the human mind, they might have to finally abandon this one. It was and is a fairly far-fetched notion if one really examines it without the cloak of scientific arrogance. The idea that some combination of hundreds or thousands of genetic variants somehow "tickle" the brain in some slightly different way, causing a person to be depressed, or schizophrenic or risk-taking or more intelligent, has always seemed, to me, a ludicrous proposition. No one can explain the mechanics of it, even hypothetically. The premise has deteriorated from one gene to a few genes to hundreds, or even thousands of genes (polygenic) causing a trait, not because of discoveries made, but because they have simply failed to find anything with teeth, so they assume that there must be more and more genes involved with each failure to pin down anything specific. Currently, they are even suggesting

an “omnigenic” model in which all genes have some effect on all traits. Leaving aside the question of its merits, this is a nebulous idea that probably can’t be proven or disproven, and appears to be the last stand on this subject. So, again, what happens if and when this genetic sideshow collapses? What are we left with as a field, and who will lead us out of the woods we have wandered into?

I doubt there will be much on offer from the current “experts” in the field, who are largely psychopharmacologists, who speak about metabolic pathways and neuroreceptors like pilots in white gloves, and took their cues from this genetic research, generally viewing any mental aberration as a brain dysfunction that must be fought off with the proper medication. From such individuals, we should expect very little once the Sword of Damocles falls. Perhaps they will find another way to reboot this tired paradigm, with some new speculative science to continue to justify this obsession with a physical/genetic view of the mind and brain. That is certainly possible, but I think it is also plausible that we might have at least a brief vacuum in which new theories and ideas could spring up outside of the medical model.

I consider this an exciting prospect, and one that could reinvigorate the field with real thought and meaningful debate extending all the way to the meaning of life. If we are going to survive as a species, we will need a holistic view of humanity, or at least a broader vision of the human mind and maybe this vacuum will lead us to a new paradigm that accomplishes that. That is, perhaps, optimistic, and what matters in the end is a view that rings true, but it’s hard to imagine anything more stifling and limiting than the paradigm with which we are saddled now. I hope I can one day dance on its grave. Perhaps I’ll even come out of retirement.

Review: Bruce Franklin: Crash Course: From the Good War to the Forever War. Rutgers University Press, 2018

By | 2019: vol. 18, no. 1

Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" remains the anthem of our times. We have been living with wars all our lives. World War II and Korea were central events for the generation before us. Vietnam was the defining experience for my American generation—whether we fought there, lost loved ones there, supported or fought against that vicious war.

The overt and "covert" US wars in Latin America tore us apart and in the case of Cuba brought us to the verge of nuclear Armageddon. The post-9/11 wars have shaped our subsequent lives and those of folks younger than us and done terrible harm to people far from America. Yet the condition of being "at war" seems to have become horribly "normalized", as if it were just a matter of whim when the next bullet, bomb, missile or drone will strike. Or when the next persons will die.

We may have become desensitized to how truly *abnormal* these wars are, or should be. Now this war-condition seems permanent, no end in sight: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Palestine, Africa—on and on and on. The war fog of propaganda and lies – and roiling emotions – unanalyzed, can obscure our vision and understanding. It is vastly important to hear from alert critical voices who have shared this experience. H. Bruce Franklin, speaking through *Crash Course,* is one such voice. This is an extraordinary book about a long American life, lived and recalled with clarity and purpose. It is filled with surprises and self-reflective lessons, brilliantly focused.

I had a surprise myself when I visited Franklin some eighteen years ago at his summer vacation rental on the New Jersey shore. I had written to him while researching a magazine article and Franklin invited me to visit him in person. I knew his published works on prison writing, science fiction, Herman Melville, marine ecology. And I knew of his heroic and costly stance against the Vietnam War—though a tenured professor, cultural historian and award-winning scholar, he had been fired in 1972 by Stanford University for leading protests. Years later, Rutgers University hired him as a distinguished John Cotton Dana Professor of English and American Studies, who taught by his own insistence at their inner-city Newark campus. He is now retired *emeritus*. I was delighted to be so kindly invited to meet him in person.

While it was pleasant chatting with Bruce and his wife, famed Cuban history scholar Jane Franklin, what I most clearly remember about the visit is being taken out in a very small boat

into the Long Beach Island ocean bay, where Bruce nonchalantly stood up in the wave-rocked skiff, expertly baiting and casting, and catching so many fish that nearby tourist fishing boats began to follow us around the bay. Bruce took that in stride with a grin. As *Crash Course* reveals, Bruce Franklin is no stranger to small craft on rocking seas. He worked on a tugboat crew in New York harbor—one of the most dangerous jobs there is—before starting his academic career. Over a dinner of grilled bluefish, Bruce and Jane Franklin recalled years of harassment by the FBI and noted that they had guided their children's educational paths so that the young Franklins were prepared to defend themselves in future rough times.

Howard Bruce Franklin has weathered rough seas and times indeed, and they have all been times of war: World War II, the Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, Latin America and now the endless American-fueled "Forever War" in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and countless countries in Asia and Africa, and a new version of Cold War with Iran and China and, perhaps once again, Russia. And the war within America between the forces of reaction and repression and those of progress. Franklin has long been on the progressive side.

Now in his mid-eighties and retired from a long and distinguished teaching career, Professor Bruce Franklin has lived a life of conscious resistance, and now he has done us all a great service by gifting us with this stunning memoir. In it, Franklin addresses the most vital questions of our times. This book is indeed an intense course in cutting through the fog of myth and propaganda to make sense out of confusing modern history. It's a course none of us can afford to skip. On the very first page of *Crash Course,* Franklin declares his own self-analytical epiphany at age 80, which prompted him to write this book: "I remembered that since early childhood America's wars had been defining the historical periods of my life . . . But living in the Forever War, it was getting harder and harder to tell one war from another, or even to count the number of ongoing wars, much less figure out when they began."(p.1)

Franklin is no armchair academic observer of these wars. As he tells us, he was an engaged combatant as a 1950s Air Force officer, "flying in Strategic Air Command operations of espionage and provocation against the Soviet Union as well as launches of full-scale nuclear attacks . . . that were recalled while we were in flight just minutes before it would have been too late." (p.3) He came close to the edge of Armageddon, as did the rest of us alive at the time, though so few of us knew it. He recalls his own reaction to Stanley Kubrick's later fictional film depiction of this hidden horror: "The critics seemed to think *Dr. Strangelove* was an over-the-top absurdist satire. I thought it was pretty realistic." (p. 156)

In this smoothly written, engrossing memoir Franklin brings readers along on his personal odyssey of discovery and public commitment. Eye-opening, and research-backed revelations fill this book: about little-known nuclear-war dangers—how close and how often we have come to the brink of world destruction—and about the falsity of Cold War and "War on Terror" claims, and the very direct and effective resistance to American imperialism which has long existed among American workers including many in the military. The Franklins—both Bruce and Jane, who have been life- long comrades in struggle and self-analytical education—moved from being self-identified "concerned liberals" to determined revolutionaries, learning along the way from

the writings of Marx and Lenin and from profoundly impactful encounters with Asian and European and other resistance fighters. This personal and political growth is deftly and clearly explained in this book, which often reads like a powerful suspense novel, but is decidedly grounded in actual fact.

Crash Course proceeds chronologically, with periodic instructive flashbacks and links across decades. Chapter 1 begins with Franklin noting the drumbeats of war building in 2014 against Syria and Russia and declaring his own war weariness, and the deep fatigue he observes among the American public in general, especially among those directly impacted by the wars. Then, Franklin tries to recall any memory of "an America at peace with the world". He decides that he recalls that condition just before World War II when he was a child in Queens, New York attending the 1939 World's Fair and then again on August 14, 1945 when Japan's surrender was announced and he rode in a celebratory motorcade through Flatbush, Brooklyn, though he qualifies his recollections: "And even these were arguably mere childish illusions." (p.3)

Then Franklin quickly takes us into an extended lesson on the history of American connivance in the French attempt—including the shocking use of former imperial Japanese and Nazi troops– to re-colonize "Indochine" which preceded covert and then overt US military invasion of Vietnam. He provides a fine review of how the US war on Vietnam developed and how pernicious and deceptive "myths" grew out of it: "Soon Vietnam became not a people or a nation, and not even a war. 'Vietnam became something that happened to us. America became the victim of 'Vietnam,' which was some kind of crippling addiction or disease, or, to use Reagan's term, a 'syndrome.'" (p. 13) Franklin introduces a concept of national "cancerous myths"—developed though out this challenging book, with psychosexual implications that he cites as explanations for the ongoing war fever in America. (pp. 14 ff.) Among the myths he cites are those which led to the Bush-era "yellow ribbon" campaign and the continuing widespread marketing and display of black -and- white MIA/POW flags. (pp. 15 ff.), which he identifies as "a myth of imprisonment."

Chapter 2 is a detailed history of "how America lost World War II" by putting into practice "the fascist doctrine . . . of the terror bombing of civilian populations," and thus succumbing to the very fascism which the war was fought to oppose. (p. 30) Franklin describes how efforts by himself and others to publicize this analysis met with the harshest government opposition. Chapters 3 and 4 take Bruce and Jane Franklin through the years of the Korean War and the 1950s McCarthy years of fear of the Red Menace. Ironically, Bruce worked during those years in a NY City photo-developing shop run by self-declared communists, and later as an officer in the US Air Force doing training exercises and later flying missions meant to menace the USSR. Franklin clearly and with subtle humor savors this irony in view of his later political awakening and commitments. Later in this chapter, Franklin thematically links the 1950s persecution of Paul Robeson to the 1970s COINTELPRO attacks on himself and Jane which include his being fired from a tenured Stanford teaching job.

Chapter 5 is an extended exploration of the history of labor conflict and what Franklin labels

“class war” on American waterfronts. His own experiences on tug boats and his intense reading of Melville are woven together convincingly to show readers how Franklin’s social consciousness grew in those years. A reader will never view the movie *On the Waterfront* in the same way after reading this chapter. Chapter 6 is titled “Thirteen Confessions of a Cold Warrior”, while Chapter 7 is “Wake Up Time.” Franklin moves from anti-communist American military combatant to anti-imperialist writer, demonstrator and educator, and it’s a fascinating story. The photos included in this book help drive home the drama, including one of Jane toting an unloaded carbine at a 1972 press conference.

Chapters 8 and 9 take the Franklins through years in Europe, extended close contacts with Vietnamese and other revolutionaries, and then back to the USA where they engage themselves in struggle as determined militants. Chapter 10, “The War Comes Home”, concludes the book with a brilliant explanation of how active resistance to the Vietnam war—by American soldiers and sailors, by the Franklins and their comrades and by very large sectors of the American public—has largely been erased from contemporary American awareness. And of how that knowledge must be restored, because only by knowing true history can we have hope to “find our way out of the Forever War.” (p. 274) Crash Course is a big step in that direction.

This book should be read widely, particularly by younger people wondering where their own lives, and their country, has been and may be heading. For a slightly younger contemporary of Franklin’s, like myself, this book—read recently alongside Bob Woodward’s *Fear*, Seymour Hersh’s *Reporter* and Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* and *Nothing Ever Dies*— helped bring my own life and public history into focus and should help other readers examine their own. *Crash Course* is a very good course of study. I recommend it most highly.

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Review: Sean T. Mitchell, Constellations of Inequality: Space, Race, and Utopia in Brazil. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2017

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Sean Mitchell's book is an illuminating account of the shifting landscapes of race and inequality that ravage Brazil in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Deftly transitioning between an intricate plot of First-World catch-up through space technology, and the scorching socio-material inequalities that continue to assail the worst-off, he shows how inequality is produced and reproduced and made an object of scientific, political, and ethnoracial contention. His point is well taken: forms of political consciousness do not automatically derive from socio-material adverse conditions; and economic theories are poorly equipped to capture how inequality is perceived, acted upon, and contested.

Inequality is a reality, but the culturally specific ways people devise to redress it hinge on unspoken utopias—ideals of wellbeing that shape present-day action—and these ideals change over time. *Constellations of Inequality* is a valuable contribution to the anthropological analysis of how class, race and inequality interact across scales of time and space, and a pledge for more historical and ethnographic studies that take seriously the issue of "how important forms of political consciousness develop out of the dialectic between historically specific forms of experience and forms of social mobilization, grounded in structures of legitimation and utopias of redress" (p.144).

Mitchell conducted the bulk of his ethnographic research between 2004 and 2006, during the early years of Brazil's commodity-driven economic boom. When I started my own fieldwork, a few years later, among Brazil's "previously poor" (Klein, Mitchell, & Junge, 2018), conditional cash transfers and essential infrastructure had poured even into the country's most remote peripheries, giving way to new forms of social membership. Like Mitchell, I encountered many informants whose lives were chronicles of the redistributive policies enacted by the left-leaning Workers' Party, people whose "demands are generally for modest rights of citizenship that other participants … already enjoy" (p.93).

To contextualize Mitchell's arguments, let me introduce the words of one of my key informants, collected over the course of a four-year-long ethnographic fieldwork among beneficiaries of Brazil's largest public housing program. In our lengthy conversations, Dona Hilda used to

mingle personal experiences of spatial and temporal dislocation with her own conceptualizations of upward social mobility. Her narrative sometimes involved statements about her extended family, but when she mentioned her 18-year-old "white" great-grandson, her words caught me by surprise:

> *He is a self-made man! And he is so handsome! The boy is white! His father is mixed [mulatinho], slightly lighter-skinned than my son; but the boy looks like the son of a German [filho de alemão]. He doesn't bother anyone and works really hard. He bought himself a motorcycle; works half shift and goes to college in the mornings. Private school is very expensive, but he always gets good grades and earned a fellowship. Once he graduates, he wants to go to Brasilia to get a job. He also wants to go to Canada. I laugh at this my boy. Canada?! It must be a very beautiful place, don't you think?*

Dona Hilda's words illustrate the interplay of *complementary hierarchy* and *mimetic convergence* that, Mitchell argues, informs how inequality is experienced and redressed in Brazil. He defines *complementary hierarchy* as a structure of legitimation that sustains inequalities through clientelistic relations of unequal reciprocity between rich and poor, blacks and whites. These are supported by widespread ideologies of "racial democracy" that juxtapose enduring differences of class and race at the expense of open conflict outbreak. Conflict is further stymied by a utopia of redressing inequality Mitchell calls *mimetic convergence*, which presumes the erasure of difference as nations and poor people become more like the rich. Thus, he concludes, "the dominant historical models of redress of racial inequality in Brazil … have involved projects of convergence, … assimilation, and whitening" (p.16).

In Dona Hilda's narrative, all these elements blended together. While being extolled by politicians and community leaders for her painstaking travails associated to her being black [*negritude*], Dona Hilda was all too aware of the intricacies of Brazil's pigmentocracy, the idea that social status can be determined based on shades of skin color (Telles, 2014). This led her to celebrate her offspring's racial mixture and the prestige that comes with embracing working-class values (Fischer, 2008), all the while being cautiously optimistic about the great-grandson's future dreams of visiting Canada in this "transnational geography of interest" (p.170)[1]. These disparate scales reveal how (intergenerational) upward mobility came to be experienced along the fault lines of whitening, middle-class aspirations, *and* racial-specific claims of citizenship—a point I will return to at the end of this review.

Mitchell argues that in much of Brazil's rural interiors and remote urban peripheries, where patronage and racial deference structured the better part of twentieth-century politics, complementary hierarchy and mimetic convergence are now in decline. He makes his point by telling the intriguing story of the implantation of a military-based spaceport in the peninsula of Alcântara, in the northeastern State of Maranhão, once a wealth-generating knot in Brazil's slavery-based economy and today one of its poorest regions. The geographical forceful

juxtaposition of cutting-edge technological development and everyday socio-material exclusion creates the perfect environment for Mitchell's analysis of the shifting scales of inequality.

He considers how the construction, at the end of the Cold War, of this satellite launch base—which expropriated thousands of villagers from their thriving coastal settlements and relocated them into the inland "agrovilas" (agricultural villages)—has produced groundbreaking consequences to their livelihood that breach into present-day Alcântara. The fraught project, which promised to bring riches and progress, failed to do so, exposing differences in access to money, technology, resources, and prestige.

But Mitchell also uses the differences in access to space as a metaphor to reflect on the changing politics of inequality at the global level. Whereas the spaceport was once cast as key in an evolutionary temporality of First-World catch-up—and though it continues to be perceived by military as an instrument to lift Brazil up to the level of rich countries—deadly satellite launch failures, dwindling public resources, and administration conflicts paved the way for a competing, civilian-led space program. Rather than a utopia of technomilitary convergence, this program envisages a conservative, neoliberal utopia of space-industrial ambition that centers on profitability, managerialism, and foreign capital.

At the local level, though by no means disconnected form the broader politics of inequality, villagers in Alcântara have faced their own share of conflicts over land and identity in the wake of the spaceport's construction, and their political consciousness and forms of mobilization have also changed significantly over time. Politicized residents of Alcântara were once represented by a local branch of the Rural Worker's Union, in line with the history of most Latin-American countries, where cross-race, classed-based solidarities have shown to be historically stronger (see chapter six). Over time, however, they have come to organize around a clause in Brazil's 1988 progressive constitution, which requires that the state grant land rights to *quilombolas* (descendants of escaped-slaves), and although Mitchell debunks the argument of a law-induced racialization in Brazil (see chapter five), struggles over land have increasingly been cast around the enactment of ethnoracial identities, making race and history key terms of citizenship in contemporary Alcântara. Here, too, mimetic convergence—the quixotic notion that inequality is redressed through a "politics of whole-cloth transformation" (p.34)—is replaced with a "primordialist utopia" (p.35) in which Afro-Brazilian identities become crucial categories of political mobilization.

Mitchell explores the roles taken up by collective bodies (such as international NGOs) and forms of expert authority (anthropologists, urban activists, and UN representatives) in articulating these lawful collectives and their conversion into "properly historical populations" (p.35). In chapter four, for example, he examines how competing meanings of "quilombola" prompted anthropologists and social movement leaders to frame their disagreements as ontological claims and matters of "technical necessity" (p.36). He takes these techno-political disputes seriously to argue that experts, the "magicians of black boxes" (p.101), do not simply assemble disparate elements contingently; they also produce mutually contradictory black boxes for wide-ranging audiences, and in order to discover which version of the truth will

prevail, one has to consider how they stick under different political regimes. The making (and staking) of ontological and technical claims is thus intimately linked to the broader regimes of truth under which certain worldviews appear truer than others.

As Mitchell writes, the partakers in Alcântara's land and space conflict

> *are intimate Others, inhabiting a cultural world with broad continuity, despite its massive inequalities. These groups cannot be convinced to desire the same things, given their structural heterogeneity, but they might be convinced to believe the same things, given this ontological continuity." (p.111, my emphasis).*

Transformations in Brazilian racial techno-politics and law have opened up new possibilities for re-racialization, Mitchell suggests in chapter five. Whereas "negro" and "quilombola" have always existed as elements of self-understanding, they are no longer identified with social exclusion, marginalization, and backwardness, instead having become linked to possible socioeconomic advance and to the workings of a translocal and sophisticated community—a shift that clearly reveals a reduction in traditional local politics, but also cations to the fact that villagers are now subject to the whims of new "powerful others" (p.49).

For politicized leaders like Machado and Janaína with whom Mitchell worked and on whose commentaries he draws to elaborate his argument, "quilombola identity is more than a descriptive one, it is also part of a particular ethical and political project" (p.134). Mitchell explores glimpses of the relational complexity behind identity-making in Alcântara, all the while describing Machado and Janaína's adamant advertisement of their own idealized notions of just *what* constitutes a quilombola and *how* the community should draw from this patchwork of collective memory to build better futures.

Indeed, I would have liked to see a bit more ethnographic attention to the processes of persuasion (Mosse, 2004) that pervade the roles of these local intermediaries as they broker, contest, and devise new ontological, albeit unstable, racial normativities. Encounters, like the one in which Janaína laments that her community does not embrace African-Brazilian spiritual obligations despite what she sees as a shared black ancestry (see p.133), allow us to see how the translocal machine of identity conflates with the anxieties, aspirations, and contradictions of villagers as they inhabit the cyclical temporality of waiting for the ever-elusive promises of development.

Why is this important? Because it may not be that complementary hierarchy is in decline so much as it is in motion, refashioning its targets and scales of interdependence. Much like the socioeconomic transformations that took place under the Workers's Party did not do away with the interjacency of class positionalities, but politicized subjectivity in important ways, so too—it seems to me—ethnoracial politics did not eliminate asymmetries of power, but rather geared them toward something closer to *collaborative antagonism:* forms of multi-scalar help despite existing differences in power and socioeconomic status. Dona Hilda, my own informant,

continues to live under economic conditions most of us would readily deem precarious, but the introduction of “powerful outsiders” shifted the signifiers of complementary hierarchy to include (hitherto unimaginable) forms of racial pride.

Mitchell recognizes the fundamental ambiguity of this nascent ethnoracial landscape. He rightfully argues that “villagers would likely not have retained their land up to now had they and their advocates not made such persuasive public arguments about the legal inevitability of their ethnoracial claim to land possession” (p.112). But the extent of the subjective transformations eventuated alongside the Quilombo Clause is, as he also points, much harder to determine. Crucially, because it does not eliminate the cyclical temporality in which Alcântara villagers are enveloped—the feeling of uncertainty and stagnation that accompanies villagers’ perception of their well-being being perennially seized and remade into trans-local structures of legitimation (the spaceport, the NGOs, the anthropologists, the local leaders), just when the future seemed to hold something new.

Understanding the new facets of complementary hierarchy and mimetic convergence is even the more important in the years to come as Brazil takes an abrupt turn to the far-right. Will the undoing of social, economic, and racial rights be tantamount to a backsliding to old-fashioned forms of experiencing and contesting inequality, or will identity, class and race politics take on new claims of expert authority and political consciousness as poor Brazilians cope with the effects of Jair Bolsonaro’s blend of technomilitary convergence and neoliberal conservative utopianism? Whatever the outcome, it will provide a counterfactual to more closely assess the depth of identity-based approaches in addressing structural inequality in Brazil, and a vantage point into how such inequalities are conceived, both individually and collectively, to be lived, contested, and redressed.

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Notes

[1] See chapter seven, where Mitchell discusses the scales of concern—local, national, and global—embraced by actors as they hold sway of struggles in Alcântara. This is also useful to think of the translocal utopias of wellbeing (a job in Brasilia; a trip to Canada) whereby the

poor conceive their futures.

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Review: Frances Fukuyama, Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

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Francis Fukuyama, former deputy director of the State Department's policy planning staff, follows up his last book on *Political Order and Political Decay* with a book that relates personal identity to political identity, entitled *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment.* He is the author of *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) as well as *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995) and *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (1999).

In the latter he argued that it is human nature to reconstitute social order when it is disrupted by such dramatic changes as the growth of the information society. Low paid jobs in the service sector may be our future, though Fukuyama believes, much in the same way as classical economists, that a just economic equilibrium is pre-ordained (by God, by fate, who knows?), for whatever comfort that may give.

Fukuyama once was a proud neo-conservative but since the administration of George W. Bush he has backed well away from the label. He believed that the fall of communism would usher in a period when the whole world would become much like the U.S., but now he retracts that position too. In his last two books he describes this new recalcitrant reality. As to where the U.S. fits into the world scheme of things, or what right members of any other culture have for criticizing the U.S., or what right we have for criticizing them, all this he leaves for others to work out. Of course, Fukuyama is not the only person to write on nation-building and its economic consequences. Bo Rothstein, an expert on, among other things, the economic effects of governmental corruption, published *The Quality of Government: Corruption, Social Trust and Inequality in International Perspective* in 2011. There he emphasized the non-economic sources of trust, and how this affects the economy, and the provision of social goods such as health, the environment, and poverty reduction.

Rothstein concludes that improvements in Quality of Government functions as a lagging indicator, a kind of luxury that kicks in when nations get rich, because the forces that produce High Quality of Government are not strong enough to prevail unless robust economic growth, that includes its soothing effect on appeasing the powerful, already occurred. Also, people are more willing to pay taxes if they see useful public services result, rather than their payments

be wasted through governmental inefficiency and corruption. The conclusion is that neoclassical economic theory does not explain how effective markets originate, since the latter requires knowledge of how social trust comes about. Similarly, Stein Ringen, in *Nation of Devils: Democratic Leadership and the Problem of Obedience* (2013) emphasized what comes before is the ability to gain the support of the citizenry and of the bureaucrats who administer policy. Like Rothstein he contends that basic government services, which encourage trust, is necessary for sustained economic growth.

And so we turn back to Fukuyama. To his *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (2014) let's apply the notion of industrial democracy. America remains the stronghold of shareholders who think of themselves as owners though, if they don't like how a company is run, they sell their stock rather than try to change the management. But for the workers even this level of influence is an empty dream, certainly compared to the level of Industrial Democracy that German workers enjoy. There workers through their works councils possess co-determination rights regarding hours, piecework rates and bonuses, performance monitoring, working conditions, job design, hiring, firing, transfer, job classifications, and training and retraining. American workers have no such rights.

Fukuyama doesn't deal with social class issues, except in a moralistic sense when he criticizes class conflict for interfering with economic efficiency, and with his fretful frame of reference, which is "Why can't everyone get along?" His grasp of economic issues tends to be somewhat basic, charitably put. He deals instead with politics in long historical perspective. He wags a prim finger against living beyond our means and empowering tyrants. He recounts standard ideas on good government and avoids predictions. Part of his newfound conservatism is to avoid a deterministic philosophy of history, which, given his woeful track record, is a welcome idea. Still, he does put a rather middle-class American notion of economic and political efficiency (for whatever purposes) on a pedestal. The basis of political order is the state, rule of law, and mechanisms of accountability. He warns of the loss of political efficiency through institutional rigidity (self-serving behavior by politicians and government bureaucrats), and a return to clientalism and patronage politics. He wants citizens to be both morally concerned and economically efficient.

For him the pressure points for social change are those that middle-class Americans are comfortable with, honest government, leading to efficient markets, leading to buying our way out of most of our problems. People more conservative than he is might also emphasize religious revival as an alternative to the nihilism that appears together with, or as the result of, economic growth and that upsets their vision of a stable, conservative capitalist utopia. His critique consists mostly in moralistic scolding of apparent backwater states such as Italy and Greece for carrying on clientelistic practices.

He reluctantly recognizes that patronage politics in 19th century America provided a short-term solution for immigrants whose problems were shrugged off by their social betters, while in Europe left-wing political parties paid more attention to more long-term solutions that

eventually resulted in the welfare state. He admits all this to be the case, but doesn't explore it. If the era of unlimited economic growth, is indeed behind us, he fears America is seeing a reinvigoration of social class tensions because of increasing maldistribution of income, but he offers no useful advice. It is realistic to expect that to the extent that American society is evidencing a growth of a harsh and overt class system, then we should somehow be prepared to help the working class improve their quality of life.

In his new book *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* his emphasis is on what he calls the search for dignity as an explanation of the weakening of community, rather than class analysis. His emphasis is always on community woes, not poverty or economic injustice. He starts out with a discussion of populism, negatively construed. I will add that there can be positive populism, a popular revolt (not necessarily violent, or even illegal) against corrupt or irresponsible leaders, as well as a negative populism closer to mob rule or demagoguery. There can also be combinations of these two tendencies. He doesn't trust contemporary populist leaders, and seems to put Donald Trump in that category. He no longer believes the fall of the Soviet Union is a portent of democratic capitalist success over the world. Nor does he believe great failures are inevitable. It is hard to tell what he believes, other than that our present is a mess, for which we hardly need his services to point out.

But like all establishment pundits he is glib at describing what good government, and what good personal character is supposed to be. He doesn't really describe what an alternative to populist upsurges might be. He writes that rich countries like America can afford a tradition of expressive individualism, but that a new crisis of identity has spurred ever more insecure people to search for a common identity that will tie the individual to a rigid social group, one that stands for clarity in moral standards and accompanying political goals. This is how he explains the rise of nationalism, including a brand of Islamic nationalism that considers Western religions and secularism as pure hypocrisy. Of course, our nationalists say the same thing about them.

Fukuyama asserts that the invisibility of the poor is their true indignity, more than their lack of financial resources. That might be true if the poor ever were enabled to stop worrying about their financial problems. Fukuyama says Islamism and secular nationalism are rooted in attempts to recreate a sense of community that would provide not only economic resources, but a sense of individual worth. Those individuals who seek out affinity groups, and individuals who crave authoritarian loyalties, both blame the government for its inefficiencies. Some may call this disenchantment with democracy.

An example of a society without democracy is the administration of President George Washington when as a celebrated figure in a small and more intimate society (especially among those who counted), he was nominated President by acclamation. There were no permanent political parties, and the leaders of the nation were communal notables, not professional politicians whose political workers would be supported through patronage jobs. One reason George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson arose was because this was still a traditional society in which their moral suasion tended to matter over their many mediocre

political supporters already developing an itch for patronage jobs, wasteful spending, and expansionist militarism. This moral influence lasted about two generations, until the administration of Andrew Jackson. Those criticisms of the British Parliament that led to the American Revolution, that it was run through patronage (provided by the King), wasteful spending that bought the loyalties of the rich, and outright militarism as the outlet for this spending (think of the British Empire) thus returned to plague American politics. Mass democracy became more important, through expansion of the right to vote, as elections became the main check upon avaricious political elites. These ideas come from Ralph Ketcham, *Presidents Above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789 – 1829* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Francis Fukuyama somehow manages to believe in both mass democracy and the moral suasion of elites.

Fukuyama has left his neo-conservative roots behind, and now he is more of a classical conservative, bemoaning the lack of virtue among leaders. He doesn't have much to say on how a rebuilding of a sense of moral community will occur. That he takes on faith. To the extent his formerly fervent belief in American Exceptionalism is wavering, what seems to be replacing it is the classical Protestant (perhaps even Calvinist) notion that in the time of peril or even doom, only the Elect will be saved. I hope he doesn't believe this means only the rich.

Nowadays there are neo-liberals who think, unlike traditional liberals, that markets can supplant government in all but the most essential functions, and there are classic liberals some of whom think perhaps the nation-state will become obsolete. For them perhaps the nation-state can become replaced such as by one world-spanning welfare state. The rise of the European Union is one example of this kind of enterprise, and at the same time it is the site of popular resistance when citizens perceive that the EU reflects the interests of elites who seek cheap labor and too-big-to-fail banks and firms as their major criterion. As to some of the lessons of history, unfortunately one of the lessons of history is how rarely we have learned lessons from history. Otherwise we'd have a lot fewer wars.