NEW DEAL TO NEW MAJORITY: SDS’S FAILURE TO REALIGN THE LARGEST
POLITICAL COALITION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2015

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ABSTRACT

Many historical accounts of the failure of the New Left and the ascendency of the New Right blame either the former’s militancy and violence for its lack of success—particularly after 1968—or the latter’s natural majority among essentially conservative American voters. Additionally, most scholarship on the 1960s fails to see the New Right as a social movement. In the struggles over how we understand the 1960s, this narrative, and the memoirs of New Leftists which continue that framework, miss a much more important intellectual and cultural legacy that helps explain the movement’s internal weakness. Rather than blame “evil militants” or a fixed conservative climate that encircled the New Left with both sanctioned and unsanctioned violence and brutality—like the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) counter intelligence program COINTELPRO that provide the conditions for a unstoppable tidal wave “with the election of Richard M. Nixon in 1968 and reached its crescendo in the Moral Majority, the New Right, the Reagan administration, and neo-conservatism” (Breines “Whose New Left” 528)—the key to this legacy and its afterlives, I will argue, is the implicit (and explicit) essentialism bound to narratives of the “unwinnability” of especially the white working class. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that a Gramscian analysis resists this essentialism and fatalism, and is better suited for an historical analysis of competing social movements vying for hegemony in the 1960s.
Dedicated to all those who fight for a better and more beautiful world.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to make a special thanks to Dr. Clayton Rosati for not giving up on me as I worked on this project. I also want to thank my entire committee for their guidance and patience. You have all provide such a wonderful model of how to mentor students. Lastly, I want to thank my family, my friends, and every activist I have ever had the pleasure of working with throughout the last two decades because you have all given me the inspiration, motivation, and love I needed to write this dissertation.

All of my adult life, I have known the joys and pains of being an activist for social justice. I have lived to see the limitless possibility in the eyes of countless workers on strike and countless people marching for justice. As we entered the 21st century, I participated in the largest anti-war demonstrations in world history and the largest general strike in American history and felt their liminal energy. I have also known the pain of defeat and failure—the continuing imperialist wars, the continuing insanity of anti-immigrant hysteria and deportation, the continuing oppression of poor people, women, and people of color. The list could continue. On top of my course work, on top of my research, I write my dissertation carrying all of these experiences inside of me, and they help focus me on the goal of helping the left in the United State rebuild itself for the 21st century. I hope my dissertation contributes to that goal, and I thank everyone who helped me along the way.

I also wish to thank libraries and librarians in general for providing me a space all of my life to think, research, write, and grow as a human being. I want to give special thanks to the following libraries who granted me access to their archives for my dissertation research: Joseph A. Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, Southern California Library for Social Studies and
Research, Charles E Young Research Library at the University of California Los Angeles, and the Nixon Presidential Library.
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The New Right and Civil Society: The Passive Revolution within the Passive
INTRODUCTION

The ultimate problem of freedom is the problem of the cheerful robot, and it arises in this form today because today it has become evident to us that all men do not naturally want to be free; that all men are not willing or able, as the case maybe, to exert themselves to acquire the reason that freedom requires.

-C. Wright Mills

You don’t need a weatherman To know which way the wind blows

-Bob Dylan “Subterranean Homesick Blues”

…Oh the years passed again And the givin’ was good With the lunch bucket filled every season What with three babies born The work was cut down To a half a day’s shift with no reason. Then the shaft was soon shut And more work was cut And the fire in the air, it felt frozen ’Til a man come to speak And he said in one week That number eleven was closin’

They complained in the East They are playing too high They say that your ore ain’t worth digging That it’s much cheaper down In the South American towns Where the miners work almost for nothing.

So the mining gates locked And the red iron rotted And the room smelted heavy from drinking Where the sad silent song Made the hour twice as long As I waited for the sun to go sinking.

-Bob Dylan “North Country Blues”

Who Will Listen To ‘The Sad Silent Song’ Of The Working Class?

In May of 1970, Mark Rudd, the handsome and charismatic media darling of the 1968 Columbia University Strike and one of the leaders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) Weathermen faction, sat on a park bench in Philadelphia reading the newspaper depressed and alone. President Nixon had just ordered the invasion of Cambodia. The National Guard had just fired upon peacefully assembled demonstrators at Kent State University and Jackson State

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1 The Sociological Imagination 175
College killing six. Students at over 450 college and universities shut down their campuses in the largest student strike in United States’ history, involving over 4.2 million people according to some estimates (Hayden *Inspiring Participatory Democracy* 21; Sale 328). But instead of providing radical leadership to these marchers, Rudd sat isolated, reduced to only reading about them after having been driven underground by a federal warrant for his arrest, his national organization torn apart, and his friends’ bodies lying in the twisted rubble of an explosion months earlier when a bomb accidentally detonated while they planned to blow up a military officer’s dance at Fort Dix in order to “bring the war home” and to “turn New York into Saigon” (Rudd *Underground* 187-204 and “The Kids Are Fine”; Giltin *The Sixties Years of Hope, Days of Rage* 387-388). How could SDS—a movement that started nearly ten years earlier supporting African American students who envisioned a universal struggle for civil rights and democratic realignment with their lunch-counter sit-ins—end in the violent sectarian fantasies of several underground factions unable to see any universal program to unite the country’s increasingly frustrated population?

Reflecting nearly 50 years later, Rudd admits that as he read the newspaper that May afternoon in 1970:

I experienced the sudden sickening realization that we [the Weathermen] had chosen the wrong strategy; that revolutionary guerilla warfare was not going to work; that we had abandoned the locus of the real struggle—the above-ground movement that people could join. SDS was no longer in existence to coordinate and give radical direction to the unprecedented mass student opposition to the war, to the millions on strike. In effect, by destroying SDS and isolating ourselves
in the underground, we had done the work of the FBI for them. It was too late for me, a wanted fugitive. ("The Kids are Alright")

As the demonstrations swelled during 1970, the time had finally arrived for SDS to seize the revolutionary moment and lead a revolutionary project in collaborative solidarity with other movements such as Black Power. National polls revealed a growing radical consciousness in America. One Gallup poll reported, “the percentage of students who agreed with the statement, ‘The war in Vietnam is pure imperialism,’ jumped from 16 percent in the spring of 1969 to 41 percent in April 1970—before the invasion of Cambodia—while the number strongly disagreeing fell from 44 to 21 percent” (Gitlin *The Sixties* …395). Even more importantly, despite popular and scholarly perceptions of working people being pro-war, this radical sentiment was widely shared beyond just young people. As historian Peter Levy reports, by 1968 “virtually every survey demonstrates that at any given time manual workers were just as likely to oppose the war as were youths [on average 52 percent by 1968], the archetypal doves” (58). By 1971, Gallop polls further indicate “61 percent of all respondents favored pulling out of Vietnam by the end of the year, with union households adopting this view more than any other group except racial minorities” (Levy 61). But, at the moment when SDS should have been busy organizing masses of people, a paradox unfolded.

Although the potential to offer leadership to a growing number of newly radicalized Americans increased to astonishing levels, the desire among a sizable portion of the SDS leadership (but certainly not all) to speak to those people, or even to collaborate with each other or other movements, severely contracted. The desire to drop out of political movements altogether consumed another sizeable percentage—leaving the factions interested in organizing a mass, collaborative movement isolated or demoralized. The largest set of demonstrations in post-
WWII history swept the nation from 1968-1972 (Sale; Hayden *Inspiring Participatory Democracy*) on top of the largest set of wildcat strikes since the mid-1940s (Cowie *Stayin’ Alive*; Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow)—revealing not only the frustrated feelings of countless Americans but also their growing radicalization—but astoundingly there was little radical leadership with any desire, energy, moral credibility, or national reach to lead the masses. Was all of this a foregone conclusion as many of the studies and memoirs of SDS suggest?

While Rudd has fallen into a kind of fatalism that must be addressed if we are to gain clarity, his recent speeches, articles, and memoir should be commended. Rudd’s recent telling of the 60s and his days in SDS are informative. Rudd’s candid confessions are a welcome change from SDS memoirs that are too often tearfully nostalgic or bitterly recriminatory. Rather than wishing that SDS never went down a radical path in the late decade, he argues instead that SDS went down the wrong radical path. Importantly, he confirms that other paths were open to SDS but not taken.

By 1970, leading factions within the largest and most organized left organization since the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) during the Great Depression had unilaterally shut its doors, dissolved its connection to a membership of over 100,000, and abandoned any mass organizing strategy. Instead they organized into small cells of underground urban guerillas because they saw the majority of Americans as irredeemable, overfed sellouts, and most politicians as heartless war mongers and racists or enablers of racists (Hayden *Inspiring*... 21). This judgment fell particularly hard on New Deal Democratic politicians and constituents of the
New Deal coalition. As C. Wright Mills’ quote in the epigraph above about the problem of the cheerful robot makes plain, factions in SDS from early on had listened to intellectual mentors that believed that not everyone had the desire or the ability to seek freedom. They were irredeemable because they were “cheerful robots.” At a time of growing instability for working class and lower middle class working people (Hamill; Cowie Stayin’ Alive…; Stein), the New Left abandoned these increasingly frustrated Americans and abandoned their effort to realign them into a radical political project. They left them alone to sing what Dylan called their “sad silent song” quoted in the epigraph above. This abandonment happened at the same time that activists in the New Right became increasingly interested in listening to “blue collar” workers that Nixon famously called the “silent majority.” Many factions within SDS chose to listen to Dylan’s whimsical anti-authoritarian songs like “Subterranean Homesick Blues” (1965) instead of listening carefully to his prophetic tales of post-industrial austerity and misery in “North Country Blues” both quoted above (1964). This reveals a stunning failure of leadership on the part of the New Left—a failure the New Right cleverly exploited and continues to exploit until today. But, what are the roots of this failure? Should we just blame the Weathermen and “stupid” white workers who were/are “easily manipulated” by the New Right to “vote against their interests,” as the common argument goes?

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2 I define the New Deal as a political movement of mild welfare-state intervention started by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 to address the spiraling crises of the Great Depression and curb the growing influence of radicalism in the United States (Fraser and Gerstle; Milkis and Mileur; Cowie Stayin’…; Stein). Beyond the welfare programs, the New Deal’s most defining characteristic was a cross-class coalition that the Roosevelt’s administration helped forge out of labor unions, rank and file blue collar workers, immigrants, minorities—particularly African Americans, farmers, many white southerners, some corporate leaders, and reformists and radicals of various stripes around the promises of reform and prosperity; all of whom benefited (some more than others) from capitalist state intervention. According to influential political scientist V.O. Key, this was one of the most successful and longest running political realignment strategies in American history, running from 1933 until the late 1960s (Key; Edsall in Fraser and Gerstle, eds; Stein; Cowie Stayin’…).
The New Left, a broad set of social movements throughout the world attracting young activists who wanted to resuscitate a radical politics in the post-WWII era, grew disillusioned and apathetic with the increasing failure of communism internationally and increasing prosperity in the capitalist countries in the post-WWII period. They focused on the limitations of welfare-state politics as well as the limitation of Soviet-influenced communism. While it was a diverse movement with no institutional center like the Comintern, nearly all New Leftists worldwide took inspiration from the U.S.-based dissident intellectual C. Wright Mills, a sociology professor at Columbia who was influenced by John Dewey, American Pragmatism, Max Weber, and 18th and 19th century agrarian and artisan-led populist movements. His “Letter to a New Left” offered a guiding clarion call to young disaffected intellectuals throughout the world (Aronowitz Taking It Big).

While this dissertation is focused on the failure of the New Left, it will always keep in perspective that the New Right was also a social movement who benefited from SDS’s failures. Despite the fact that many historians do not consistently see them as a social movement (Brinkley “The Problem of Conservatism”; Kazin “Grassroots Right…”), the New Right were conservative activists associated with the 1960s student movement Young Americans for Freedom and other conservative groups, who provided the base of organizers for the Goldwater, Nixon, and later Reagan presidential campaigns. They wanted to resuscitate a laissez faire free market-based politics they believed under assault in the 20th century by communism and post-WWII welfare-state politics. While they came from a variety of conservative backgrounds, conservative intellectual William Buckley, Jr., who came to national prominence with his book God and Man at Yale in the 1950s, provided inspiration and a media outlet for the New Right to

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3 The Comintern was the central deliberative body of the Communist International where the various national communist parties met to discuss strategy and policy from 1919-1943. It was led by the Soviet Union.
organize their movement. His publication *National Review* served as an institutional home and organizing center.

But in order to answer the question regarding the New Left’s failure and the New Right’s success with popularizing their movement, this dissertation will focus on SDS. SDS’s failure is key to unlocking the larger failure of the New Left and the rise of the New Right. SDS took up Mills’ challenge to build a new left with more determination than almost any other New Left organization in the 1960s, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers. Additionally, their determination to organize out preformed the early anti-war movements, multiple US-based nationalist movements, and collections of dissident intellectuals from Cuba to Yugoslavia that Mills influenced (Hayden *Inspiring…*). Most significantly, SDS was substantially larger than other movements by almost every measure: membership, geographical reach, number of leaders, financial support, and traditional institutional support such as unions and foundations. For example, the most significant Black Power movement, the Black Panthers, at the height of their popularity had less than 10,000 members with 45 chapters concentrated into mainly urban areas (Bloom and Martin). By 1968, SDS had over 100,000 members and 350-400 chapters across the entire country (Sale “Appendix”). SDS had the potential to popularize radicalism across a broad coalition of Americans—especially among working class white Americans who became the base of first George Wallace, then Nixon’s “law and order” realignment strategy.

SDS could have provided critical solidarity and most importantly protection from organized state and extra-judicial violence for people-of-color and/or anti-colonial movements. This solidarity and protection could have provided the basis for one the most substantial expansions of revolutionary organizing since at least the Great Depression if not the end of the
Civil War (Ottanelli; Kelley; Roediger; Fraser). This was the kind of critical solidarity that SNCC leader Stokley Carmichael asked SDS for in 1963 when he asked Tom Hayden to create “freedom schools for white people” in the North (Sale 67), and the Black Panthers asked factions of SDS in late 1969 during their United Front Against Fascism conference (Barber). Not only Americans sought their support. The Vietnamese asked for it when they met SDS representatives in Vietnam and Czechoslovakia when they asked them to expand the anti-war movement by recruiting their parents and other working class people (Barber). This is what Fidel Castro and Ricardo Alarcon asked when they invited SDSers to Cuba throughout the 1960s as they criticized the urban guerrilla strategy they originally helped foster (Hayden and Alarcon). Finally, it was this kind of solidarity that working people needed as the U.S. economy started to collapse with the growth of “stagflation” in the early 1970s and the first waves of de-industrialization crashed in North America (Brenner; Stein). Despite repeated opportunities, SDS failed these movements and consequently failed at expanding the potential for radicalism in the 1960s across a far-reaching cross section of the American population.

Their failure contributed to a collapse of revolutionary imagination and a massive retreat back to Democratic Party politics that long-time socialist activist Michael Harrington famously wrote was the result of “a collective sadness” in a widely-circulated 1974 Dissent Magazine article (Mills and Walzer 111). This sadness still haunts the left today, and severely limits our imagination. The very people in SDS who were going to take on the entrenched bureaucracy of the New Deal and the CPUSA in post-WWII America and realign the largest political coalition in the 20th century, ended up running back to the New Deal once they were confronted with the failure of their own poorly conceived strategy and the popularity of the New Right in the 1970s (Davis “Lesser Evil?...”). SDS’s original goal in 1962 was an America free from the overbearing
influence of bureaucratic Soviet communism, reckless Cold War foreign policy, and insufficient and bureaucratic New Deal state-welfare reforms. By the 1970s in the face of the misunderstood ascendancy of the New Right, the New Deal became in Harrington’s words “the leftwing of the possible” instead of viewing it as an insufficient set of reforms meant to save capitalism from itself and contain the more revolutionary desires for an entirely different society (Davis “The Lesser Evil?…”).

Since at least the 1972 campaign, both radical and reform movements in the United States have severely moderated their program for social change based upon an essentialist determination that conservatives have a “natural majority” among working people—especially the white working class. Leftists today from former SDSers Tom Hayden to economist Paul Krugman to President Obama, wistfully discuss the New Deal as a moral political movement encompassing a grand compassionate vision of American society that must be resurrected in these times of crisis and austerity (Hayden Inspiring 21…; Krugman). Today, criticism of the New Deal is generally restricted to Republican Party hopefuls and conservative talk-show hosts. To the average college student, this dichotomy is taken as an unquestionable historical fact: people on the left love the New Deal and its welfare-state policies and people on the right hate the New Deal, so the conventional wisdom goes. But, this incomplete narrative is a product of the New Left’s failure. Several social movements—from the left to the right took aim at the New Deal during the 1960s. In fact, just the same as the word “liberal” is a favorite insult on the right today, the New Left used the word “liberal” as an insult during the 1960s. All of this has been erased from our historical memory by historians who advocate a centrist pragmatism drained of radical hope and even SDS participants who wish to distance themselves from their more radical days in a rush towards a centrist pragmatism they bitterly rejected in their youth. At the same
time, many SDS participants wish to paint overly simplistic narratives justifying their failure rather than engaging in a tough introspective criticism of their movement. These evasions leave the question, why and how was the New Right able to popularize their criticism of the New Deal into a common sense and the New Left was not, largely unexplored.

Even half-a-century after the founding of SDS, the question of why they (and the New Left in general) failed is still unresolved among the participants and among scholars of social movements in the United States. Worse still, there has not even been a robust scholarly conversation examining their failure that moves beyond simple answers. The recent 50th anniversary of the Port Huron Statement (PHS), SDS’s founding manifesto, provides a good time to reflect on this problem. The PHS was not only conceived as “an agenda for a generation,” it was the most widely distributed political manifesto during the second half of the twentieth century, not to mention the longest, coming in at 25,000 words, which is slightly longer than the Communist Manifesto (Kazin and Isserman). Rather than articulating a decisive ideology, it focused people’s attention on the bankruptcy of the two dominant ideologies during the mid-twentieth century: Soviet Communism and Liberalism, and focused young people’s attention on the need for a society organized by humanist values like participatory democracy that encourage questioning, searching, and deliberation rather than offering ridged political answers. The PHS written in 1962 and it’s less wordy, greatly-reduced 25-page condensation “America and the New Era” written in 1963 inspired countless activists throughout the world and acted as the guiding documents of the largest movement since the CPUSA during the Great Depression (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds “Introduction”). That only small percentages of activists today have read one of most circulated manifestos speaks loudly to SDS’s failure.
Despite a few recent self-critical reflections by second-generation SDSers like Mark Rudd and Cathy Wilkerson, the dominant understanding of SDS’s failure in the historiography is paralyzed by several intertwined problematic narratives: one that exclusively recriminates the late-decade SDS for being too radical while avoiding criticism of the early SDS. Another that essentializes the American population—especially the white working class—as conservative and a natural majority of the New Right. Another that refuses to view the New Right as a social movement but rather as a spontaneous beneficiary of backlash resentment, and lastly one that fatalistically absolves SDS of any culpability because they never had a chance of organizing “the cheerful robots” in the first place. These problematic narratives suffocate a clear understanding of the 1960s. Despite the finger-waving commentary that ranges from shrill on the right to dejected on the left, the failure of SDS was not a foregone conclusion. Radicalism was not the problem, as so many former SDSers and historians have claimed (Hayden Inspiring…; Gitlin; Miller; Isserman Which Side…; cf. Breines “Whose New Left”). The problem was an ineffective organizing strategy to popularize its revolutionary project. What is needed is a theorist who can help build a critique of their organizing strategy. The degree to which American activist-intellectuals fail to understand the 1960s, the collapse of the New Left, and the rise of the New Right is the degree to which they cannot more effectively help build a sustainable radical movement for the 21st century.

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4 The first generation is made up of the 58 founders who met at the Port Huron, Michigan summer camp to finalize SDS’s manifesto the “Port Huron Statement” in 1962. The leadership of SDS remained a tight inner-circle through 1964 and the creation of the Education and Research Project (ERAP). The first generation also includes the early recruits like Todd Gitlin and Carl Oglesby. After 1965, SDS experienced enormous growth both in overall numbers and chapters. These people represent the second generation. The new recruits tended to have different political goals. Because many of these new recruits came from the mid-west and south, they were called “prairie radicals.” The Port Authority Statement (1967) represents a good overview of their theoretical orientation (Davidson, ed. Revolutionary Youth…). See also, Sale; Rossinow; Miller.
Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, resuscitated with the aid of the new renaissance of Gramscian scholarship in the past decade (See below), is the clearest way out of these suffocating narratives. The question of why some groups failed in the anti-New Deal upheaval of the 1960s is crucial. Unlike many Marxists of his generation, Gramsci did not subscribe to a theory of the inevitable victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie due to the structural contradictions of capitalism. He did not believe the system would slowly collapse and the socialist society would evolve naturally and automatically from that catastrophe. Nor, did he believe in the scientific certainly that many evolutionary socialists of his generation that viewed the working class and ruling class as fixed essentialized categories. Because Gramsci’s theory focused primarily on social agency (moral leadership and class struggle in a contingent historical moment—especially during a crisis) and only secondarily on economic structures, it was an open-ended question to him if radical social forces could/would lead a counter-hegemonic project or alternatively if reactionary forces could/would lead a revolution-restoration project. And it is this aspect of Gramsci’s insights, especially witnessing the rise of fascism in the wake of the failure of socialist revolution in Italy in the 1920s, which makes him so compelling in the American context for understanding many of the failures of the 1960s social revolution. Gramsci studied history to understand the potential for socialist revolution, but he never lost sight of the painful fact that revolutions could be subverted and that revolutions could fail not because of their destiny but because of their strategies, choices, and philosophies.

The key to understanding success or failure to Gramsci is studying the effectiveness of leadership in the class struggle, as judged by how successfully leaders (broadly defined) build a political project that is understandable to masses of people because it responds to their lived
daily experiences and desires. The amalgam of these thoughts and feelings reduced, concentrated, and shared over a mass of people is what Gramsci refers to as “common sense.” The key to evaluating political action is to assess the degree of unity around any given belief system across a coalition of peoples—what Gramsci referred to as a “collective will.” However, equally important is Gramsci’s understanding that a collective will is contingent, transitory, and inherently unstable. Rather than seeing people as fixed entities that have certain pre-determined political proclivities, Gramsci viewed all people as existing in a process of transformation. In other words, as potentially organizable. It is Gramsci’s theoretical tools—specifically his anti-essentialism—that he used to examine the failure of the Italian left and the rise of fascism that best fosters an understanding of the failure of the New Left and the rise of the New Right. Using Gramsci’s analytical tools against determinism best explains how the New Left missed its opportunity to vie for hegemony in the 1960s.

*Intervening in the Historiography, Towards a Cultural and Intellectual History of Failure: The New Left and Fatal Foundations*

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—the largest and most influential group in the New Left—tried valiantly to break free of 1950s conformity and apathy to chart an independent direction. It is almost impossible to overstate what a risky departure this was from the dominant “conservative mood” of the 1950s, an age of HUAC terror on one hand and consumerist gratification on the other (Mills *The Power Elite*). SDS was led in the early years by a combination of the children of New Deal officials (like Robert Haber), disaffected red-diaper babies (like Dick Flacks), the children of social democratic union officials (like Sharon Jeffrey), as well as newly radicalized middle class students interested in breaking free of an alienated consumerist society (like Tom Hayden). With only the reassurances of a few isolated, dissident
intellectuals, the young people who met to draft the PHS and form SDS knew that reviving a radical left in post-WWII American society was not going to be easy. Their two most important mentors were John Dewey (one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century and the one-time leader of SDS’s parent organization League for Industrial Democracy) and C. Wright Mills (a radical sociologist who wrote his dissertation on Dewey and then authored several widely popular groundbreaking studies in the 1950s that early SDSer studied intensely). The obstacles in front of the New Left were well-known and daunting: the incapacitation and internal collapse of the old communist movement, especially after Khrushchev’s not-so-“secret speech” in 1956 revealing atrocities in the Soviet Union; the Cold War super-patriotism that stunted critique and debate while praising conformity in conjunction with the McCarthy-fueled dread of any semblance of radicalism being labeled “communist subversion”; a culture of hyper-consumerism coming out of the 1950s that valued getting and spending above all else; not to mention the paternalistic attitude towards young people that limited their participation not only in decision making but also democracy (the voting age was 21).⁵

To their credit, the young activists’ dedication and sense of self-righteousness—along with their privileged status being mainly white, middle class, and highly educated—allowed them not to be cowed by these many obstacles, despite older mentors wishing to contain their ambition, advising caution, and (sometimes forcefully) recommending adherence to more limited

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⁵ On McCarthyism, see Schrecker; McAuliff, Mary Sperling. On super patriotism that stunted debate, see PHS particularly the “Towards American Democracy” section. On the culture of hyper-consumerism, see Marcuse. On paternalism, it is important to remember among the first rally points of SDS on campuses across America was opposition to the “in loco parentis” paternalistic student conduct codes. These codes policed student’s behavior by establishing restrictions such as curfews, sex-segregated dorms and activities, discouraging inter-racial relationships, and friendships, and other paternal oversights.
forms of organizing.\(^6\) Also, to their credit, they were not mesmerized by the dizzying post-war affluence that most of their families enjoyed. Instead of a dazzling world of consumer abundance and suburban bliss, they saw a world of alienation and stagnation where human relationships and moral virtue were being eroded, hollowing out not only the American culture of independence and self-reliance but also hollowing out democracy itself. These were some of the brightest minds of their generation—to paraphrase Allen Ginsburg—that went to some of the most prestigious universities in the country. They could have done almost anything with their careers and been comfortably placed in well-paying middle class jobs. In fact, Carl Oglesby, SDS president from 1965-1966, did have a very comfortable middle class job as a technical writer for the defense contractor Bendix when he met SDS. He resigned from his job to become a fulltime organizer for SDS (Oglesby *Ravens in the Storm*). Instead of taking “the vows of organization life” in the words of a widely read sociological study of the 1950s (White), they choose rebellion and work among the urban poor. But, while they should be praised for blazing a new path for a new left in a historical moment in American history that was otherwise deeply committed to conformity, there is still ample room for critique.

Many accounts of the failures of the New Left and the ascendency of the New Right blame either the former’s militancy and violence for its lack of success—particularly after 1968—or the latter’s natural majority among essentially conservative American voters (Miller; Giltlin *The Sixties...*; Hayden *Reunion and Inspiring*). Additionally, most scholarship on the 1960s fails to see the New Right as a social movement (Brinkley “The Problem of American Conservatism”; Kazin “The Grass-Roots Right...”). In the struggles over how we understand the

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\(^6\) See Miller’s chapter on Michael Harrington’s opposition to several of the positions in the Port Huron Statement (Ch 7). See also the contentious correspondence between Haber/Hayden and the Student League for Industrial Democracy’s main office in Reel 1 of the Students for a Democratic Society Records 1958-1970.
New Left in the 1960s, this narrative, and the memoirs of New Leftists which continue that framework, miss a much more important intellectual and cultural legacy that helps explain the movement’s internal weakness. Rather than blame “evil militants” or a fixed conservative climate that encircled the New Left with both sanctioned and unsanctioned violence and brutality—like the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) counter intelligence program COINTELPRO that provide the conditions for a unstoppable tidal wave “with the election of Richard M. Nixon in 1968 and reached its crescendo in the Moral Majority, the New Right, the Reagan administration, and neo-conservatism” (Breines “Whose New Left” 528)—the key to this legacy and its afterlives, I will argue, is the implicit (and explicit) essentialism bound to narratives of the “unwinnability” of especially the white working class.

Tom Hayden, writing in the PHS, asserted, “Today labor remains the most liberal ‘mainstream’ institution—but often its liberalism represents vestigial commitments, self-interestedness, unradicalism” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 253). 7 25 years after Port Huron, Todd Gitlin, president of SDS in 1964, still maintained, “The working class was conservative, more or less, the privileged were radical” (The Sixties… 367) and has become more so after the 1960s. He dejectedly added “The odds have been against the Left in laissez-faire-loving, race-divided, history-burying America from the start” (422). Fifty years later, Hayden still firmly maintains that because of a “secret pro-Cold War element. . .there was no way…that the New Left could have joined organized labor in 1964-1965…” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds … 28).

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that a Gramscian analysis resists this essentialism and fatalism, and is better suited for an historical analysis of competing social movements vying for

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7 The Port Huron Statement was recently reprinted in its entirety in the appendix of a collection of essays celebrating its 50th anniversary edited by Dick Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein. This is where I will quote from throughout the dissertation.
hegemony. But this is not counterfactual history that wishes the New Left took a different path that was not available to them. My study uncovers paths that were consistently open to the New Left—that were researched, debated, reported on, but that prominent SDS leaders and major factions within the movement consistently choose not to take. Uncovering these often-buried debates and thinking about their consequences in relation to the failure of SDS will be one of the major contributions of this dissertation to the historiography.

To understand these problematic narratives that weigh down the historiography, it is important to discuss the historical conditions—specifically the cultural and intellectual traditions—within which the New Left developed and how those conditions are often missing in the dominant histories of that era and its movement leaders. The dominant narrative in memoirs that attempt to explore the history of the New Left are a nostalgia for the “good” early years of the New Left and a recrimination of the “bad” later years of the New Left—after 1966. This is the year Hayden still calls “The Derailing” where “Marxism Replaces Participatory Democracy in SDS” even 50 years later (Inspiring... 11, 18). I argue that this nostalgia is built upon not only an insufficient analysis of the early years of SDS but also a misguided nostalgia for a lost autonomy they believed existed in the agrarian and artisan-based societies before the industrialization and incorporation of America after the Civil War.\(^8\) The recrimination is focused on those “ultra-left” factions they believe scuttled the potential realignment towards a radical politics. In many memoirs up until the present, nostalgia and recrimination combine in a dangerous way to produce a fatalistic despair that shuts down critical thinking about the early decade.

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\(^8\) For a review of the 19th century republican agrarian-artisan ideal see, Arnesen 762-765.
While many memoirs from the first generation of SDS activists argue that the Weathermen faction developed an unpopular radicalism, they are unable to point that same critique at the early years. By placing SDS’s early years into the larger cultural and intellectual framework inherited from their intellectual mentors, one can understand how SDS’s early theoretical formation influenced their essentialism and fatalism and contributed to their rejection of the working class. To condemn working people as fixed “cheerful robots” is to see them fatalistically as un-organizable machines. Rather than the Weathermen’s brand of apocalyptic radicalism (described by Rudd above) coming out of nowhere in the later decade, I argue that critical missteps in the early decade—inhired from their intellectual and cultural mentors and exacerbated by the frustration of a failed political strategy—are connected to the rapid move to a more militant and apocalyptic politics in the later years.

I argue memoirs of the 1960s from leftwing activists generally suffer from a crushing sense of inevitable loss that boarders on fatalism (Gitlin The Sixties…; Hayden Reunion and Inspiring…; Miller; Isserman If I Had a Hammer). Memoirs from the New Right suffer from triumphalism bordering on mechanicism (Buchanan; Colson Born Again). They hold a deterministic view of the New Right’s inevitable victory because the nation is essentially conservative. Once Nixon and Reagan awoke this essential conservatism, everything else fell into place, so goes the New Right narrative. Now is the time to reconsider Gramsci’s mission to see critical theory “purged of every residue of mechanicism and fatalism” (Q15§17). But, for this to happen, memoirists and activist scholars must move beyond stories of their own “collective sadness” (Harrington “Collective Sadness”). In the popular stories of the New Left told by participants, between essentialist destiny, recrimination, and nostalgia little room is left for asking what specifically, as a social movement, the New Right did to realign a significant
percentage of the former New Deal coalition. How did they bring a new cross-class hegemonic coalition into existence organized around a new “common sense”, and conversely, what were the specific strategic errors that led to the failure of the New Left? By not asking this question, we become trapped in our own history.

The ‘Good’ 60s/’Bad’ 60s Dichotomy: Against the Radical Break

Instead of building a dichotomy between the “idealistic early years” (Hayden *Inspiring…*) of SDS and the “sloppier and more frantic” later years (Gitlin *The Sixties…*) where factionalism broke apart the early unity, I show how there was not as much of a “radical break” as many memoirs claim. Furthermore, there were more factional arguments early in SDS’s “golden age” 1960-1965 than is often reported (Hayden “SDS Founder…”). Further, it misses how the intellectual choices made within the New Left limited the horizons of its strategies and tactics. A Gramscian approach that emphasizes internal organizational choices and the politics of intellectual leadership make much more sense in light of the real—versus the idealized—history of this movement and period. Here, it is important to review the most common narrative that supports that sensationalized history: the “good” versus “bad” 1960s.

The “radical break” claim can be associated with the over-reliance on memoirs—particularly written in the 1980s, but it extends to the present day. A review of the literature reveals 14 books written about Students for a Democratic Society. Twelve were written by participants as memoirs, and of those, the majority are white males who now occupy positions as university professors or other professional positions. When reviewing this historiography, one realizes that most of the authors writing memoirs are reflecting on their participation from a position of cynicism and disillusionment (eg. Gitlin *The Sixties…*; Isserman *If I had…*; Miller). Many have described these memoirs as building a pessimistic “declension narrative” of
unavoidable decline and collapse. This could have something to do with the fact that most of the memoirs were written at a time the New Right was in what seemed like unstoppable ascendancy when Reagan won the largest landslide elections in US history garnering even more votes from former constituents of the New Deal coalition than Nixon did in 1972. These elections lent to an aura of inevitability that working class whites (especially males) were essentially conservative and naturally susceptible to the backlash politics (cf. Davis). While it seemed like a sophisticated analysis, it also was a way to assuage New Leftist of any culpability to the emergence of the New Right. If they were just overrun by an army of naturally conservative forces led by corrupt institutions, then their own strategies did not have to be examined beyond recriminations of the radical militants and a vaguely defined “system” (Hayden *Inspiring…*16-17).

Even a reviewer of a recently published memoir about the New Left faction, Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers, claims that most former New Leftists writing about their experiences today are still “stuck in a cycle of recrimination and nostalgia” (Longo). Many memoirists recriminate “ultra-left factions” towards the end of the 1960s who “turned to violence and militancy” as scuttling the earlier vision of participatory democracy and community organizing found in the 1962 Port Huron statement. Twenty-five years later, James Miller claimed: “…the radical student revolts of the 1960s were more or less a spectacular failure. [SDS] cracked apart … plummeting into a deserved historical oblivion as one after another self-styled guerrilla warriors turned to grotesquely counterproductive acts of terrorism” (4). This is counterpoised to what Maurice Isserman calls an “innocent idealism” in the beginning of SDS (*If I had…*, or what

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9 Van Gosse was the first historian to use the phrase “declension narrative” to describe the memoirs of SDS participant observers that appeared in the 1980s (Gosse). Historian Allan Smith provides a nice overview of historians who have continued to use the phrase “declension narrative” (“Present at the Creation…”) Wini Breines’s book length study of SDS provides a nice summary in chapter one detailing how the dichotomous view of SDS as good vs bad has limited historian’s analysis of the New Left, also her book review of the major memoirs published in the late 1980s is help for the same reason (*Community…*; “Whose New Left…”)
Hayden refers to as the “golden age of hope” between 1960 and 1965 (Hayden “SDS Founder…”), or what Gitlin juxtaposes as “nobility” on one end and “violence” on the other (The Sixties… 3). Even fifty years later, Hayden still separates the “idealistic early years” against what he calls “The Derailing” in 1966 where a “second generation” of more radical activists were less idealistic because of increasingly violent historical conditions (wars and assassinations) but also “rampant conspiracy theories.” The second generation was “…filled by doctrines, which, in seeming to explain everything, in leaving no room for doubt, could not possibly be open-ended or provisional in spirit like the sensibility of Port Huron” (Inspiring… 1, 16, 11). Because of the near ubiquity of this dichotomous view of the 1960s, SDS’s political strategies in the early “good” part of the decade are almost never critiqued (Smith “Present at the Creation …”). Historians and participant observers correctly point to events in the mid-to-late decade—most specifically the escalation of the Vietnam War—for having challenged SDS’s faith in Democratic Party (Matusow; Hayden Reunion; Gitlin). However, events in the early decade are rarely thoroughly discussed as factors that severely challenged SDS’s faith in a realignment of the New Deal coalition (Smith “Present at the Creation…”). Hayden argues, in the early 60s, “Groups like SDS and SNCC, we thought, would be the impatient radical vanguards of a new majority, and would continue to play such roles in a new and reformed world” (My emphasis Inspiring… 11). In truth, Nixon’s organization proved to be more popular among vast sections of the population SDS simply wrote off (Cowie Stayin ’ Alive; Mason), but too few scholars explore beyond blaming the escalation in Vietnam and irresponsible radical factions in the New Left and Black Power movements. Yet, consistently over 50 years, Hayden’s narrative of the 1960s helps perpetuate the “radical break thesis,” and mainly blames Johnson’s Vietnam escalation—interestingly letting Kennedy off the hook (Inspiring… 11-14). Hayden goes so far as to declare
in a Keynote Address celebrating the 50th anniversary of the PHS, that Vietnam destroyed the Great Society (Inspiring…12), not developing a thoroughgoing critique of the internal weaknesses of the early SDS’s belief in Democratic Party that was not based upon developing a new common sense in the masses. It instead relied on “young people as shock troops building a bridge to political power…” (Hayden Inspiring…10). Hayden claims, “For the first time, students were thinking of themselves as an agency of social change” instead of the working class (Hayden Inspiring…10). The founders of SDS always considered themselves to be a small vanguard movement of students who in the later decade ended up criticizing “Leninists” and “Maoists” factions for being “vanguardist.”

Sociologist Wini Breines provides one of the clearest critiques of the historiography of the New Left memoirs that let liberalism off the hook while haranguing militants (“Whose New Left” and Community…). She provides a good foundation for a critique of the mythology of the early/good vs. later/bad SDS narrative common in many memoirs. My project builds on her foundation with supportive archival research. In her often-cited review of the most popular 1980s memoirs, she concludes they tend to let the failure of liberalism off the hook (“Whose New Left”). She argues to memoirists in the 80s, the failure of the New Left becomes understood as the failure to “suppress” the unwieldy “adventurous factions” who became enamored with the “Third World,” “militancy,” and “unrealistic utopian visions of America” (“Whose New Left”). This type of analysis where the New Left was infiltrated by an ultra-left coup matches those who believe the New Left was overpowered by a rightwing coup. This obfuscates and stands in place, in Breines’s view, of an introspective analysis that would focus on the theoretical miscalculations of the group. To the degree that the era’s critical politics revolved around critiquing the Democratic Party and its New Deal, Cold War policies, her critique opens up an
unexplored line of inquiry that could help scholars more effectively understand how the different analyses of the New Deal coalition led to different strategic decisions, each of which had consequences for recruitment, popularity, and longevity.

Two under-explored sub-issues are important here. A) The respective programmatic strategies of the factions who were successfully able to convince the attendees of the early SDS national conventions to follow their programs had a tremendous influence on what happened later in the decade. The early programs—developed especially by “America and the New Era” statement and the Education and Research Action projects (ERAP)—rather than being sacrosanct texts of an “innocent and pure” movement, are on one hand more determinative of future problems in SDS than is often assumed (rather than just representing the revered “golden years” which were shattered by “ultra-left militants” later in the decade). On the other hand, the gap between early strategies and the late-decade radicalism is smaller than is often reported. The standard assumption is somewhere around 1966-67 there was a “radical break” from SDS’s founding ideology (Gitlin The Sixties… 235-242; Hayden Inspiring… 17-18). I argue this is a problematic false dichotomy that most memoirs assume rather than exploring deeper critiques of their movement. B) By exploring the much-lesser-known losing factions and their associated social movement strategies, the reader can start to build a sense of the paths that were available but not taken by SDS in the early years. For example, one such path not taken early on could have led SDS to a more creative engagement with a cross-class coalition which would have included the white, adult working and middle class and the possible creation of a new Socialist Party as advocated by radicals associated with the journal Studies on the Left. That being said, in

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10 The Education and Research Action Project was developed after members of SNCC asked white northern organizers to leave the south in 1963. ERAP recruited middle class college students to setup community organizing projects in poor communities of color in the north. ERAP and its strategy will be investigated at length in chapters 6 and 7.
terms of underexplored theoretical miscalculations in the early years, few are more important as SDS’s view of the working class in the post-WWII ear.

*SDS and the Labor Question*

While exploring the failure of the New Left, many scholars and most memoirists have a noteworthy blind spot. As already stated, several scholars have commented on the New Left’s “hard left turn” after 1966 as placing SDS far out of step with the majority of “middle Americans” (Gitlin *The Sixties*...; Miller). A number of scholars have critiqued SDS’s intense factional infighting towards the end of the 1960s as a strategic error (Sale; Gitlin; Rudd *Underground*). A few scholars have even commented upon the New Left’s inconsistent stance on racism and sexism (Frost; Barber). Yet, very few scholars have deeply investigated SDS’s rejection of the working class as the left’s traditional agent of revolutionary change (cf Levy). At the same time, none have explored SDS’s rejection in relation to how the New Right’s embrace of the white working class, as a fundamental agent of Richard Nixon’s “New Majority” social movement strategy, realigned many if not most of the very New Deal constituents that the New Left rejected (Cowie *Stayin’ Alive*; Mason *Richard Nixon and His Quest for a New Majority*). The New Left’s abandonment overturned nearly one hundred years of left social movement common sense that focused on the need to organize working people—what historian Jeffery Coker calls “the consensus era for the left” (2-10), and it sent the New Left on a desperate search for a “replacement proletariat” that fractured the movement rather than unifying it (Harrington *Fragments of a Century*). At the same time, the New Right’s embrace of labor unions and working class voters overturned more than 40 years of anti-union, exclusively pro-business positions. If “only Nixon could go to China” (as the popular phrase goes), likewise, only Nixon exhibited the radical leadership to transform the Republican Party from a party of bankers and
country club members to the party of “the forgotten man”—a phrase once exclusively reserved for FDR (Cowie Stayin’... Ch 3). Nixon’s New Majority strategy paved the way for the largest electoral landslide in the twentieth century that featured 57 percent of manual labors voting for Nixon—a 25 point increase over 1968 (Cowie Stayin’... 121). This trend only increased with the Reagan Revolution.

This only reinforced many SDSer’s view of the working class as ignorant and irredeemable. What started as a moral critique of the “cheerful robot” drowning in an alienated Cold War, consumerist society, quickly became more tendentious. Counter-intuitively, as the SDS grew more “Marxist” after 1966, their denunciations of particularly the male white working class—some argued all of “Amerika”—were “sold out,” “one-dimensional” men bent on racism and war became shriller and their conclusions became more apocalyptic. Rather than the traditional Marxist focus on organizing the working class as a lever of social change, several leading factions within SDS focused on how the working class in America could not be organized. These factions, particularly the Weathermen, believed only bombs and terror could shock Americans out of their stupor. As Weather leader Bernardine Dohrn said they needed to focus on becoming “crazy motherfuckers and scaring the shit out of honky America” (qtd. in Gitlin 385), or as Weather leader JJ Jacobs said they needed to “shove the war down their dumb, fascist throats” (Gillies "The Last Radical").

The debate over the labor question provides an extremely interesting, yet underexplored, way of investigating SDS’s organizing strategy in the early-to-mid 1960s. A review of the literature, reveals an extremely limited investigation of SDS’s view of labor. Historian Alan Brinkley comments:
But on the whole, the New Left did not form (or even try very hard to form) any meaningful connection with the working class. More than that, some on the left came to identify the working class not as a potential ally but as one of their most powerful and least redeemable enemies (231).

Brinkley summarizes the majority of historiography on the New Left’s attitude towards the working class. But, Brinkley’s analysis relies on an overly narrow view of the pre-history of SDS. Most scholars simply take it as a given that SDS rejected organized labor as part of a generational move away from the Old Left’s focus on the centrality of labor. SDS’s relationship with organized labor is far more complicated than that common view. Historian Peter Levy’s book *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* offers a picture of that more complex relationship. 11 Levy’s book stands alone as nearly the only academic book-length study arguing that the New Left had a meaningful and positive relationship with organized labor (see also Aronowitz *False Promises*). Between Brinkley’s assertion about the New Left and labor and Levy’s counter-argument that SDS had a deep and mutually beneficial relationship with organized labor, clearly more study is needed. One of the goals of my research on SDS is to try and bridge that gap in the historiography.

Levy and I both agree that SDS broke decisively with organized labor toward the end of the decade. Levy concedes this in several places in his otherwise optimistic study (4, 44-45, 114-115, and 187-188). Rather than being a hagiographic study of how SDS did no wrong, Levy wrestles with a deep level of complexity to show how both organized labor and SDS made missteps that led to their ultimate break. Additionally, we both disagree with common essentialist or generationist arguments that say the New Left was anti-labor due to their middle

11 Levy was Brinkley’s former student at Columbia University.
class, elite student identity, or youthful defiance. He is absolutely correct that rather that some
essentialist anti-worker bias based upon their identity as intellectual middle class students. We
both see SDS running into conflicts with organized labor based upon more historical specific
factors. However, without a Gramscian framework, at times, he describes these contingent
factors as random historical events instead of the products of poor strategic organizing.

Rather than a decisive break, I see the choices made in the early years about their
organizing strategy as having a determinative impact on the extremism in the later decade. Like
Hayden’s and several SDS participant memoirs, Levy’s study subscribes to a “radical break
thesis.” He draws a line between the early SDS and the late SDS and shows how radical factions
within SDS, the anti-war movement, and the Black Power movement scuttled the growing
relationship between labor and SDS. My study does not subscribe to the radical break thesis. I
conduct a closer reading of SDS’s founding documents and early internal memos that reveals
more anti-labor sentiments than Levy’s study admits. I try to show a clearer contrast between
League for Industrial Democracy (SDS’s original parent organization) and SDS regarding the
labor question. I study the complex factional arguments\(^\text{12}\) at the end of the decade with the
benefit of recent memoirs from Weathermen and recent FBI documents that were not available to

\(^{12}\) Small Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist factions within SDS wanted to focus on organizing workers—especially after
1968. This is clear in the Progressive Labor Party’s attempt to build a “Worker-Student Alliance” and organize
“work-ins” where students would take factory or campus jobs to influence workers. It is also clear that some of the
New Communist groups were committed to organizing among the working class. Groups such as: Revolutionary
Union, Venceremos, October League, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and Third Camp Trotskyist groups
like the International Socialists. While that is true, two factors remain pertinent for the purposes of my study. For
many of these groups, the adult white working class was still thought of as un-organizable. For others, like
Revolutionary Youth Movement (later becoming the Weatherman, a faction that successfully took the leadership of
SDS in 1969) all “Amerikkkan” workers were hopeless. This was the conclusion they drew from their failure at the
Days of Rage in Oct 1969. Groups that were interested in a multi-racial, gender-inclusive radical alternative like
PLP and the groups listed above were small and lacked broad popular appeal. Those who were not caught up in the
increasing police and state repression of radicalism were among the first victims of the massive layoffs in the 1970s
due to recession and de-industrialization. They were among the last hired, so they were among the first fired. For a
chart that displays the dizzying number of factions and splits from SDS in the late 60s and early 70s, see
https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/chart.pdf see also Elbaum.
Levy. Lastly and most importantly, my study is the first to chart, in a complex and extended discussion, how SDS followed a similar trajectory as Mills by moving from skeptically pro-labor to pessimistically believing organized labor fell under the spell of the corporate state and the rank-and-file under the spell of mass society.

Labor leaders and social democratic intellectuals who defended the Democratic Party after their insufficient response to racism and war received SDS’s condemnation (Lichtenstein *Walter Reuther* ...392-95). Even further, anyone who was happily absorbed in a mass consumerist and aggressively militaristic society that drifted far from its humanist ideals, received SDS’s condemnation. This is where many older working class and middle class citizens were situated and many people in SDS believed they could not be organized in such a way as to challenge this historically developed Cold War common sense—what Hayden recently called “the powerful paradigm we defied but could not defeat” (Hayden in Flacks and Lichtenstein, ed 26), the confrontations between these groups and the New Left only increased as the historical contradictions increased during the decade. This intensified until as Hayden says “a mood of paranoia took root in the New Left, in which it seemed that any notions of peaceful democratic transfers of power were illusory” (24). While Hayden correctly identifies this trend, he fails to see in his memoirs published over the last 50 years that the seeds of this trend were embedded in the early New Left rather than some radical break in 1966.

Rather than vilifying the “bad” radicals who destroyed an otherwise “pure” and “virtuous” movement, I uncover key strategic mistakes early in SDS’s history. These missteps were connected to the intellectual and cultural history the SDS drew from and a rejection of strategies that sought to build a base in the prosperous working class. SDS must be lauded for resisting the pull of post-WWII consumer conformity and uncritical Cold War anti-communism.
But their adoption of a moralism—which I will show they derived from Dewey and Mills—condemned the average working person. It relied on nostalgia for 18th and 19th century America grounded in the principles of artisan and agrarian individualistic autonomy and civic participation before industrialism destroyed that autonomy (Roediger *Wages of Whiteness*). This nostalgia created a holier-than-thou-morality that excluded important strategic actors that the New Right was all-to-happy to include in their struggle for hegemony.

That being said, simply stating that the New Left singularly rejected the working class as agents of change relies on an overly accusatory argument that borders on recrimination itself. A far sharper and fairer critique of the New Left must include an investigation of the cultural and intellectual foundations upon which they built their movement. It must also acknowledge that there were factions—often made invisible or made into strawmen in many memoirs and scholarly histories—in the New Left that disagreed with SDS’s rejection of the working class and sought a path of slowly educating, agitating, and organizing the working class (See footnote 11). Uncovering intellectual and cultural mentors, forgotten factions, and contentious debates that shaped SDS policy will help build a fairer investigation.

*Republicanism as the Language of Leadership*

To uncover the cultural and intellectual history of the New Left requires investigating the philosophical underpinnings of their movements. Recent scholarship proposes that the New Left and New Right were not all that new (Aronowitz *Taking it Big*; Hunt “How New Was the New Left” in McMillian, ed.; Jones; Mirowski). Scholars have pointed to the 1950s and especially the Cold War as the formative years for the New Left and the New Right (Isserman; Nash; Jones). On one hand, some scholars have pointed to the philosophical heritage of John Dewey’s moralistic pragmatism (Flacks in Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds), Christian existentialism
(Rossinow), Jewish radicalism (Gitlin), the pacifist movement (Isserman), or libertarian anarchism found in journals like *Liberation* (Mattson) as being influential to SDS. On the other hand, some scholars have pointed out the longer history of the New Right as well—especially the history of post-WWII European intellectual immigrants like Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises and their involvement in organizations like the Mont Pèlerin Society, which influenced young conservative activist intellectuals like William F. Buckley Jr. who headed the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists and later the *National Review* (Jones; Mirowski; Harvey). Certainly, there is much to be gained from this analysis, and what follows will deeply investigate this cultural and intellectual inheritance. But, what is still missing is an investigation of how an anti-New Deal ethos—especially one that was so rooted in a moralistic fear of bureaucracy and corruption—was able to become widely shared. How do we find the roots of the moralistic language that social movements in the 1960s attempted to use to tap into this deep seeded set of American values? In order to accomplish this, Gramsci’s insights into intellectual leadership will be invaluable. Key to his insight was his views on the language of leadership and the formation of a unifying common sense.

There is no such thing as pure ideas or pure political action in Gramsci’s formulation. And, this is the real political strength of his theory of hegemony. It is remarkably more open and more flexible than other Marxist or progressive theories. He was interested in studying how an individual’s ideology was synthetic, contradictory, instable, and never complete. Peoples’ belief systems were an amalgam of progressive elements often derived from their experience with exploitation, reactionary elements often derived from the residual popularity of former hegemonic projects, superstitious elements often from religion or regionalism, and sentimental
thoughts and feelings often from popular culture. His insight functions on the proposition that a politically identifiable coalition of people does not unify around a particular collective will randomly or by chance. Unity is constructed by class conscious intellectuals broadly defined (see chapter 3) acting as agents of a social movement with a clearly articulated class project that integrates people’s contradictory consciousness in a believable way to inspire collective political action.

He strongly argued that when an understanding of a crisis is brought to the masses through slow organizing, educating, and agitating in the cultural and political trenches of society to form a cross-class coalition that articulates a popular conception of moral, community-based citizenship, revolution will occur. He called this strategy a “war of position.” But, just as radical forces can organize and lead a counter-hegemonic project against the state, the same applies equally to reactionary forces organizing to protect the maintenance of social control and capital accumulation sometimes under a different political and cultural formation and sometimes under the name of the status quo. This he called “revolution-restoration.”

Much of the power of Gramsci’s analysis is that he focused on the messiness of human history. Gramsci focused on how factions seeking power fused together various popular theories, folklore, and cultural remnants in order to vie for cultural and political hegemony. While they must form a popular coalition through leadership to be successful in vying for hegemony, they need a popular language to facilitate that popularization, specifically a popular language derived from indigenous leaders who speak in an understandable vocabulary of the masses that connects to their deeply held superstitions, cultural values, and history. Gramsci called these leaders “organic intellectuals.” This language must tap into previous hegemonic projects in the country’s

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13 Green argues it was Gramsci study of linguistic and language acquisition that helped him develop this theory (“Subalternity and language”)
history to give it an aura of common sense as well as connect to the lived experience of masses of people in order to recruit coalitional members.

In the United States, the fear of subservience is a wellspring on which social movements vying for hegemony have drawn upon for over two centuries. The fear of aristocrats and plutocrats forcing average working people (especially white people) into slavery animates a wide array of American political rhetoric from the Declaration of Independence’s fear of “absolutism,” and “tyranny” to the movement for the eight hour work day organized by Knights of Labor in the late-19th century with their fear of “wage slavery,” to Roosevelt’s fear of “economic royalists” during the Great Depression, to the New Left’s fear of the “Power Elite,” to the New Right’s fear of “government bureaucrats” and “pointy headed intellectuals” telling you how to live your life. Fear of people at the top is often matched by a fear and enmity of people at the bottom who succumbed to being controlled (eg. the New Left’s “cheerful robot” or the New Right’s “welfare queens” or “illegals”). Historians since the 1970s have called this political rhetoric “republicanism,” by which they mean a tradition of western thought descended from Greco-Roman, Renaissance, and English sources: the neo-classical thinkers such as Machiavelli, English republicans like Milton, Harrington, Sidney, French thinkers such as Montesquieu, English Commonwealthmen such as Trenchard and Gordon, all of whom deeply influenced American revolutionary leaders Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams, among
others (Gordon; Rogers; Appleby).  

With its aversion to greed, republican values stress virtue through autonomy and civic participation (Arnesen 762-765; Wilentz), but at its core it is animated by fear of societal corruption and disorder due to a loss of self-determination. Historian Daniel Rogers, in his canonical article reviewing the historiography of republicanism lists “Americans fear of corruption, fear of the grasping, fatal effects of luxury, fear of their own inability to sustain the self-denying virtues on which a republic depended” all as animating the leaders of the American Revolution (15). Republicanism was such a part of the collective common sense of post-Revolution America that it took on the characteristics of what Eric Hobsbawn, a noted historian and neo-Gramscian, calls a “perpetually reinvented tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, ed.). Historian Gordon Woods details its influence not only on the Declaration of Independence, but on Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address (Wood). Labor historians Graham Cassano and Troy Rondinone go even further arguing “during periods when class struggle becomes impossible to ignore, working Americans often reinvent the republican tradition, draw upon the republican vocabulary, to make sense of their political and social world” (418). They trace the rhetoric of republicanism in Roosevelt’s inaugural speeches, Frank Capra’s movies, and the current anti-immigrant movement.

14 To avoid confusion, when I refer to Republicanism, I am referring to this classical philosophy. When I am referring to modern Republicans, I will say Republican Party. For more about classical republicanism see: Bernard Bailyn’s 1968 book *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, continuing through Bailyn’s student Gordon Woods and his book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* and reaching a high point in John Pocock’s groundbreaking study *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. The study of republicanism since the 1970s has, according to noteworthy historian Daniel Rogers, created “a conceptual transformation…a paradigm shift of Kuhnian scale and Kuhnian dynamics” in our understanding of American history (Rogers 11). He argues, during the twentieth century, American historiography saw three major paradigm shifts. First, the Beardian or Progressive paradigm seeing American history as organized around conflicts. Second, the Hartzian or Consensus paradigm, seeing American history as a balance of interests fused together by Lockeian liberalism. Lastly, the Republican paradigm described in this section. For more on these paradigms, see Rogers; Hulliung.
Bringing together historian’s insights into republicanism with Gramsci’s theoretical tools to explore how a fear of subservience and a loss of virtue and self-determination became a language of leadership to critique the New Deal will help evaluate how both the New Left and the New Right used the fear of subservience, the fear of corruption and luxury, and the fear of being crushed by bureaucracy to popularize their respective class projects. In other words, the New Right and the New Left tried to reinvent the republican tradition in order to build a popular movement to realign the New Deal coalition and vie for post-WWII hegemony. However, while both the New Left and the New Right used a republican vocabulary, the striking difference is that the New Left used this vocabulary to reject the working class as “cheerful robots” from their cross-class coalition and the New Right used the republican vocabulary to draw the working class—particularly the white working class—into their new cross-class coalition—using FDR’s very language of protecting the “common man.” Exploring these different strategies will help answer the question: what did the New Left not do to make their anti-New Deal criticism a popular common sense?

Isn’t Gramsci Dead?

One of the guiding threads of my project is to use the theoretical insights coming out of the recent renaissance in Gramscian scholarship and apply them to a better understanding the rise of the New Right in contrast to the failure of the New Left. The key to this history is a better understanding of Gramsci’s contribution to Marxist philosophy in general and hegemony theory in particular. Timothy Brennan, Peter Thomas, Fabio Frosini, James Martin, and Marcus Green’s recent research—along with Joseph Buttigieg’s ongoing project to completely translate Gramsci’s prison writings (as opposed to the selected and filtered translations that most Anglophone scholars have exclusively based their research upon prior to the late 1990s)—has
revitalized an arguably more accurate understanding of Gramsci’s complex view of hegemony 
(among many other concepts).

His recent renaissance is no surprise. Gramsci has come back to life several times since 
his death in 1937. Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), used 
Gramsci’s ideas to develop the PCI into the second largest party in Italy (Martin). After the 
Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968, several communist and socialist parties throughout used 
Gramsci’s ideas to develop what they referred to as Eurocommunism (Anderson). In the 1970s 
and 1980s, the British-New Left built not only a large faction of the emerging cultural studies 
field but also their political strategies based upon their reading of Gramsci (Hall “Gramsci and 
Us” and Policing the Crisis and The Hard Road to Renewal). Post-Marxists, popular especially 
in the United States, built a synthesis between Gramsci and several postmodern thinkers such as 
Foucault (Laclau and Mouffe; Omi and Winant; Said; cf. Meyerson and San Juan). However, in 
the late 1980s and 1990s, under the dominance of various postmodern theories and anarchist and 
autonomous political strategies, Gramsci fell into the margins of critical theory and political 
strategy, some going so far as to say we live in a post-hegemonic moment where as one book 
title boldly claims Gramsci is Dead (Day; Beasley-Murray; Lash).

But, Gramsci is never dead for long. Starting in the late 1990s, he has risen from the 
ashes once again inspiring revolutionary movements in Venezuela, Bolivia, Spain, Greece, and 
Great Britain to name only a few. Examples of his influence abound—especially in movements 
that are fighting neo-liberalism and austerity. After surviving another US-backed coup attempt 
and being elected in Venezuela for the third time, Hugo Chavez gave a detailed and academic 
speech focusing on the importance of Antonio Gramsci for “socialism for the 21 century” 
(Maira). The leftist vice-president of Bolivia, Álvaro García Linera—a sociology professor and
former Tupac Katari guerrilla leader, often invokes Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and civil society when talking about his party’s successful war of position strategy (Linera “Empate catastrófico y punto de bifurcation” and “Neo-liberalism and the New Socialism – Speech by Álvaro García Linera”). Stathis Kouvelakis, a central committee member of Syriza, the radical left party that recently democratically took power in Greece, argued they studied Gramsci ideas of organic crisis and war of position to formulate their strategy (“Greece: Phase One”). Even the BBC news anchor Paul Mason reporting on Syriza’s democratic victory argued “Among the party’s Greek veterans, there was a numb recognition that everything they had dreamed of in a lifetime of protest marches, strikes, petitions, study groups devoted to the writings of Antonio Gramsci, was about to come true” (Mason). Íñigo Errejón and Pablo Iglesias, leaders of Spain’s radical party Podemos, as well as leaders from the Indignados movement all completed their dissertations on Gramsci as well as neo-Gramscian philosopher Ernesto Lacalu (Hancox).

Not only radical political leaders are returning to Gramsci. Even Stuart Hall, a towering activist intellectual who started his career as a neo-Gramscian but drifted away from Gramsci towards postmodernism in the late 1980s (Larrain), in interviews with Sut Jhally shortly before his death, admitted regretting his drift (Jhally; Jeffries). He discussed the need not for a wholesale “return” but a “re-visiting” of the central questions Gramsci posed informed by the lessons learned feminism and postmodernism in the 70s and 80s. Moreover, towards the end of his life, the renowned postcolonial theorist Edward Said, who also started as a neo-Gramscian, made a comparable argument in interviews with David Barsamian (Said). Lastly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, the renowned third world feminist, rethinking some canonical essays she wrote in the 70s and 80s, argues for the need for feminism to leave post-structuralism and return to more strongly articulated anti-capitalism (“Under Western Eyes Revisited”). These scholars
join a growing list of noteworthy activist scholars from Terry Eagleton to Tony Negri to Susan Buck-Morss who have made similar arguments brought together in a recent collection *The Idea of Communism* edited by Douzinas and Zizek. Even the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, whose work inspires a significant percentage of the anti-Gramscian, post-hegemony scholarship, at the end of his life was in the middle of writing a book on Marx. This revelation, in part, prompted Slovoj Zizek to make a call to all radical philosophers who drifted in the 1980s and 90s: “Do not be afraid, join us, come back! You’ve had your anti-communist fun, and you are pardoned for it—time to get serious once again!” (*First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* 157).

This sea change is remarkable for someone who grew up in the 1980s. I came to college in the mid-1990s. According to the dominant theory at the time, we had reached “the end of history.” We were told by Reagan and Thatcher devotees, “there is no alternative.” Some theorists on the left went further and argued that any radical project that thought about a different world would necessarily end up promoting totalitarianism and gulags. By the 1990s, not even the left was animated by a vision of a better and more beautiful world, we could only count on “triangulating” Democrats as we watched the center move further and further right. We all had to temper our outlooks with pragmatism, realize nothing very much was to be hoped for, and go about our small projects that hoped only to “put a human face on capitalism.” This put us in a bind as David Harvey argues “A double blockage exists: the lack of an alternative vision prevents the formation of an oppositional movement, while the absence of such a movement precludes the articulation of an alternative” (“Organizing for the anti-capitalist transition”). Much of this retreat I argue has to do with the left’s misunderstanding of the 1960s. The anti-globalization, anti-war, Occupy Wall Street, and anti-neo-liberal/anti-austerity movements have revived a moribund left, but while we have growing enthusiasm and
excitement, we still do not have a clear historical understanding of the failure of left movements in the recent past.

In the 1983, Terry Eagleton wrote that owing to the disillusionment of 1968 “the student movement was flushed off the street and driven underground into discourse. It enemies . . . became coherent belief systems of any kind—in particular all forms of political theory and organization which sought to analyze, and act upon, the structures of society as a whole” (Literary Theory). Activist-intellectuals were trapped inside of this limbo for several decades searching for a new paradigm while reeling from defeat. But, by 2009, Zizek was able to respond by saying

The long night of the left is drawing to a close. The defeat, denunciations, and despair of the 1980s and 1990s, the triumphalist ‘end of history’, the unipolar world of American hegemony—all are fast becoming old news. . . If 1989 was inaugural year of the new world order, 2001 marked its decline, and the collapse of the banking system in 2008 marked the beginning of a full blown return to history. (The Idea of Communism)

It is wonderful to read Zizek’s enthusiasm, but to live up to his enthusiasm and “get serious once again” requires that left activist-scholars help solve the puzzle of why the largest radical organization in the second half of the twentieth century America failed. The 1960s—a decade that fills activists with inspiration and awe even today—is still largely misunderstood.

Outline of Chapters

If the realignment of the New Deal coalition was one of the central goals of the New Right and New Left, it is important to understand what the New Deal is more deeply. To do this requires understanding the complex history of American liberalism. Chapter one defines the
various types of liberalism and positions the New Deal as a type of reform liberalism. It will also further define republicanism and discuss its relation to liberalism and American social movement history. Lastly, it will build an understanding of Gramsci’s view of liberalism.

Once the larger historical definition of liberalism has been sorted out, chapter two focuses on the history of reform liberalism using Gramsci’s theoretical insights as a guide. It has long been argued that the New Left attempted to revive the reform liberal tradition of the Populist movement (SDS “America in the New Era”), but the implications of this inherited social movement history has rarely been examined. Social movements in the 19th century failed to develop an organizing strategy that could withstand containment and absorption into a liberal coalition. Put another way, they had limited strategies to organize against 19th century reform liberals (defined in ch 2) who successfully absorbed various center-left factions and hammered together a cross-class coalition into a vibrant social movement to contain the more radical factions seeking the end of all slavery at the conclusion of the Civil War—including wage slavery.

Chapter 3 discusses how Franklin D. Roosevelt became the most important leader of this reform liberal social movement. He carefully deployed a republican vocabulary with his use of phrases like “economic royalist” trying to consume the virtuous “common man,” while at the same time building a foundation for the continued success of capitalism. Using Gramsci’s insights, I will apply his analysis of the unification Italy to the United States in the post-Civil War era in order to better understand the intellectual and cultural history that the New Left adopted, which ultimately contributed to their failure to realign post-war liberalism.

In chapter 4-5, I develop an institutional, intellectual, and cultural history of the New Left. I locate SDS’s history not only institutionally in the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, the
League for Industrial Democracy (SDS parent organization), and the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SDS’s original name), but I locate its history intellectually by tracing the influence of its two most important philosophic mentors: Dewey and Mills. Lastly, I locate SDS’s history in the popular culture of the Beat movement and their bohemian non-conformity.

In chapter 6-7, I periodize SDS’s political trajectory through three important debates over strategy: the debates over the labor question in the early decade, the debates around the Education Research and Action Projects in the mid-decade, and the debates between PLP and Weathermen in the late decade.

In chapter 8, I review the New Right’s successful war of position strategy. I discuss the formation of Richard Nixon’s New Majority coalition, and his use of Charlton Heston as an organic intellectual to target and recruit “blue collar” in order to realign the New Deal coalition.
CHAPTER I. MILLS AND BUCKLEY CHAT ABOUT THE NEW DEAL OVER COFFEE

Even with the election of the first black president—heralded as one of the major fulfillments of the Civil Rights and the New Left movements¹—we still live in a cultural and political environment where the vision of what is possible is largely defined by the New Right movement. As historian Sean Wililez recently put it, we still live in the “age of Reagan” (*The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*). One defining feature of our present moment is an anti-New Deal, anti-welfare state consensus. Over time, this consensus has become what Gramsci describes as a “common sense”—to the point where even a dyed-in-the-wool New Deal liberal like Bill Moyer’s recently admitted “in our country today, the last thing most people want to be called—let alone politicians—is a liberal.”² Just half a century earlier, in contrast, Lionel Trilling famously said: “In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition. For it is the plain fact that nowadays there are no conservative or reactionary ideas in general circulation” (xv). Between great majorities of people calling themselves “liberals” and feeling confident they lived in a stable New Deal consensus to almost no major politician wishing to be associated with liberalism today, there is a story that needs further investigation. The road to that investigation must acknowledge the anti-New Deal organizing by social movements on both the right and the left in the 1950s and 1960s. In many ways, Reaganism was just the popularization of a rightwing anti-New Deal social movement that

¹ A wide array of Civil Rights and New Left leaders from Tom Hayden to Howard Zinn to Al Sharpton to Angela Davis to John Lewis to Julian Bond all hailed the 2008 election as one of the major fulfillments of the Civil Rights movement. Endorsing Obama Hayden wrote, “Many ordinary Americans will take a transformative step down the long road to the Rainbow Covenant if Obama wins” (“An Endorsement of the Movement Barack Obama Leads”). Additionally, the Southern Christian Leadership Council issued a press release on the date of Obama inauguration declaring that one of Dr. King’s dreams had been fulfilled.

² He first made this argument in a 2004-show titled “Defining Liberals,” where he argued “By the 1980s and 1990s, liberalism had lost favor, and left-leaning politicians reacted by avoiding the term; in recent years, the term ‘liberal’ has become a disparaging label. A CBS/New York Times poll . . . showed that ‘just 22 percent of respondents were willing to describe themselves as liberals, against 35 percent who described themselves as conservatives.’” The
had been building in post-WWII America. But that leaves the question unanswered, what happened to the anti-New Deal organizing from the left? If they were both organizing against the New Deal, why did the right’s movement become popular while the left’s did not?

One way of investigating this question is to imagine the activist intellectuals who inspired the New Left and the New Right sitting down for coffee. For many people today, it is difficult—if not impossible—to imagine C. Wright Mills and William Buckley Jr, (or the activists inspired by them) sitting down over coffee and finding anything to agree on peacefully. While it is true that they led politically oppositional movements, underneath the surface (and in hindsight), it is interesting to note that they would have had several points of agreement. They both, in their own way, were frustrated with the New Deal. The New Left inspired by Mills and the New Right inspired by Buckley were the culmination of an anti-New Deal consensus brewing since the 1940s on the left and the right.

While the New Left and the New Right critiqued the New Deal, how their leading intellectuals formulated their critiques, to whom they addressed their critiques, and their vision of a more perfect society differed greatly. As a result, their political strategy and thus their political success—measured by their ability to help form a “collective will” around a multidimensional “common sense”—differed greatly. Only the New Right was able to forge a new cross-class alliance (what Gramsci called a historical bloc) to realign the New Deal coalition and build a new hegemonic class project.

It is tempting to take the common view that the success of the New Right was the outcome of stupid, poor, and working class Americans (particularly white male blue collar Americans) “voting against their interest” (Franks; see Introduction). However, it is more

quote is from a 2012 show titled “Eric Alterman on Liberalism’s Past, Present and Future.”
informative to follow Gramsci (and neo-Gramscian theorists such as Stuart Hall and more recently Peter Thomas) and consider that voter re-alignment and the overall re-mapping of the political spectrum was a product of a conservative social movement with a more successful political strategy. In other words, the New Right did not have a “natural majority” (Hall *The Long Road to Renewal*), nor is “middle America” “essentially conservative” as is commonly asserted. In fact, the very concept of “middle America” was a creation of President Nixon’s advisor Dan Colson during the 1972 re-election campaign (Rider in Fraser and Gerstle, eds). The contemporary political positions a majority of white working class voters and “middle” Americans hold (as judged by their voting patterns) are a product of a carefully crafted “war of position” organized by New Right intellectuals like Buckley during the 1960s and 1970s. The imaginary coffee conversation among Mills and Buckley allows for an abstract analysis regarding the role of intellectuals in social change and particularly in the formulation of an anti-New Deal “common sense” that reins today in American politics. Additionally, it is beneficial to explore the surprising similarities in Mills and Buckley’s critiques of New Deal liberalism in order to isolate the differences. After establishing how both social movement leaders critiqued the New Deal, it is important to investigate the history of the New Deal and where it fits within the tangled web of America’s multiple liberalisms.

*The Common Enemy, Liberalism: Fighting Against ‘the Failure of Nerve’ in the 1950s*

Against the tradition of disinterested observation, Mills and Buckley Jr. each organized their life around a political and functional definition of the intellectual in service to a social movement that focused on organization and action. Mills saw the autonomous middle class intellectual being swallowed by the corporate leviathan, stripping him/her of their power of independent thought and democratic participation. In his famous “Letter to the New Left,” he
looked to the “young intelligentsia” as the principle agents who could stop the “main drift” towards the “managed integration of a corporate state.” At the same time, Buckley saw the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals being crushed under the growing bureaucracy of the New Deal welfare state. More than almost anyone, he took the recruitment of intellectual/organizers (particularly disaffected former Communist Party and Trotskyist leaders like Frank Meyer and Irving Kristol and traditional conservative intellectuals like F.A. Hayek and Russell Kirk) as the way to make connections between various factions within the bitterly divided post-WWII conservative movement.

Contrary to the view of many of his contemporaries, Gramsci saw “intellectual and moral leadership” that inspires the masses to take up political action in a class struggle as the prime mover of history. This is one way to read his famous quote that the Russian Revolution was “a revolution against Capital” because it relied on class-conscious struggle and human activity rather than strictly on the evolutionary development of the productive forces or the devolutionary tendency of capitalism in crisis. He argued “a philosophy is ‘historical’ in so far as it gets disseminated, in so far as it becomes the conception of reality of a social mass (‘with a conformant ethic’)” (Q10II§31i). He further claimed “Ideologies, rather, are the ‘true’ philosophy since they are then those philosophical ‘popularizations’ that lead the masses to concrete action, to the transformation of reality” (Q10II§3i). Ideas become true, not because they conform to some immutable law, but because they unify and motivate a critical mass of people to fight for “the transformation of reality.” At the same time that the leadership of the international communist movement were arguing that a revolution could not take place without the evolutionary development of particular structural conditions like productive forces (relatively free from human action), Gramsci argued, in opposition, that a revolution could not take place
without the long-term and calculated development of a particular praxis-oriented, revolutionary consciousness (Thomas *The Gramscian Moment* 406-437; Martin 39-65).

Mills and Buckley both argued that inspiring action in the masses was the key to changing society. They each sought a dramatic rupture from what they saw as the stagnant, passive political environment of the 1950s. They were not alone. Even an ardent New Deal supporter like historian Author Schlesinger, Jr., in his article for *Esquire* in 1960, "The New Mood in Politics," argued:

> . . . the mood which has dominated the nation for a decade is beginning to seem thin and irrelevant; that it no longer interprets our desires and needs as a people; that new forces, new energies, new values are straining for expression and for release. The Eisenhower epoch -- the present period of passivity and acquiescence in our national life -- is drawing to a natural end.”

Mills (and Buckley) wanted to lead the masses “out of apathy” and into action. Mills describes the political scene in American and Britain since the end of WWII limited by “smug conservatives, tired liberals and disillusioned radicals” where debate is “muted” and “the sickness of complacency has prevailed” (“Letter to the New Left”). He points to popular mid-century intellectuals like Daniel Bell with his “proclamation of the ‘end of ideology’” as a “slogan of complacency, circulating among the prematurely middle-aged, centered in the present, and in the rich Western societies.” Casting aside the left’s traditional focus on the working class as the agent of social change as an unneeded remnant of “Victorian Marxism,” he questions “Who is it that is getting disgusted with what Marx called ‘all the old crap’? and “Who is it that is thinking and acting in radical ways?” He answers emphatically “All over the world — in the bloc, outside the bloc and in between — the answer’s the same: it is the young intelligentsia.” He
claimed the “real live agencies of historic change” were the “students and young professionals.”

He predicted a time of movement and action based on critical thought. “The Age of
Complacency is ending. Let the old women complain wisely about ‘the end of ideology’. We
are beginning to move again.” This new agency was to be targeted at the bureaucracy and
corruption which led, to his way of thinking, to a loss of freedom and self-determination.

At the same time, both Mills and Buckley saw the cowardliness of post-WWII
intellectuals as a primary reason the New Deal was able to maintain its bureaucratic hold over
decisionmaking and solution building. Mills talks about an overwhelming “political failure of
nerve” among left intellectuals and politicians that leads to a “tragic sense of life” and a
paralyzing sense of “helplessness” not only among leftist intellectuals but also among the masses
(Power, People, and Politics 294). In the wake of this sense of paralysis—which disables the
participatory checks on the concentration of power—an “organized irresponsibility” becomes
“the leading feature of modern industrial societies everywhere” (295). Mills specifically
criticized New Deal Liberalism’s demobilization of the independent grassroots left and the
general loss of autonomy:

. . . the prewar years of liberalism-in-power [the New Deal] devitalized
independent liberal groups, drying up the grassroots, making older leaders
dependent upon the federal center and not training new leaders round the country.
The New Deal left no liberal organization to carry on any liberal programs, rather
than a new party, its instrument was a loose coalition inside an old one, which
quickly fell apart so far as liberal ideas are concerned ("Liberal Values . . .").

Likewise, (yet from a contrasting political position), Buckley argues:

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3 Sadly, this is a fairly typical sexist comment in activist circles in the mid-twentieth century meant to emasculate
Conservatives in this country — at least those who have not made their peace with the New Deal, and there is a serious question of whether there are others — are non-licensed nonconformists; and this is a dangerous business in a Liberal world. (“Publisher’s Statement”) He further claims when “radical conservatives” like him “are not being suppressed or mutilated by Liberals, they are being ignored or humiliated by a great many of those of the well-fed Right” (“Publisher’s Statement”). Mills’ and Buckley’s voluminous publishing and widespread public speaking provided many of the seeds of the anti-New Deal consensus.

Like Mills, Buckley sees the New Deal working as a containment of the individual’s freedom in an increasingly “centralized” and “statist” society. There is a remarkable similarity between Buckley’s criticisms of the post-war liberal consensus strangling the individual’s creative powers and Mills’ criticisms of post-war bureaucracy. Buckley even identifies some of the same adversaries as Mills—eg. unions and corporations. Buckley declares:

I will not willingly cede more power to anyone, not to the state, not to General Motors, not to the CIO. I will hoard my power like a miser, resisting every effort to drain it away from me. I will then use my power, as I see fit” (Original emphasis Up From Liberalism 219).

Around the same time, Mills writes a similar homage to individualism and freedom in an autobiographical essay titled, "On Who I Might Be and How I Got That Way." Writing to a persona he names Tovarich [Russian for comrade], he declares:

You've asked me, 'What might you be?' Now I answer you: 'I am a Wobbly.' . . . I take Wobbly to mean one thing: the opposite of bureaucrat . . . But do you know

Bell and other New York Intellectuals.
what a Wobbly is? It's a kind of spiritual condition. Don't be afraid of the word, Tovarich. A Wobbly is not only a man who takes orders from himself. He's also a man who's often in the situation where there are no regulations to fall back upon that he hasn't made up himself (*Letters to Tovarich*).

Autonomy, self-determination, civic virtue in defiance of bureaucracy, corruption, and totalitarianism help summarize Mills and Buckley’s criticisms of the New Deal and signaled shared libertarian beliefs.

*The Fear of Bureaucracy and Subservience Verses Decentralization and Autonomy: The Agrarian and Artisan Ideal*

Mills and Buckley’s fears of a loss of freedom can be best understood within the framework of republicanism discussed in the introduction, particularly when synthesized with Gramsci’s insights on the fragmented, synthetic nature of common sense that gets sutured together through intellectual leadership in order to popularize their movements. As historians Graham Cassano and Troy Rondinone note at different points in America, “different social groups and different classes utilize this [republican] rhetoric for far different purposes” (418). In this way, they claim that republicanism “becomes an arena of class struggle” (420). Cassano and Rondinone’s insight becomes deeply important when considering the battle to realign post-WWII liberalism between the New Right and the New Left from a Gramsci perspective. Through the intellectual influence of Dewey and Mills, the New Left drew upon a fear of bureaucracy strangling a 19th century agrarian-artisan radicalism that they thought upheld autonomy, “participatory democracy,” and “civic virtue.” At the same time, through the intellectual influence of F.A Hayek and William Buckley Jr., the New Right drew upon a fear of bureaucracy strangling a laissez faire radicalism that promised autonomy and freedom in the market place for the individual. As the introduction stated, Republicanism is animated by a fear
of virtuous individuals becoming subservient to the unvirtuous both above them and below them. It directs its anger not at the capitalist system, but rather at unvirtuous bad actors—both those dominating and those who have surrendered to domination—who disrupt an otherwise functioning system through their greed and corruption.

For the New Left, the “bad actors” at the top are who Mills called the “power elite.” The power elite include several subgroups. First he includes the liberal politicians and intellectuals who sold their soul to the corporations and the military (Mills *The Power Elite*; Hayden *Inspiring…*). Second he points out the dominated are who Mills called the “cheerful robots.” And finally he mentions average working people who abandoned militancy in favor of rising standards of living in consumerist prosperity; they were also irredeemably lost in racism and imperialism. Mills, defines the “power elite” as an interlocking yet not interdependent set of corporate leaders, high rank military officers, politicians, and cultural celebrities which dominate the “ordinary men.” His book by the same name details this domination in bleak prose right from the opening page:

> THE powers of ordinary men are circumscribed by the everyday worlds in which they live, yet even in these rounds of job, family, and neighborhood they often seem driven by forces they can neither understand nor govern. 'Great changes' are beyond their control, but affect their conduct and outlook none the less. The very framework of modern society confines them to projects not their own, but from every side, such changes now press upon the men and women of the mass society, who accordingly feel that they are without purpose in an epoch in which they are without power. (*Power Elite* 3)

Under the influence of the New Deal and the Cold War, the loss of autonomy and self-
determination was nearly complete for the average working person, to Mills’ way of thinking.

This fear of subservience to masters has a deep history in America. Several Workmen Parties and the Knights of Labor from the early to late 19th used republican rhetoric. Workingmen’s Party of New York leader Thomas Skidmore argued,

For he, in all countries is a slave, who must work more for another than that other must work for him. It does not matter how this state of things is brought about; whether the sword of victory hew down the liberty of the captive, and thus compel him to labour for his conqueror, or whether the sword of want extort our consent, as it were, to a voluntary slavery, through a denial to us of the materials of nature…”

Working Men’s Party of Philadelphia leader William Heighton argued in 1828 “an iron chain of bondage” was suffocating them “by which the most useful classes of society are drained of their wealth, and consigned over to eternal toil and never-ending slavery.” But, what about the people on the bottom who willingly turn themselves into slaves?

The New Left adopted the phrase “cheerful robot” along with radical philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s “one dimensional man” to designate the declining militancy of the working class—particularly the white male working class—due to their increasing satisfaction with the material incentives of post-WWII capitalism and the increasing “mass society” of distraction and titillation.

We know that men can be turned into robots - by chemical means, by physical coercion, as in concentration camps and so on. But we are now confronting a situation more serious than that - a situation in which there are developed human beings who are cheerfully and willingly turning themselves into robots. (Politics
Mills bemoans the loss of autonomy that 19th century farmers and artisan once had due to the centralization of power into corporations facilitated by the power elite. He argued:

The nineteenth-century farmer and businessman were generally thought to be stalwart individuals--their own men, men who could quickly grow to be almost as big as anyone else. The twentieth-century white-collar man has never been independent as the farmer used to be, nor as hopeful of the main chance as the businessman. He is always somebody's man, the corporation's, the government's, the army's; and he is seen as the man who does not rise. (*White Collar* xii)

This is even true in the professional world:

In the established professions, the doctor, lawyer, engineer, once was free and named on his own shingle; in the new white-collar world, the salaried specialists of the clinic, the junior partners in the law factory, the captive engineers of the corporation have begun to challenge free professional leadership. (*White Collar* x)

His writing contains nostalgia that represents the 19th century as more autonomous and thus freer. It is also revealingly gendered reading of the 19th century when “men were men” instead of the twentieth century where we see the “decline of the independent individual and the rise of the little man” (*White Collar* xii). The epigraph in Mills study *White Collar* quotes Fabian socialist R.H. Tawney:

Whatever the future may contain the past has shown no more excellent social order than that in which the mass of people were the masters of the holdings which they plowed [Jeffersonian yeoman farmers] and of the tools with which
they worked [Jacksonian artisans]… (1).

He wished to use thinkers from the republican tradition as a weapon against the power elite. In a letter to his parents, he wrote: “I am learning American history in order to quote it at the sons of bitches who run American Big Business. After all, who can deny Patrick Henry or Tommie Jefferson?” (Letters and Autobiographical Writings 50).

For the New Right, there were many “bad actors.” They blamed people on top pressing people into subservience and the liberal politicians and intellectuals who profited off a bloated welfare-state bureaucracy. They also claimed poor recipients of state relief programs (particularly people of color and recent immigrants) and anyone (especially the leftists) who coddled them along allowing themselves to be dominated and thus were part of the problem. In fact, anyone who did not maintain a hawkish, anti-communist, Cold War posture was accused of subservience. For the New Right, these “parasites” fed off of good, honest hard working people and lost their self-reliance. Sounding a similar alarm as Mills against domination, Buckley famously stated in his “mission statement” for the first issue of National Review in 1955:

For we offer, besides ourselves, a position that has not grown old under the weight of a gigantic, parasitic bureaucracy, a position untempered by the doctoral dissertations of a generation of Ph.D’s in social architecture, unattenuated by a thousand vulgar promises to a thousand different pressure groups, uncorroded by a cynical contempt for human freedom.

Like Mills, Buckley sees New Deal liberalism working as a containment of the individual’s freedom in an increasingly centralized and bureaucratic society that robs the individual of his or her autonomy and self-determination. Buckley drew on the longer Jeffersonian anti-state libertarian tradition revived by the publication of F.A. Hayak’s Road to Serfdom. Dedicating his
book to “socialists of all parties,” Hayak, acting as a leader of the burgeoning New Right movement, urged disillusioned liberals, conservatives, and former communists to see the tenets of the New Deal such as state-centered planning, state-intervention through redistribution, and, state-centered welfare as a containment on individual liberty; instead, he claimed individual liberty was best protected by an unregulated free market. He bluntly stated: “But when economic power is centralized as an instrument of political power it creates a degree of dependence scarcely distinguishable from slavery.” Using popular republican language, he equated bureaucracy with subservience.

But, while the criticisms of the New Deal and the republican rhetoric were similar between the New Left and the New Right, their strategies about how to popularize an anti-New Deal coalition was not. They had very different thoughts about who the actors were and who the agents of change were. This noteworthy difference has been under-analyzed and under-evaluated in most studies. Rather than relying on essentialist narratives of working people being naturally conservative, it is vital to explore the limitations of the New Left as a failure of strategy rather than the fulfilment of some conservative “destiny.” In order to trace the roots of this failure, one must dig deeper in American history and understand how the inability for the left to build a popular post-liberal common sense among the masses in the 1960s is a problem that is rooted not only in the founding of SDS, but ultimately in the 19th century. The New Left inherited (from the 1940s and 50s dissident radicals) a burgeoning movement that was critical of the New Deal, exemplified by John Dewey and C Wright Mills.⁴ They shared a penchant for a vague republican-based moralism that castigated people who had become subservient to greed and

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⁴For John Dewey’s influence on SDS, see Rinn; Flacks in Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds. For Dewey’s influence on Mills, see Mills’ dissertation “A Sociological Account of Pragmatism: An Essay on the Sociology of Knowledge.” For SDS being influenced by republicanism through Dewey and Mills, see Miller 13-14; Mattson 16-17.
corruption. Like Mills, the SDS thought that the working people who had benefited from post-WWII prosperity did so to the detriment of their own autonomy—an autonomy once cherished by Americans before industrialization and the incorporation of America (Roediger and Foner; Trachtenberg). Also, like Mills, SDS thought autonomy was lost in the modern corporate industrial world mired in appeasement to racists, hyper-consumerism, and Cold War anti-communism. As will be discussed in Ch 4, they looked backwards to the 19th century and hoped for a radical realignment of the New Deal coalition along the lines of the Populists (SDS “American and the New Era”), but without a clear understanding of labor history (Hayden Inspiring…; Miller; Sale; Gitlin), SDS repeated many of the mistakes the Populists made along with many of the mistakes of the Old Left Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). The history of these mistakes will be covered in depth in chapters 2 and 3.

Several unexplored questions remain, if the SDS’s hope was to realign the New Deal coalition towards a more radical future, and they thought that working people were irredeemably lost, who was going to be the agent of realignment? This strategic blind spot goes a long way towards understanding the trajectory of the 1960’s New Left.

To what degree did the total failure of the New Left’s realignment strategy (to revive 19th century radicalism based upon republican principles) have an impact on the way they thought about the problem of agency? Once they believed that the majority of Americans had been irreparably corrupted by an immoral mass society, to what degree did they fall into a deep collective frustration that dangerously combined with a feeling of urgency that time was running out? Did they feel that the truly moral agents (namely themselves) must act now for the good of humanity? Any strategy based upon this foundation would limit their analysis, consume them in nostalgia, justify their rejection of the working class, and justify increasingly apocalyptic
solutions like the underground activism discussed by Rudd in the introduction. Rather than seeing two SDSs—an early good SDS and a late ultra-left bad SDS, as many memoirs do (Gitlin *The Sixties*...; Miller; Hayden *Reunion* and *Inspiring*...), is it possible to locate an organic connection between the moralistic rejection of the working class in the early years and the increasingly apocalyptic strategies in the later years as their frustration and disappointments with post-WWII New Deal intensified?

In order to sort out how SDS failed to popularize their critique of the New Deal, it is first critical to gain a better understanding of the New Deal. If New Dealers are “liberals,” where does the New Deal fall in the tangled web of American liberalisms? Why did it rely on top-down bureaucratic solutions? This is a much more difficult question to answer than at first glance. In fact, liberalism in America is a slipperier signifier than most admit, leading to what historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. calls “semantic confusion” (*The Politics of Hope*) and what historian William Connolly refers to as an “essentially contested concept” (“The Terms of Political Discourse”). The problem of rigorously defining liberalism in the United States becomes clearer when one considers that the American Revolution and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Grover Cleveland and Lyndon Johnson, Tom Paine and Herbert Hoover, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Citizen’s United Supreme Court decision, F.A. Hayek and Franklin D. Roosevelt, have all called themselves or been called “liberal.”

*A Brief Typology of American Liberalism*

Liberalism, in the United States these days, is often portrayed as the farthest expression of left politics. This is how President Barak Obama can be so persistently labeled a socialist, or how President George Bush could say when debating John Kerry in the 2004 campaign “You know, there's a mainstream in American politics and you sit right on the far left bank” (“Bush,
Kerry Domestic Policy Debate 2003”). However, liberalism has its roots in the French Revolution (Wallerstein) taking as its mission to slow the potential of radicalism—the Jacobins specifically—while also providing opposition to conservatism—feudal restorationism (Robin). That is not the story commonly told about the development of liberalism in the 17 and 18th centuries. It is often told in a heroic narrative about the rise of modernity and the “emancipation of man” from absolutist tyranny and the deconstruction of fixed divine and/or royal hierarchies. Modernity and the promise of emancipation under liberalism created what some of the founding American revolutionaries worried about as “the contagion of liberty” (Bailyn 230; Roediger How Race…30). Certainly, from the point of view of slave-holders, not all hierarchies could be deconstructed. People’s dreams of freedom needed to be contained in a system that deconstructed some hierarchies, maintained others, while constructing new ones. Recovering this history from people who wish only to celebrate liberalism as the defeat of feudalism is why Gramsci is so valuable. Few philosophers understood liberalism as containment better than him.

When historians celebrate American liberalism, they are often celebrating a favorable reading of John Locke (Hartz; Schlesinger, Jr.; Hofstadter). Locke was one of the most important philosophers justifying the breakdown of the fixed feudal hierarchy of God, king, clergy, lords, commoners, and peasants—sometimes referred to as the divine chain of being. Locke takes as his central imperative the liberation of the free and equal individual from arbitrary domination so that he or she (but in Locke’s time it would have most certainly been he) may exercise their rational self-interest (Two Treatises on Government). He advocated the rule of law under a social contract arbitrated by a constitution. The consent of the governed legitimates the social contract rather than some divine or hereditary authoritarianism. Locke goes so far as to say “Freedom from Absolute, Arbitrary Power, is so necessary to, and closely joined with a Man’s
An individual’s clearest path to exercise their freewill and escape subservience is through property ownership (Locke *Two Treatises on Government*). An individual’s ownership of their body (possessive individualism) and their labor (free labor) in conjunction with land ownership (what Locke refers to as “life, liberty, and estates” or what the U.S. constitution refers to as “life, liberty, and property”) is the hallmark of autonomy, which—for the American revolutionists—was the definition of freedom from subservience. But, while this is a popular view, it is a rather narrow view of liberalism.

In the United States, when one mentions the words “liberal” and “conservative,” historian and New Deal partisan, Arthur Schlesinger, argues one “immediately raises questions of definition.” Partly, because there was not a deep and long history of aristocratic feudalism in
America; partly because there has only very rarely been popular socialist movements; partly because there was not a popular, organized true conservative party advocating for the return of the monarchy as there was in France; and partly because for most of the twentieth century historians defined American liberalism in a framework focused solely on John Locke instead of

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5 Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat traveling in the U.S. in the 1830s, famously observed “An aristocracy seldom yields without a protracted struggle, in the course of which implacable animosities are kindled between the different classes of society. These passions survive the victory, and traces of them may be observed in the midst of the democratic confusion which ensues . . . The great advantage of the Americans is that they have arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution; and that they are born equal, instead of becoming so.” Despite traveling in Jacksonian America—a time rife with conflict and economic transformation—de Tocqueville still saw a surprising amount of consensus compared to his native France. As a consequence of not having a long feudal tradition, de Tocqueville argued that America lacked both an established aristocratic class that was the center of counter-revolutionary reaction but also a radical left class that fought for socialism. Only in Europe with its long history of feudalism and revolutionary class struggle, did these extremes on the right and left develop. America was instead an exceptional country for its relative absence of conflict and it unity around a developing capitalism. The two most important historians of 20th century American liberalism, Louis Hartz and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr follow de Tocqueville’s line of reasoning. Schlesinger for example argues “The absence of a feudal tradition, of course, has gravely affected the character of American ‘conservatism.’ It has deprived American conservatism of the instinct to be responsible as well as the instinct to kill, of both decorum and of terror, reducing it, on the whole, to expressions — or, rather, ejaculations — of individual or class self-interest. In recent years a school of New Conservatives has sought to rehabilitate the tradition of American conservatism. But, since many of the New Conservatives take positions on immediate issues which are closer to the views of American liberals than of American conservatives, the semantic confusion has only been compounded.” Hartz agrees but takes it from another angle. Starting with a unique reading of Trotsky’s concept of uneven and combine development, Hartz expands de Tocqueville’s analysis of American exceptionalism. When thinking about American liberalism, he argues “We are confronted, as it were, with a kind of inverted Trotskyite law of combined development, American skipping the feudal stage of history as Russia presumably skipped the liberal stage” (3). He claims that the most determining feature of a “non-feudal society” like America is its lack of “a genuinely revolutionary tradition.” At the same time, it lacks a “tradition of reaction” as well. Hartz insists “… lacking a Robespierre it lacks [Joseph-Marie] Maistre, lacking [Algernon] Sydney it lacks [King] Charles II.”

6 In 1906, Werner Sombart, a German economist and sociologist, famously put the question succinctly using de Tocqueville’s framework “Why is there no socialism in the United States?” He concluded that due to the fact that the US had no feudal tradition to overcome, it had no opportunity to forge a traditional sense of class consciousness. This, added to opportunities including abundant resources, mobility through westward expansion, and “functioning liberal democratic institutions” to resolve class-based grievances, Sombart concluded there was no need for radical parties. Much of historian David Roediger’s work has tried to answer the same question in the 1990s and 2000s. For the most resent discussion of the absence of a socialist tradition in the U.S., see Fraser.

7 For a discussion of America not having a popular movement of people loyal to the monarchy and how that effected conservative thought, see Kirk. For a discussion of feudalism in America and its impact on conservative movements, see Robin.
vast array conflicting political ideologies,\textsuperscript{8}—liberalism in the United States is a confusing tangle of poorly understood belief systems and political practices. What is needed is a brief typology to help sort out the mess.

Using a typology inspired by historian James Young, American liberalism can be categorized into three “currents.” This typology will only serve as a brief introduction to currents that will be developed more thoroughly throughout this dissertation. It is specifically meant to locate the New Deal inside the vast array of different articulations of liberalism alive in American history in order to help the reader pinpoint SDS’s criticism more specifically. The basic purpose of this typology is not to overwhelm the reader with definitions; instead it highlights the historical emergence of New Deal liberalism as a political strategy of containment rather than it’s more popular reading as “the savior of the common man” in the aftermath of the Great Depression (Schlesinger \textit{The Coming of the New Deal} and \textit{The Vital Center}).

\textsuperscript{8} Historian Louis Hartz is largely responsible for focusing the discussion of American liberalism solely on John Locke. What came to be known as his “single factor thesis”—that American liberalism was solely Lockeian—enjoyed the widest circulation and praise. In fact, his book \textit{The Liberal Tradition in America} had a scholarly dominance that few books have ever enjoyed in American historiography (Hulliung). His argument states, descending from Great Britain, Lockean liberalism took root in America during the eighteenth century as a powerful revolution against feudal political structures and social relations. Louis Hartz argues a similar point but places it in an American context “Locke dominates American political thought, as no thinker anywhere dominates the political thoughts of a nation. Hartz was just the most cited of the Consensus Historians, mid-century intellectuals believing the American history can be best understood through a framework of consensus rather than a framework of conflict typical to Charles Beard and other Progressive historians. For example, in \textit{The American Political Tradition}, famed historian Richard Hofstadter argues: “However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions [in the US] have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalism as necessary qualities of man” (viii). This has produced a culture where, as he states, the “ideology of self-help, free enterprise, competition, and beneficent cupidty” are shared to such a level that consensus overrides conflict. He is a massive national cliche” (140). Locke’s importance to the story of American liberalism cannot be underestimated. Even Karl Marx argued “Locke’s view is all the more important because it was the classical expression of bourgeois society’s ideas of right as against feudal society, and moreover his philosophy served as the basis for all the ideas of the whole of subsequent English political economy” (“Theories of Surplus Value”). Not only was Locke philosophically invested in America’s success, he was financially invested more deeply than is commonly known. As historian David Roediger states “It was in the context of his successful investments in slave trading and colonization that Locke became a Carolina ‘landgrave,’ and attended some 372 meetings of the Board of Trade and Plantations after also serving as secretary of the earlier Council of Trade and Plantations” (10-11). He was also one of the authors of the “Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina.” Scholarly works that list John Locke as the “father of American liberalism” are...
The first current of liberalism is the laissez faire current. This current draws its philosophic roots from Adam Smith. Today, it is popularly associated with Milton Friedman and Ronald Reagan. It rests on the assumption that if free and equal individuals were allowed to develop their rational self-interest and cupidity with minimal interference from the government, the “hidden hand” of the market and dispassionate economic laws such as “supply and demand” will find a natural social equilibrium. In the American context, Smith’s ideas are often articulated with social Darwinism, a theory developed by wealthy industrialist in the late 19th century through their promotion of Herbert Spencer’s ideas. Spencer, who coined the term “survival of the fittest,” was influenced much more by philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Thomas Malthus than Charles Darwin. Social Darwinism claims that only the most perfect members of society should excel, prosper, and lead (Robin The Reactionary Mind). Society is not governed by a social contract that seeks to protect the common good, but much more by atomistic, acquisitive individualism that seeks self-reward. This view was most famously underscored by Margaret Thatcher with her comment, “There is no such thing” as society. She states:

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand ‘I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!’ or ‘I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!’ ‘I am homeless, the Government must house me!’ and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a

numerous: see Hartz; Manent; Merquior; Young; Kramnick; Foner The Story…; Appleby “Republican and
reciprocal business and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations.⁹

The laissez faire current has strong connections to libertarianism. This point will be explored in chapter 8 while discussing William Buckley, Jr., Charlton Heston, and the rise of the New Right.

The second current of American liberalism is reform liberalism. Reform liberalism draws its philosophic roots historically from the writings of John Stewart Mill and turn-of-the-20th-century American reformers like Jane Addams and John Dewey who were interested in a negotiated settlement of the economic crises of the late 19th century that avoided the radical solutions being proposed by the Knights of Labor and other growing anti-capitalist organizations (this will be developed at length in chapter 2). They believed that the rapacious greed of the 19th century “robber barons” like industrialist David Rockefeller or the vast income inequality in the Hoover-era of the 1920s had invoked a crisis of authority among working and poor people that could spread to anti-capitalist solutions. What was needed was a reform of laissez faire liberalism that contained the “contagion of liberty” and maintained capital accumulation and social control.

While it developed in the late 19th century and through the Progressive era at the turn of the 20th century, reform liberalism is most commonly associated with the early New Deal (1933-1937) and certain small factions of the post-WWII Democratic Party—particularly aspects of Kennedy’s New Frontier and especially Johnson’s Great Society. Historian Alan Brinkley argues that reform liberals “distinguished themselves from laissez-faire liberals” by their belief in “the need to protect individuals, communities, and the government itself from excessive corporate

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⁹ Interview for *Woman's Own* ("No such thing as society") with journalist Douglas Keay. Margaret Thatcher Foundation. 23 September 1987.
power; the need to ensure the citizenry a basic level of subsistence and dignity, usually through
some form of state intervention” (End of Reform 9). Reform liberalism still assumes the free and
equal individual operates under a social contract as the foundation of society and still wishes for
him/her to exercise their rational self-interest in a free market, but it also believes that there
needs to be much more active intervention from the government in order to regulate the tendency
of self-interest and cupidity to lead to greed and inequality. In the American context, reform
liberalism borrows the language and some of the values of republicanism in order to assimilate
dissident movements into their class project. This will be explored deeply in chapter 3 chapter in
relation to FDR. It has been argued that with the death of Senator Ted Kennedy, the last of the
reform liberals passed from the political scene in American life. While there is some truth in this
position, it is hyperbolic. There are small streams of reform liberalism still running through the
Democratic Party, but there should be no question that the project of the post-60s Republican
Party has been to undo all reforms enacted by post-WWII reform liberalism—often aided an
abided by post-60s Democrats, sometimes referred to as New Democrats organized under the
Democratic Leadership Council. I argue that this pattern of rightward drift through a coalition
that seeks to contain radical movements and assimilate many of their main intellectuals was a
pattern that can be traced to the 19th century (see chapter 2).

The third is the current of corporate liberalism. Corporate liberalism is a term coined by
the New Left, first in the pages of one of the New Left’s most important journals, Studies on the
Left. It was originally coined by Martin Sklar, a student of historian William Appleman Williams
and follower of C. Wright Mills. Corporate liberalism became a highly important analytical
concept and term of derision in the New Left and has since been used by numerous historians
and political scientists.\textsuperscript{10} Using the corporate liberalism thesis, historians divide the New Deal era into the early and the later New Deal. The early New Deal was influenced by republicanism inherited from Progressive-era radicalism and saw a surprising collaboration between radicals and reform liberals (Brinkley). The later New Deal was influenced by the 1937 recession, the rise of corporate interests in policy making, the recovery brought on by the manufacturing increases due to WWII, and the sharp increase of post-war consumerism. Recent historians have commented on the fact that Roosevelt did not follow the Progressive-era pattern of raging against corporate greed from a religious and anti-corporate position very long. He did not continue the initial impulses toward social justice embedded in his administration’s first responses to the Great Depression instead he focused on immediate aid to the vulnerable based upon solidarity and what many scholars call “social Keynesianism” (Fraser and Gerstle ix-xxv). Instead, historian Jefferson Cowie argues the post-37 period marked a fundamental shift in the Democratic Party’s vision away from the chaotic stream of populist rhetoric, progressive pragmatism, antimonopoly politics, and radical flirtations that had defined it since the nineteenth century. Although those earlier ideas continued to have their adherents, the bedrock legislation of the early New Deal signaled a turn away from antimonopoly positions to the acceptance and regulation of the modern corporation” (“The Long Exception. . .” 8).

Brinkley agrees. Brinkley contends that the sharp double dip recession of 1937 and WWII smothered the Roosevelt administration’s commitment to reform liberalism. Roosevelt had

always been divided between social reformers and corporate interests. The sharp decrease in economic recovery in 1937 (throwing the US into a serious double dip recession) made Roosevelt even more hesitant about spending money on social reform. More importantly, it emboldened the corporate advocates to campaign successfully for their consumer-driven economic solutions (Brinkley *End of Reform*). The post-1937 New Deal purged itself of social justice aspirations and reconciled itself with the militaristic and consumerist impulses of corporate America, as “a world in which large-scale bureaucracies were becoming ever more dominant and in which it was becoming increasingly difficult to imagine an alternative to them.” Post-1937 liberalism did not challenge, and in many ways aided, the “existing structure of corporate capitalism.”

It is corporate liberalism that the New Left critiques and the New Right wants to see purged of any trace of reform liberalism in order to champion their vision of free market fundamentalism. Scholars have begun to call this type of liberalism, “neo-liberalism” (Harvey; Stein; Jones; Mirowski). This typology is important for two reasons: first, it starts to introduce the reader to a different interpretation of liberalism—one that sees it as a political strategy of containment rather than the emancipation of man. Second, it locates the main political ideology SDS was critiquing in its historical emergence out of social struggles. This will be discussed at length in chapter 2. After examining the push and pull of different liberal ideologies in the United States it becomes clear that liberalism is a battleground that social movements have tried to rearticulate since the American Revolution. If America is a battleground, then it is important to understand the battle terrain better.
Republican Common Sense and the Battle Ground of American Liberalism

Louis Hartz, said in his canonical 1955 study, “Ironically, ‘liberalism’ is a stranger in the land of its greatest realization and fulfillment.” Despite how much present day conservatives declare their hatred of liberalism, as one of the fathers of the modern “conservative” movement admitted, they are all liberals (Hayak “Why I Am Not a Conservative”). Most political struggles in the U.S. look like what contemporary intellectual historian Tim Lacy calls “an intramural contest within liberalism.” Rather than the typical schematic that sees conservatives and socialists as providing an other-than-liberal political option, with few exceptions, the intramural contest is over “shades of American liberalism,” Lacy argues “not a rejection of the larger project of liberalism.” If we are to understand why certain definitions of liberalism formulated by social movement intellectuals organize enough people to become hegemonic at particular conjunctures in American history, (and why social movements that think beyond liberalism have had such a difficult time becoming popular) we must go beyond the war of ideas framework common in traditional intellectual history and understand how Gramsci viewed liberalism as a class project of containment, particularly during times of “organic crisis.” Containment is the central political tool used by hegemonic coalitions wishing to blunt the cutting edge of radical counter-hegemonic movements coming out of the sharp class struggles of the long 19th century.

Gramsci called a class project of containment, a “passive revolution.” Gramsci uses the term “organic crisis” to mean something more than just the periodic economic crises that always befall capitalism. Organic crisis refers to a time when the bourgeois’ integral state enters into a profound “crisis of authority,” where the bourgeoisie’s universalistic claims of promoting the common good are placed into question, and the working and poor classes no longer see themselves absorbed into the bourgeoisie’s universalizing project. It is a political crisis, where
the masses start to imagine a world without capitalism and therefore imagine a world without the bourgeoisie. Reconstruction, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights and New Left movements in the 1960s, and the stagflation crisis in the 1970s all represent organic crises punctuated by severe crises of authority. The operational goal of activist intellectuals wishing to use these organic crises to propel their faction into leadership of the class project was very similar—restoring the conditions of capital accumulation and social control favorable to the emerging fraction of the capitalist class after overcoming the crisis of authority by containing and/or absorbing the radical factions. Both passive revolution and organic crisis will be discussed at length in chapter 2 and 3.

The imagined conversation between Mills and Buckley throughout this chapter and the brief typology of liberalism was not intended to be a pedantic exercise or a piece of counterfactual history. Reviewing this history articulates how the battle over which social movements would be able to build a popular coalition in the 1960s around an anti-New Deal common sense serves as the important staging ground for the rise of Ronald Reagan and Reaganism in the 1980s. Without this, it is easy to view the decline of the New Left as a foregone conclusion and Reaganism as the product of a natural majority in the working class.

In order to understand the deeper cultural and intellectual roots of the New Left and the New Right critique of the New Deal, the next chapter will first review the history of 19th century liberalism and republicanism using Gramsci’s theories to aid the investigation. In order to understand the increasing levels of frustration in the post-war period and how that frustration was mobilized, I will review how Gramsci revised several analytic components of Marxist hegemony theory so that he could better understand the failure of the 19th century unification of Italy, called “Il Risorgimento.” Those concepts will then be applied to the United States with particular focus on the organic crisis of the late 19th century and the New Deal as a passive revolution. In
chapter 3, I will then narrow my focus in to the American context and survey the emergence of “reform liberalism” in the late 19th century and its apotheosis in the New Deal that was hegemonic from 1933 until the late 1960s.
CHAPTER II. THE AMERICAN RISORGIMENTO: THE CREATION OF A BASTARD STATE

Wandering between two worlds, one dead
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
-Matthew Arnold

When considering the gap between the potential for freedom in America and the reality of oppression and inequality for the great masses, it is Gramsci’s understanding of liberalism that reveals useful theoretical tools to understand the class project developed to contain radical movements especially after the Civil War in the United States. His study of the Italian Risorgimento—a movement in Italy in the mid-19th century that fought to unify the various kingdoms into the “Kingdom of Italy” in 1861—is particularly useful (Gramsci SPN 44-122). In “Notes on Italian History,” Gramsci explores the influence of the French Revolution in relation to Italy’s national unification. He considers what the ramifications were that the Risorgimento lacked a clear popular movement that unified poor and working people like the Jacobin movement in France. Did that contribute, he thought, to the underdevelopment of certain regions in Italy—specially the south? What degree did race contribute to this underdevelopment? To what degree did the wealthy northern industrialists in Milan and Genoa reinforce and exploit the disunity between the poor and working people? Did those industrialists take advantage of regional splits between the north and south to benefit their own corporate interests while pretending to usher in a universally beneficial national unification? Rather than a popularly unified country that benefited all, Gramsci called the Risorgimento the creation of the “bastard state.”

To answer these questions, Gramsci developed his theory of the passive revolution,

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1 Matthew Arnold’s poem "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" quoted by Gramsci in the Prison Notebooks.
which was introduced in the above chapter but will be elaborated upon at length below. Gramsci focused on how industrial interests used a political strategy to fracture the poor and working class along cultural lines of race, class, and regionality. This analysis is very applicable to the United States during the late 19th century. The Risorgimento in English means resurgence or rebirth. Gramsci’s study of the failure of the Risorgimento lends powerful tools to analyze the failure of Reconstruction in the United States. To Gramsci, radical movements in Italy could not effectively vie for hegemony without understanding the strategies that separated the poor and working classes since the 19th century. This same Gramscian argument could be made about radical movements in the United States.

Once we understand 19th century American liberalism from Gramsci’s point of view as a passive revolution, then it becomes easier to understand the emergence of New Deal liberalism in the 20th century. By exploring the historical roots of New Deal liberalism through a Gramscian lens, we can understand liberalism as the containment of more thoroughgoing movements for freedom in America (Zinn New Deal Thought; Smith). This was also a key insight of many leaders in the New Left in the 1960s. Unfortunately, like the left movements in post-Civil War era, they did not connect their critique of liberalism with a popular social movement that organized the masses; they particularly left out the working class masses. Instead, their failure allowed conservative forces to win the war of position in the cultural and political trenches of civil society. This chapter seeks to study how laissez faire liberals joined forces with reformers to create a top down, administrative reform liberalism in order to subvert more radical movements in the 19th century. By doing so, we discover not only how left movements were out organized in the 19th century, but also we learn about a strategy that was later followed by the New Right in the 1960s to create neo-liberalism.
Liberalism and ‘Unsatisfied Hopes’

As a way to fight against the autocracy of clericalism and monarchy and usher in the era of modernity, the bourgeois revolutions in the 18th century and the framers of the US Constitution specifically instituted a liberal philosophy and political-economic doctrine that focused upon limiting the reach of arbitrary power into the lives of individuals (Young; Foner The Story…). The American revolutionaries wanted to cast off feudalism and its autocracy. They wanted to focus on God’s patrimony of natural rights, progress, and enlightenment with the self-directed, rational individual as its agent; they did so by casting off the superstition and unquestionable divine hierarchy embedded in feudalism. They wanted to cast off serfdom and subservience for the more mobile socio-economic position of the autonomous, free laborer guided by the framework of capitalism, competitive self-interest, and private property ownership (Foner The Story... and Free Soil…).

These are all lofty ideals, but the liberal constitutional framers throughout Europe and the United States also wanted to contain and assimilate the various social movement ideologies that envisioned alternative forms of modernity beyond capitalism (Amin; Wallerstein). They wanted to contain the contagion of liberty (Roediger How Race…Ch2). Many of those social movements downplayed or reviled private property ownership and individualism, and argued for more communal and collectivist social relationships (Young; Appleby “Republicanism and Ideology”; Rogers). Republicanism and Puritanism were the most popular, but various Christian millenarian movements, labor movements, and utopian socialist movements also existed (Young; Messer-Kruse). From the very beginning of the country’s history, it is liberalism’s flexibility and its power to absorb dissident social movements through effective leadership in cultural and political
society that helped make liberalism hegemonic (Appleby *Capitalism...*; Young; Foner *The Story...*).

However, the plain fact remains, despite its poetic language, liberalism (in any of its historically defined iterations) has never been able to come close to realizing its central vision for a world free from arbitrary power, subservience, and scarcity. At certain moments in history, its central contradictions of purporting to serve the cause of liberty and the common good versus its actually more circumscribed bourgeois interests becomes painfully obvious and creates a rupture in the worldview of the oppressed classes. One need only to look to numerous rebellions in early American history, such as Bacon’s Rebellion or Shayes’ Rebellion, to see the frustrations poor people had with the unrealized promises of liberalism (Allen; Holton *Forced Founders...*; Linebaugh and Rediker). Where there is contradiction, there is struggle, and where that struggle is properly organized by effective leadership, there is revolution; where it is ineffectively organized—as is more often the case—(unable to become popular and motivate oppressed people to act politically in a collective universal struggle), then containment and/or repression succeeds by the dominant group.

Too often, actually existing liberalism has stood in direct conflict with the promises made by liberals seeking power. Political theorist Samir Amin argues, in the aftermath of the several 18th century revolutions, there started to be a widening gap between the “promises of modernism” and “really existing modernism whose development had remained enclosed within the framework of capitalism.” Amin points to the frustration of revolutionary hopes when he says, “The modernity that has developed under the limiting constraints of capitalism is, as a result, contradictory, promising much more than it has been able to deliver, thereby creating unsatisfied hopes” (54). “Unsatisfied hopes” and frustration are powerful social forces. They
speak to dissatisfaction with the status quo and the potential of what Gramsci calls an “organic crisis.” Gramsci uses the term organic crisis to mean something more than just the cyclical economic crises that always plague capitalism. It is more of a political crisis than an economic crisis (but it could be both). Organic crisis refers to a time when the bourgeoisie state enters into a profound “crisis of authority,” where the bourgeoisie’s universalistic claims of promoting the common good are placed into question by oppressed groups, and they no longer see themselves absorbed into its universalizing class project. It is a political crisis, where civil society begins to break away from political society.

To Gramsci, a crisis of authority signifies that the present state of affairs is not permanent; history is open, and change is possible. Mobilized correctly, social dissatisfaction and frustration can lead to a revolutionary transformation. However, if mobilized incorrectly or the potential is not correctly understood, it can lead not to revolution, but to fascism at worst or the strengthening of the status quo under a different guise at least. Gramsci describes this frustration as being caught between two worlds: “one dying and the other unable to be born” or what leading Gramscian scholars call “a time without a time.”

The period after the Civil War, after the Great Depression, and after the Civil Rights/anti-war movements of the 1960s represent organic crises that were unsuccessfully mobilized by left forces, and hence resulted in a revolution-restoration. We are perhaps living through another organic crisis now, that is why a proper understanding of the failures of left movements during periods of organic crisis is so important. If we can understand this pattern of how leftwing forces

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2 Gramsci scholars Thomas and Borgio refer to a “time without time” as existing within a “duration” and they juxtapose duration with “rupture” or the ability to “constitute an epoch” (Thomas 152). Thomas also argues that the line “one dying and the other waiting to be born” is most likely a reference to a Mathew Arnold poem: "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" “Wandering between two worlds, one dead / The other powerless to be born, / With nowhere yet to rest my head / Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.”
continually fail to mobilize the potentiality of organic crises, we can have a better chance of understand the failure of the New Left in the 1960s, but also how to build a better social movement for the 21st century. While viewing it from different positions, scholars from W.E.B. Dubois in his book Black Reconstruction to David Roediger in his book Wage of Whiteness to, most recently, Steve Fraser’s The Age of Acquiescence have agreed that the failure of left movements in the Reconstruction era set a devastating pattern for the American left that still haunts us today.

Gramsci’s View of Liberalism

Gramsci characterized the liberal class project as a “passive revolution” that struggles to establish a consent-seeking government rather than an autocratic feudal or dictatorial government. Gramsci borrowed the term “passive revolution” from historian Vincenzo Cuoco. Cuoco used the term to describe the 1799 Neapolitan revolution in his essay “Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799.” Gramsci originally applied the concept narrowly in order to understand the Italian Risorgimento, but he soon greatly expanded its significance as an analytic concept. Gramsci argues: “The concept of passive revolution seems to me to be exact not only for Italy, but also for other countries that modernise the State by means of a series of reforms or national wars, without passing through the political revolution of the radical Jacobin type” (Q4, §57). Interestingly, Gramsci originally termed it “revolution without a revolution” or “‘royal conquest” and “not a popular movement.” The American Revolution is often contrasted to the French Revolution by a range of scholars who argue the United States did not have a “radical Jacobin type” revolution (de Tocqueville; Hartz; Wallerstein). This makes Gramsci’s conception of the passive revolution a useful tool to unpack the political form of rule developed in the
United States. It is surprising that more scholars have not utilized this tool to examine the Reconstruction.

A range of Gramscian scholars have recently commented on the centrality of the passive revolution to Gramsci’s thinking. Gramsci scholar Domenico Losurdo argues:

The category of passive revolution is a category used in the *Prison Notebooks* in order to denote the persistent capacity of initiative of the bourgeoisie which succeeds, even in the historical phase in which it has ceased to be a properly revolutionary class, to produce socio-political transformations, sometimes of significance, conserving securely in its own hands power, initiative and hegemony, and leaving the working classes in their condition of subalternity. (Qtd. in Thomas 147)

Maintaining the fragmentation of the working and poor classes was fundamental to maintaining social control and capital accumulation. Gramsci scholar James Martin further defines passive revolution as, “The possibility of recomposition, of the balance of class forces being reworded into new superstructural forms without radically transforming production relations . . .” (83). Equally, International Relations scholar Adam Morton argues “The theory places emphasis on those progressive aspects of historical change during revolutionary upheaval that become undermined, resulting in the reconstitution of social relations but within new forms of capitalist order” (150–1). The passive revolution is one of the most important analytic tools Gramsci developed but one of the most underutilized to understand liberalism in the United States.

Whereas the feudal or dictatorial state breeds resistance, the passive revolution attempts to re-direct the possible revolutionary political solutions advocated by the oppressed masses (to the continual crises of capitalism) into reforms that do not challenge, and in some ways aid, the
further development of capitalism (Gramsci *SPN* 44-122; Thomas 133-158). Gramsci argues this is the key political strategy developed by the bourgeoisie during “the long 19th century” to limit and contain opposition to its hegemony in response to a prolonged period of deep economic crisis, sharp class struggle, and profound social change coming together in an “organic crisis,” or a political and economic “crisis of authority.” The long 19th century encompasses the time period between beginning in 1776 or 1789 through the 1920s. The idea of the “long 19th century” is usually credited to historian Eric Hobsbawn, but by his own admission, Hobsbawn appropriated the concept from Gramsci.

Rather than the deterministic view that the bourgeoisie totally dominates oppressed groups, Gramsci viewed the bourgeoisie’s response to organic crisis as always historically contingent, incomplete, unstable, and thus transitory. It is this aspect of Gramsci’s theory that made him so popular among scholars of the 1980’s interested in political transformations, and the rise of “Thatcherism” (*Hall The Hard Road to Renewal*). It is also this approach that makes Gramsci so important to the study of the antecedent of Reaganism and Thatcherism, the organic crisis of New Deal liberalism in 1960s. Indeed, rather than a theory of domination and intractable power, Gramsci’s whole *Prison Notebooks* project and his revision of Marxist hegemony theory emphasize the *vulnerability* of historical blocs\(^3\) to become disarticulated by effective forms of leadership and class struggle that inspires the masses to take revolutionary collective political action.

\(^3\) For more on the relationship of Gramsci’s notion of ‘historical bloc’ and his re-thinking of the ‘base-super structure’ argument, see Martin 81-85. In his neo-Gramscian period, Stuart Hall argued “The question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order . . . The notion of a ‘historical bloc’ is precisely different from that of a pacified, homogeneous, ruling class. It entails a quite different conception of how social forces and movements, in their diversity, can be articulated into strategic alliances. To construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect an already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historical project” (Hall 1988).
It has long been understood that the emergence of the modern, corporate industrial state was the product of class struggle, but the results of that class struggle are widely debated. Does the period between Reconstruction and the New Deal (what many contemporary scholars are calling the “Long Progressive Era”) represent the slow unfolding of freedom and equality for all (through a succession of liberal reform movements from the Populist to the Progressives to the New Dealers), or does it represent the continual search for a popular political form to absorb and re-direct radical forces effectively shielding corporate capitalism from the more revolutionary impulses of working and poor people? It is here that Gramsci’s study of the Italian Risorgimento contains useful theoretical tools to guide a study of the passive revolution in the United States after the Civil War.

Because the Italian bourgeoisie sought passive revolution as a protection of their own social control through a paternalistic clientelism, they actively sought to suppress the masses’ popular democratic voice in politics. While on one hand, working and poor people remained passive with limited ability to act as full democratic citizens; on the other hand, this led to a weak connection between the state and civil society. It led to the creation of what Gramsci referred to as not a modern state but “a bastard state.” This lack of a thoroughgoing popularity—especially at a time of organic crisis—represented an opportunity to disarticulate the hegemonic

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5 Because there were so many progressive social movements stretching over such a long period, recent historians have started referring to the period from 1865 to 1920 as the “Long Progressive Era.” See Edwards.
coalition and rearticulate it under different leadership. However, as Gramsci’s research on Italy (and his life in prison) sadly recounts, it was an opportunity the fascists took better advantage of than the left.

Gramsci focused on the political and social fallout from the unprecedented wave of revolutions that swept Europe in 1848 and the 1871 Paris Commune (Hobsbawn *Age of Revolution* and *Age of Capital*). The popularity of the French Revolution made rulers all over Europe, who were accustomed to ruling with an iron fist, tremble with fear (Wallerstein). According to Gramsci, the fear of revolution caused the emerging bourgeoisie to change the form of political rule in response (Q13§7; Q8§52, Q9§133). Instead of ruling mainly through domination and fear, the state sought to rule through popularity and consent. This required a momentous transformation in the political form of the state and the political form of rule. The ruling class’s own greedy economic interests needed to be partially submerged and in some cases overlooked to build a political form that issued several—sometimes very significant—reforms in order to maintain social control and capital accumulation. It also cloaked their class projects in the universalistic Enlightenment language of equality, liberty, and fraternity. Gramsci referred to the new form of political rule as the passive revolution and the new form of state as the “integral state.”

Gramsci scholar Peter Thomas informs people that despite popular belief, Gramsci did not coin the word hegemony. He appropriated it from Soviet thinkers (136; See also Anderson). Thomas also reminds that Gramsci did coin the term “integral state” as a Marxist modification and elaboration of Hegel’s “Ethical State.” Integral state is not only important for the explanatory power it brings to Gramsci’s analysis, it is also much more representative of his original contribution to Marxist social theory than strictly hegemony. Gianni Francioni argues
the integral state is part of Gramsci’s: “…redefinition of some fundamental concepts of the Marxist tradition in order to confront the question of the state in terms that are closer to the political and institutional complexity of the capitalist West” (qtd in Thomas 95). Interestingly, while this is widely accepted today in liberal and Marxist circles (Wallerstein; Harvey; Amin; Allen; Jumonville, Mattson, Dionne, eds), it was a highly debated topic in Gramsci’s time. The idea that the bourgeois state was anything but an agent of repression and domination that the members of the working class hated was anathema to the central strategy of the Second International.6 Gramsci thought differently. Gramsci argues “the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Q15§10; SPN 244). Elsewhere he re-states his position in a formula: “State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony armoured with coercion” (Q6§88; SPN 263).

Much of his state theory was designed to combat the widespread belief in the Second International that western countries like Italy would go through a similar revolution as Russia. In a letter describing his opposition, Gramsci wrote the founder of the Italian Communist Party Amandeo Bordiga:

The determination, which in Russia was direct and drove the masses onto the street for a revolutionary uprising, in central and Western Europe is complicated by all these political superstructures, created by the greater development of capitalism. This makes the action of the masses slower and more prudent and therefore requires of the party a strategy and tactics altogether more complicated and long-term than those which were necessary for the Bolsheviks . . . (qtd. in

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6 The Second International was an association of communist and socialist parties from across the world. Formed in 1889, it was officially disbanded in 1916 after the Zimmerwald Conference.
In another letter, he wrote “in advanced capitalist countries, the ruling class possesses political and organizational reserves which it did not possess in Russia. . .” so that “even the most serious economic crises do not have immediate repercussions in the political sphere” (35) Gramsci instead explored how the state constructed a popular, consent-seeking political form.

The main way the integral state built popularity and sought consent was through the assimilation of civil society and the absorption of some of its key leaders, a strategy Gramsci calls *transformismo*. Civil society was not an invention of the state. People have long organized themselves into various self-initiated, mutual-aid associations of a regional, religious, fraternal, or a workplace-related nature long before modern states. Historically, these associations had a degree of distance and anonymity from the state. They also tended to insulate themselves from politics. Gramsci’s point is rather than seeing these associations as meaningless at best or harmful at worst, the state sought to close the distance between itself and civil society after 1848. The state thereby brought civil society into the realm of the political as closely watched allies in the production of consent—in other words as a mediating agent dissipating the revolutionary impulses of the masses.

Before the political transformation initiated by the bourgeoisie in the late 19th century, Gramsci argues, “society was still in a state of fluidity from many points of view, so to speak . . . a relatively rudimentary State apparatus, and a greater autonomy of civil society from the State activity.” In contrast, he writes:

. . . in the period after 1870, with the colonial expansion of Europe, all these elements change. The internal and international organisational relations of the State become more complex and massive, and the [Eighteen] Forty-Eightist
formula of the ‘Permanent Revolution’ is expanded and superseded in political
science by the formula of ‘civil hegemony’ . . . The massive structure of the
modern democracies, both as State organisations and as complexes of associations
in civil society, are for the art of politics what ‘trenches’ and permanent
fortifications of the front are for the war of position. (Q13§7; SPN 243)

It is important to note that consent is not “false consciousness” meaning the working class were
not stupidly being manipulated as much as experiencing what Gramsci calls a “molecular”
transformation in a similar way that Foucault talks about bio-power7 in the 19th century. Gramsci
argues:

The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they
did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own,
i.e. to enlarge their class sphere ‘technically’ and ideologically: their conception
was that of a closed class. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in
continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to
its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been
transformed; the State has become an ‘educator’. (Qtd. In Thomas 142)

Gramscian scholar Alberto Burgio refers to the conception of the molecular transformations of
civil society as: “questions of capillary and permanent direction of an entire social fabric,
penetrated into its fibers, rendered ever more compact and transformed, in each of its
articulations, into an instrument for the production of new forms of wealth” (Original emphasis
qtd. in Thomas 144). International studies scholar Adam Morton has also argued that Gramsci is

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7 Michel Foucault introduced the concept of bio-power as “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for
achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (The History of Sexuality Vol 1 140). Foucault
first used the term in his College de France lectures published in English as Michel Foucault: Society Must Be
a “paramount theorist of capillary power” (92). While main thinkers of the Second International focused almost exclusively on how the bourgeoisie revolutionized the mode of production, Gramsci focused on how the bourgeoisie revolutionized the political form of class struggle to maintain social control and capital accumulation. Thomas argues that Gramsci helped resuscitate a decidedly political interpretation of Marxism that focused on class struggle:

...whereas Marx’s and Engels’s tract [the Communist Manifesto] has often been read (particularly recently, in an age of ‘globalisation’) with an eye to its focus upon the bourgeoisie’s revolutionising of the mode of production, Gramsci places the accent upon the Manifesto’s complementary political thesis that these transformations have been accompanied, in a complex relation of dialectical interaction, by an accompanying revolutionising of the nature of the ‘political’ and its concrete institutional forms (143).

It was Gramsci’s ability to view the Risorgimento as an advance political form of consent-seeking class struggle that helped him change his opinion about revolutionary strategy.

To summarize, “organic crisis”, “passive revolution”, and “integral state” are key Gramscian concepts used to explore the formation of New Deal liberalism. These concepts work together as a whole in Gramsci’s thinking. Peter Thomas succinctly encapsulates Gramsci Prison Notebooks project: “The guiding thread that organizes all of Gramsci’s carceral research can be succinctly characterized as the search for an adequate theory of proletarian hegemony in the epoch of the ‘organic crisis’ or the ‘passive revolution’ of the bourgeois ‘integral state’” (136). While that is true, it is important to emphasize that Gramsci leaves the question open as to whether the proletarian forces will develop the leadership necessary to popularize their class project during the organic crisis, or whether the ruling class will gain control of the organic crisis
by implementing a political form of rule he calls the passive revolution and institutionalizing it in a new state form of rule he calls the integral state.

It is also important to emphasize the consent-seeking nature of this new form of political rule. Ruling classes seeking to form an integral state accomplished this political transformation not through domination or mind control, but by carefully responding to and encoding their class projects with the partial desires of oppressed peoples by passing moderate reforms—expanding the franchise, establishing a welfare system (following Otto von Bismarck lead in the 1880s), legalizing certain non-revolutionary unions, granting some limited minority rights, encouraging charity among the affluent, establishing certain “cooperative” shared management schemes, and sharing prosperity—not in any revolutionary way, but to a greater degree than had been done in the past.

These reforms were meant to blunt the revolutionary edge of subaltern opposition and contain their desires within what Gramsci referred to as an “economic-corporate consciousness.” That the bourgeoisie is able to move to a level of political struggle that transcends the economic-corporate (narrow economic or self-centered interests) and make popular universalistic claims that are “capable of absorbing the entire society” represents a tragedy to Gramsci and reveals his thoughts about the failure of the left to counter the right with a more popular class project.

In the next section, Gramsci’s insights on the Risorgimento will be applied to the American Revolution and the form of political rule emerging out of the Civil War in the United States during the consolidation of American corporate capitalism and the failure of Reconstruction (and the failure of radical movements at the end of the 19th century).

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8 In an effort to unify Germany, ease tensions after the Franco-Prussian War, and contain the growing popularity of socialism, von Bismarck created the first welfare state in modern Europe including medical insurance, old age pensions, and unemployment compensation. See Beck.
By studying the period between Reconstruction to the New Deal (1865-1937) using a Gramscian framework, we find two important lessons. First, how poor and working class people organized against the incorporation of America using a republican vocabulary inherited from the American Revolution to build mass movements connected to a popular common sense. Second, how leaders of the reform liberalism movement fragmented and contained the radical factions, absorbed centrist factions, and rearticulated the passive revolution of liberalism in such a way as to save capitalism. This breakthrough for reform liberalism in the 19th century teaches important lessons for understanding New Deal liberalism in the 20th century and also the New Right’s rise to power in the 1960s.

Reconstruction, the era after the Civil War, saw an unprecedented wave of industrialization and incorporation that upended traditional social relations in its search for new profit maximization (Fraser; Foner and Roedigger). With the defeat of slavery, came the defeat of the southern plantation economy that had until then been the life-blood of capitalism in the United States. After the Civil War, the rise of the northern industrial economy brought into being a new stage in capitalist development (Post). It was a time of rapid transformation of a predominately individualistic entrepreneurial agricultural and artisanal workforce that offered a degree of autonomy to a predominantly de-individualized, urban-proletariat workforce. The time was exemplified by massive migration to cities and massive immigration from Europe to supply a workforce for this new factory regime (Roediger and Foner). The Jeffersonian/Jacksonian ideal of the “small producer” was guided by the republican ideology that the dignity and freedom of the “common man” was guaranteed by civic virtue and individual ownership over productive property—be it agricultural land or skilled labor. This ideal gave way to a rapacious corporate
capitalism centered on industrialization and “freedom of contract” ideology supported by a particular American interpretation of Lockean liberalism fused with social Darwinism (Montgomery; Sellers; Trachtenberg; Roediger and Foner; Roediger Wages...; Kazin The Populist...; Young; Foner The Story). Eric Foner argues: “Among economists, social scientists, and captains of industry, ideas like the worker’s right to the fruits of his labor increasingly seemed quaint anachronisms, irrelevant at a time when the modern corporation had replaced the independent producer as the driving force of economic change” (118). “The incorporation of America,” as cultural studies theorist Alan Trachtenberg puts it, had an enormous political and cultural scaring effect upon working and poor Americans.

The Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction era in the United States (sometimes referred to as the Gilded Age or the Age of Robber Barons) was animated by a remarkable number of well-organized social movements in civil society that sought to use the state to reform the most pernicious aspects of the newly dominant corporate capitalism. They sought to enact labor reforms including: the integration of poor farmers and former slaves into the industrial workforce; the 8-hour work day; the end of child labor and forced labor, and the redistribution of land to poor farmers and formerly enslaved peoples (Fraser). Additionally, they wanted to institute a graduated income tax, to nationalize key industries and resources, to create welfare protection, to achieve women’s suffrage, and decent housing for the poor. Some envisioned a socialist America or what some socialist Christians called the “kingdom of God on earth in the new millennium” (Rossinow Visions...). Alarmed by the rising tide of activism in 1873, the Chicago Tribune complained about the wide range of left movements pressuring the state for reforms, “The spirit of Grangerism, Workingmanism, Communism, Grievanceism, or by whatever name the present fever among those who assume to themselves the title of ‘the
industrial and producing classes’ may be termed” (qtd. in Rossinow 22). The largest groups will serve to characterize the radical nature of these movements.

The Knights of Labor, the largest postbellum labor movement, declared on their Great Seal that “profits are not necessary” and sought (with notable but uneven success) to organize skilled and unskilled workers, people of color, and women alongside poor white workers in the new industrializing economy (Gerteis). Established in 1869, by 1886, it had 800,000 members. Historian Jason Kaufman argues upwards of 20 percent of the entire working class in the United States belonged to the Knights of Labor (Kaufman; Fraser). Along with the Populist Party, the Knights fought for what they both called a “cooperative commonwealth” (Fink). Furthermore, militant trade unionism overlapped with Christian activists seeking to uphold the “social gospel,” which found corporations and greed in violation of Christ’s basic teachings, as evidenced by a popular 1888 speech Henry Demarest Lloyd titled “The New Consciousness, or the Religion of Labor” and in his bestseller *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, which detailed the monopolistic tendencies of the oil industry. Moreover, the leaders of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the most important social movement of women in the Gilded Age (Rossinow 37), declared at their yearly meeting in 1893 that “in every Christian there is a Socialist; and in every Socialist a Christian” (Buhle *Women and Socialism* 81). Most famously, Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House in Chicago, offered a vision of compassionate liberalism that sought to serve the growing population of people living at the edge of misery and poverty in industrializing urban spaces in the mist of the accumulation of unprecedented wealth (Addams).

The working classes did not take the uprooting of their traditional, more independent agrarian and artisan way of life lying down. Foner argues “Between the Civil War and the end of the 19th century, the United States underwent one of the most profound economic revolutions any
country has ever experienced, and witnessed some of the most violent struggles between labor
and employers in the history of capitalism” (The Story... 116). At the same time, the extreme
sacrifice during the Civil War by both men and women—native and foreign born—in
conjunction with the emancipation of former slaves made almost every section of society keenly
aware of their contribution to America and conscious of their desire to benefit more equally in its
future success. Historian Nancy Cohen argues “the Union war machine . . . mobilized the
citizenry under the banner of patriotism, free labor, and democracy,” which “heightened their
expectations about what the nation [once victorious] could do for them” (4). Large percentages
of working people’s vision of America settled again on radical themes from the American
Revolution: of a “cooperative commonwealth” that pitted workers and farmers against what the
Knights of Labor called “moneyed interests” or what the Populists called “parasites.”9 A
progressive agrarian-artisan interpretation of republicanism was central to their ideology
(Arnesen; Wilentz Chants...). I will call this progressive republicanism “civic republicanism”
following labor historian Eric Arnesen’s classification of republicanism (Arnesen).

At the center of civic republicanism is the importance of virtuous patriotic citizens
actively participating in the creation and protection of a common good. Through constant civic
participation (education, debate, good works done with public participation, and collective
protection of the commonwealth), citizens create and adhere to a notion of virtue that goes
deeper than just procedural rules (Locke’s social contract) followed because of their fear of the
anarchy in the state of nature (Hobbes Leviathan). The social contract and the civic space created
by active participation, does more than just guarantee individual rights and rule of law, it allows

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9 For the Knights, see Fink; Gerteis; “Record of proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor
(1878)”. For the Populists, see “The People Party Platform 1896”; Hofstadter The Age of Reform; Kazin The
Populist Persuasion.
for the full flowering of human potential and self-realization. Lovett writes, “Freedom and humanity are accomplished by action in the public eye, transcending labor to which man is compelled by necessity.” Historian Joyce Appleby agrees when she argues “To be a free man (and they always were men) was to participate in the life of the community. To have liberty was to share in the power of the state, to be active in making and executing decisions” (*Capitalism and a New Social Order* 16). From this position, *men* realized their human potential in a collective struggle for the common good. The focus on the gendered definition of freedom continued into the 1960s and became a key organizing principle of the Second Wave Feminist movement sought to challenge (Rosen).

The protection of “civic virtue” was central to freedom and self-realization, which animated many of the partisans of the American Revolution. It protected the individual from the more rapacious aspects of corruption brought on by developing commerce and its attendant vice, greed. It also protected the Puritan notion of the commonwealth, God’s patrimony to all of humanity, from slowly being eroded by the rapid development of capitalism (Young Ch2).

Rather than a picture of the founding fathers all being proto-capitalists, historians studying republicanism in the 1960s and 1970s aimed at painting a more diverse and complex picture. In their view, property rights and individualism was countered by communalism and civic protection of the common good (Rogers). The American Revolution was no longer just conceived as a revolution guided by liberal ideology grounded in a reading of Locke as a promoter of commerce, private property, and individualism; it was also (and in the case of some historians like J.G.A. Pocock more importantly) a revolution guided by neo-classical ideas of virtue, commonwealth, and civic humanism. Rather than Americans being an individualistic people, confidently looking forward to modernity, they viewed Americans as a community-
focused people, anxiously fearing the encroachment of capitalism—“the dread of modernity” as Pocock called it—on their neo-classical understandings of the world. In a much-quoted passage from Pocock, the American Revolution was not so much “the first political act of revolutionary enlightenment than the last great act of the Renaissance” (124). In other words, the American Revolution was guided by a combination of neo-classical republican ideas as well as liberal ideas.

Historians of republicanism have also argued that rather than a split between republicanism and liberalism, the founding fathers fused the two together (Rogers). They brought together a combination of Protestant and neo-classical Republican ideals, natural rights doctrine, and Lockean liberalism shaped into a secular political movement that proved popular in America (although not without tensions and contradictions). In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson asks “And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God?” From this perspective, God instilled in human beings certain natural rights as well as a rationality that can both understand and exercise those rights. This is why one of the most famous passages from Declaration of Independence reads, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Jefferson merges natural rights doctrine with Lockean liberalism. Through their natural rights and rationality, individuals are sovereign, and through their sovereignty, they have agency to change the world specifically by struggling against injustice and making productive use of natural resources thereby instituting a relationship of private property. An individual’s ownership of their body (possessive individualism) and their labor (free labor) in conjunction with land ownership (what Locke refers
to as “life, liberty, and estates” or what the U.S. constitution refers to as “life, liberty, and property”) is the hallmark of autonomy, which—for the American revolutionists, was the definition of freedom from dependence or subservience. This has been a central tool for social movements as diverse as the American Revolution, Abolitionism, the fight for the 8-hour day, and the Civil Rights movement, but also the New Right’s focus on “small business” entrepreneurship.

While the preservation of republicanism—and an agrarian and artisan vision of freedom—became harder and harder to maintain during the full blown emergence of American capitalism after the Civil War, it was especially difficult after WWII with the rise of the Cold War and the solidification of what the New Left referred to as “corporate liberalism” (Yeselson). Radical young students were conflicted because of the gap between the traditions they inherited. On one hand, they were influenced by the revolutionary understanding of morality and freedom in the 19th century as well as strong anti-fascist feelings unleashed by WWII. On the other hand, the modern day feelings of alienation and entrapment in an immoral industrial machine bend on conformity to Cold War, racism, and capitalism. The post-war era youth sought out morally-centered, non-conformists influenced by republican values.

In other words, as labor historians Cassano and Rondinone (quoted in ch 1) argue, “during periods when class struggle becomes impossible to ignore, working Americans often reinvent the republican tradition, draw upon the republican vocabulary, to make sense of their political and social world” (418). But, because Republicanism is based upon virtue, it tends to mobilize people against bad personality traits like greedy bankers or the lazy poor people rather than a systemic analysis of what creates bankers and poor people. This is the difference between a discussion that focuses on inequality and a discussion that focuses on exploitation.
Republicanism mobilizes masses of people unlike almost any rhetoric in American history. It amplifies their fear and anger while at the same time containing their analysis of causality and thus their search for solutions. The Gramscian question is not only how to build a popular movement; more importantly, it is how to build a popular movement that can withstand the containing and absorbing power of the passive revolution. Leaders in the reform liberalism movement starting in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century built a powerful political form that left social movements still have not figured out how to overcome.

*Reform Liberalism and the Politics of the Passive Revolution*

The period from the Civil War to the emergence of the New Deal during the Great Depression entails a long social process by the bourgeoisie of searching for a successful political form to contain radical movements. This included: public housing (like Hull House), public recreation (like urban parks), to charitable giving (from wealthy people like Carnegie), to the “scientific management” movement (championed by organizations such as the National Civic Federation that brought together big business, labor, and consumers to resolve disputes at the turn of the century) (Haber). It is here that Gramsci’s theoretical tools are useful. With the mutual interpenetration of civil and political society, the state found a way to be both repressive and popular at the same time. This was (is) no easy feat. One of the ways they accomplished this was by dividing the working classes against themselves. The lessons Gramsci drew about fragmentation of working and poor peoples from studying the Italian Risorgimento are not only clearly applicable to the failure of Reconstruction in the United States with the further fragmentation of black and white workers and south and northern regions, but also the failure of the New Left in the 1960s with the further fragmentation of working class and student populations. Anytime social movements exclude a group of people—particularly a group of
people who are vital to the functioning of capitalism—it opens up an opportunity for oppositional social movement to either use it as a wedge issue or outright organize those excluded people. As Gramsci’s research into the failure of the Risorgimento shows, the divide between urban and rural workers (between the industrial north and the agricultural south), as well as the divide between colonial and colonized countries was cleverly exploited by conservative forces in Italy. Similarly, we shall see how fragmentation was cleverly exploited by conservative forces during the 1960s as well.

*How Does Fragmentation Effect Organization*

The inability to unify a moral community is a central problematic to Gramsci. Despite the common scholarly interpretation, oppression is not the central characteristic of Gramsci’s definition of subalternity. Subordination due to fragmentation is a closer definition—a kind of fragmentation that cuts someone off from realizing the root cause of their subordination and therefore cuts off their ability to exercise collective agency. As Gramscian scholar Kate Crehan argues: “[subalternity is] the inability of subaltern people to produce coherent accounts of the world they live in that have the potential to challenge existing hegemonic accounts…in an effective way” (104). When thinking about subalternity, there is probably no word in Gramscian studies that has received wider usage with such a contested definition. In fact, leading Gramscian scholar, Marcus Green, argues:

> Although hundreds of books have been published on various aspects of subaltern studies in English alone since the 1980s, a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Gramsci’s concept of subaltern social groups does not exist in either Subaltern Studies or Gramscian scholarship. (“The Concept of Subaltern Social Groups” 4)

Many people, strikingly including the renowned Indian theorist Gayatri Spivak, have argued the
word subaltern is simply a code word for the more Marxian word, “proletarian” used by Gramsci to subvert the prison censors (“The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview”). Yet, there is ample research to suggest that Gramsci was not using a code word, but rather intended the word “subaltern” to mean a larger group of disenfranchised people than just workers (Green “Rethinking the subaltern and the questions of censorship in Gramsci’s Prison notebooks”). In fact in Notebook 25, Gramsci refers to: “slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, the popolani (common people) and popolo (people) of the medieval communes, the proletariat, and the bourgeoisie prior to the Risorgimento as subaltern groups” (Qtd in Green 388). Gramsci listed this wide group of oppressed peoples because he was specifically interested in studying the fragmented social existence of subaltern peoples under historically specific forms of oppression that produces a fragment social consciousness.

Most importantly, Gramsci was concerned with subaltern social group’s inability to become political actors with the fullest human agency—to be the “creators of an epoch” as he wrote (Q3§48). He argues that their location in the social relations of production leaves their ideas and their social solidarities fragmented. Most damagingly, fragmentation leaves them lacking a well-developed historical consciousness, one that seeks a systematic understanding of causality of why they are in a subordinate position. He writes:

Since the ensemble of social relations is contradictory, human historical consciousness is contradictory. . . . It manifests itself all across a body of society through the existence of the different historical consciousness of various groups; and it manifests itself in individuals as a reflection of these group antinomies. Among subaltern groups, given the lack of historical initiative, the fragmentation is greater. They face a harder struggle to liberate themselves from imposed
(rather than freely propounded) principles in order to arrive at an autonomous historical consciousness. (Q8§153)

Lacking a critical historical consciousness leaves many subaltern groups trapped in a “common sense” or “folklore” philosophy that is “a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions” (Q8§153). It also traps them in a position that is easily mobilized by conservative forces. While it must be respected as a popular understanding of people’s lived experience, Gramsci understood common sense philosophies as conservative, superstitious, and incoherent, and thus he clearly saw the political need to transcend them. This is a widely misunderstood point (Green “Subalternity and Language…” and “Rethinking the Subaltern…” ; Crehan). As will be developed further in chapter 3, Gramsci held a dialectical opinion about common sense. Although he thought it needed to be overcome, he also thought it should be respected and not be criticized in an overly pedantic way. Leadership needed to start at the level of common sense with the goal of revolutionizing it. This is why organic intellectuals—indigenous leaders who emerge out of a class to lead—are so important to Gramsci because they understand the common sense impressions of their class, and therefore have the best opportunity to find an appropriate language to move people to a more critical level of consciousness.

He was interested in investigating the historical conditions that keep groups in a subaltern state and inhibit revolutionary social movements from forming. A subaltern group that remains divided against its own class or other subaltern social groups can never rise above an economic-corporate consciousness, and therefore can never lead a class project for counter-hegemony. This is because it does not have the critical consciousness necessary to 1) understand the historical causality behind their subordination, 2) use that understanding to recruit/create organic intellectuals, 3) formulate a vision of a universalistic moral community that unifies most
subaltern groups and working people under its leadership, and 4) struggle together for a different conception of citizenship that ultimately becomes popular enough to united a large mass of people to make a revolutionary fight for state power.

Subordination and fragmentation is at the heart of the political solution that the bourgeoisie used to implement the passive revolution. Peter Thomas argues:

In its over-arching logic of disintegration, molecular transformation, absorption and incorporation, the passive revolution . . . was single-mindedly dedicated to this one goal: prevention of the cathartic moment in which the subaltern classes cross the Rubicon separating a merely ‘economic-corporative’ phase from a truly ‘hegemonic’ phase, or, in other words, the phase in which a subaltern social layer becomes a genuine class, architect and faber [creator] of an historical epoch. (152)

The cultivation of revolutionary agency or the cultivation of social acquiescence was the pivot upon which history moved for Gramsci, and it is effective forms of leadership that can apply pressure to that pivot. The failure of left-wing forces to understand this animates a great deal of Gramsci’s frustration.

While the modern state seeks consent, Gramsci is quick to point out that it still maintains a repressive apparatus in its political society in order to crush elements of the oppressed classes who would not assimilate or who were deemed beyond assimilation. Thomas explains the groundbreaking dialectical nature of Gramsci conception of the integral state:

With this concept [integral state], Gramsci attempted to analyse the mutual interpenetration and reinforcement of ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ (to be distinguished from each other methodologically, not organically) within a unified (and indivisible) state-form. According to this concept, the state (in its integral
form) was not to be limited to the machinery of government and legal institutions (the ‘state’ understood in a limited sense). Rather, the concept of the integral state was intended as a dialectical unity of the moments of civil society and political society. Civil society is the terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes. Such hegemony is guaranteed, however, ‘in the last instance’ by capture of the legal monopoly of violence embodied in the institutions of political society. (137)

In other words, the ruling class is able to find a temporarily effective (yet unstable) division of labor between consent and force in order to try and maintain social control over potentially rebellious or outright rebellious populations—especially in times of organic crisis. There is an obvious connection between fragmentation and repression. The degree of repression is often directly proportional to the degree of fragmentation. This is especially important in the case of the United States were fragmentation is achieved through cross class collaboration in repression against people of color, immigrants, and poor and working class communities.

*The Construction of Reform Liberalism in America*

Worker’s rebellion against the destruction of artisan and agrarian ways of life in America due to rapid incorporation and industrialization was met with unprecedented state repression in the postbellum period. This repression was second only to a largely successful intellectual campaign in civil society from laissez faire liberals to contain any anti-capitalist thinking among newly emerging reform liberals.10 The Great Railroad Strike of 1872 (the first general strike in American history), Homestead, Pullman, Coeur d’ Alene are just some of the names of labor

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10 Reform liberalism was defined in the Typology section of Ch 1. Reform liberals were a group of intellectuals and activists who argued for greater state intervention in the political economy of the nation to help mitigate some of the worst aspects of emerging corporate capitalism. See Cohen.
battles where private security agents (Pinkertons and Baldwins) as well as the National Guard and US Army were used to violently put down worker rebellions (Zinn *The People’s History*; Fraser). But, as many historians point out, try as they might, the state could not quiet worker’s rebelliousness with force alone (Cohen; Foner *The Story*…; Roediger; Fraser). A small but well placed cadre of liberal intellectuals—particularly newspaper and magazine editors—passionately committed to laissez faire political economy were able to institute themselves so successfully in American culture that they were able set the limits of the debate around the creation of reform of liberalism. According to historian Nancy Cohen, laissez faire liberals

held a presence in virtually every institution through which culture was disseminated to the Northern middle classes, and they controlled many of the most important forums of opinion formation . . . by virtue of their strategic positions in American culture, [they] were able to frame the terms of the political debate, determine the issues, and establish the values to which others had to conform. (13)

She goes so far as to say the younger generation of reform liberals “were forced back onto the terrain of liberalism [away from socialism or social democracy] or out of established positions of public power” (14). The success of laissez faire liberals followed a classic Gramscian strategy. Cohen argues, “they always believed that their most enduring work would be cultural—the tutoring of public opinion” (13).¹¹

Parallelizing Gramsci’s thinking about the importance of cultural struggle, laissez faire liberals were able to insinuate themselves and their ideas in mainstream civil society to such a

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¹¹ While Cohen uses the word hegemony a few times in her book, she does not explicitly engage with Gramsci anywhere in her study. However, in my opinion, Gramsci’s influence is implicit throughout her study. While I am using Cohen’s work to support a Gramscian analysis of my own, I do not think I am doing so by stretching the original intent of her work in a procrustean way.
degree that through the broad dissemination of their ideas and their popularity in key sectors of society, they were able to gain a hegemonic position. Cohen concludes that even when reform liberals were able to “reconstruct liberalism” along the lines of state activism, “nothing fundamental about [laissez faire] liberalism was lost in the adoption of state activism” (224).

Gramsci’s theory of passive revolution helps us understand the absorption of dissidents in a time of organic crisis. It also helps the reader understand the main tool reform liberalism created to manage the passive revolution, what Cohn calls “the administrative mandate.” By understanding the intellectual and cultural history of this tool, we understand the emergence of Franklin D Roosevelt and New Deal liberalism. We also better understand the failure of left social movements to effectively confront the containment strategies of reform liberalism from the 1870s to the post-WWII period.

To summarize, after consolidating its rule (1848 in Europe and post-Civil War in America), the bourgeoisie in Europe and the United States moved away from ruling strictly by force and domination and instead worked on absorbing the proletariat and subaltern classes into its class project by developing a popular, consent-seeking integral/ethical state. Its main function was to absorb dissident elements of the non-dominant classes thereby containing (temporarily) their aspirations for more utopian, millenarian, and/or revolutionary socialist solutions. Gramsci called this containment strategy a “passive revolution.” The passive revolution and the need for an integral state came out of the bourgeoisie’s response to an organic crisis of capitalism in the 19th century that was punctuated by a particularly strong crisis of authority and the most militant class struggle in American history.

12 For Gramsci’s thoughts about the political transformation of the bourgeoisie after 1848 see Q13, 7; Q8, 52, Q9, 133. For a discussion of the post-Civil War consolidation of corporate capitalism see Hartz; Trachtenberg; Young; Post.
The Alliance of Reform and Laissez Faire Liberals Out Organize the Radicals

As social movements such as the Knights and the fight for the eight-hour work day advanced their anti-monopoly, anti-corporate thinking, two events in Europe and America served to frighten the rising industrial/corporate bourgeoisie as well as many of the new reform liberals into reconsidering the political form and social character of liberalism along the lines of Gramsci’s observations: first, the 1871 Paris Commune, and second, the fight for the 8-hour workday in the United States in the 1880s. The most widely-read laissez faire American liberal intellectual, E.L. Godkin, used his powerful editorial platform at the *Nation* magazine to express fears at the possibility of “worker’s control and the end of private property.” Godkin warned that “Thousands of demagogues are busy every day telling the workingmen of the civilized world of the power they now begin to possess over society, and the workingmen are not loath to exercise this power at the earliest possible moment.” In an editorial for the *Nation* on the day of the Paris Commune, Godkin urged that only:

> the willfully blind now fail to understand the exact nature of the danger with which we are threatened; and to those who imagine that America is going to escape the convulsion [class war], we recommend a careful study of the mining industry of Pennsylvania during the last ten years. (Godkin)

The same fear Gramsci wrote about griping the European bourgeoisie after 1871, also motivated their American counterparts.

Gramsci writes in his notes about the passive revolution

> The historical fact of the absence of popular initiative in the development of Italian history, and the fact that ‘progress’ would be verified as the reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and disorganic rebellion of the popular masses
with ‘restorations’ that comprehend some parts of the popular demands, thus
‘progressive restorations’ or ‘revolutions restorations’ or even ‘passive revolutions’ (Q8§25).

Repression alone could not quiet worker’s anger, nor could the power of laissez faire liberal’s culture struggle. Only an alliance between laissez faire liberals and reform liberals to reconstruct liberalism, argues Cohen, seemed to have built a tentative industrial peace that issued several significant reforms containing militant workers, but left capitalism and private property off limits.

Out of the social movements and class struggles during Reconstruction emerged leaders that helped synthesize laissez faire liberalism with a new reform liberalism. A diverse group of thinkers and activists from poor urban and women’s movements like Jane Adams and Florence Kelley, to political leaders and academics like Henry Lloyd, Henry George, and Richard T. Ely, to prominent clergy like Walter Rauschenbusch fought hard to re-shape liberalism to a pro-labor, pro-state intervention framework but also decidedly away from a socialist or anti-capitalist framework (Cohen Ch 5).

While they did not participate in one unified social movement, they were united in two ways. Firstly, they were united in their belief that “state-intervention” was necessary to mitigate the horrific living and working conditions brought about by industrialization and the cyclical economic crises plaguing the late 19th century (See Rossinow Ch 2 and Cohen Ch 4). Secondly, they feared class war: that if “enlightened leaders” of the bourgeois class did not do something, socialist forces in the proletariat (at worse or at least disgruntled farmers and industrial workers) would take over using their expanded voting rights to punish capitalists (See Cohen Ch 4 and Post). Because of their ideological commitment to work for the poor compounded by their fear of
radical poor people’s movements, Rossinow calls these leaders the American equivalent of British Fabianism. Rossinow argues: “British Fabians were a group of genteel reforms . . . [who] hoped to bring about a gradual transition to socialism through top-down methods. The Fabians thought that highly educated people like themselves should develop plans for the regulation of society by a powerful state” (30). He defines Jane Addams as an American Fabian who while an inspiring activist among the poor, she “had no desire to see the have-nots take control of society” (37).

The second point of unity described above between reform liberals also eventually put them in alliance with a solid cadre of laissez faire liberals and certain forward looking elements of the corporate industrial bourgeoisie. Cohen goes so far as to say laissez faire liberals and reform liberals: “reached a personal, political, and intellectual reconciliation . . . Ultimately, members of both generations of liberal political intellectuals played a critical role in interpreting and legitimating the victory of the consolidators” [those supportive of corporate monopoly capitalism] (178). Her focus on the collaboration between different liberal factions underscores Gramsci’s point about the coalitional nature of hegemonic projects. Cohen argues:

Contrary to the prevailing historiographical interpretation, the proto-progressive social scientists did not overthrow the classical [laissez faire] liberals. Rather, after a cultural struggle in the 1880s, liberal reformers and social scientists ended up collaborating with each other to forge the new [reform] liberalism. (11)

However, equally important is Gramsci’s point that like all coalitions, the reform liberal coalition existed in an unstable equilibrium. That equilibrium was tacitly held together because of the common interests of: corporate owners wishing to quiet the growing industrial class war, intellectual social reformers who feared more radical solutions being advocated by anarchists and
communists, and centrist trade unionist like AFL leader Samuel Gompers wishing to use the
growing fear to enact legislation legalizing business-friendly unions.

In 1900, these three forces were brought together into the National Civic Federation (NCF). By 1903, not only were Jane Addams and Samuel Gompers leaders in the NCF, but fully one third of the 367 corporations in America at the time joined the federation including some of the most ruthless anti-labor industrialists of the 19th century like Andrew Carnegie and several of the big railroad operators (Weinstein *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State*...8). Seeing the move to contain the growing radicalism at the time, the Western Federation of Miners, the union that made up much of the leadership of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), concluded that the strategy of the NCF was as historians Thompson and Murin state: “...to housebreak unionism, to confine its growth to those fields where management could use it, and to emasculate it by a united front of labor leaders and captains of industry against all socialistic and insurgent elements” (11). The NCF strategy combine with the Red Scare after the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Palmer Raids against American dissidents proved effective at temporarily re-directing factions of the radical movement and crushing the recalcitrant factions.

*The Politics of Failure: Disunity, Fragmentation, Subalternity, and the ‘Administrative Mandate’*

The historians of Reconstruction and the Populist movement in the US have filled bookshelves detailing the tragic failure of what historian David Roediger calls “an anti-racist rainbow to rise” to form a cohesive unity and struggle for a revolutionary American future (*How Race*... 102-135). W.E.B. DuBois lamented in his magisterial study *Black Reconstruction* that

In the displacement of Southern feudal agriculture by Northern industry, where did the proletariat, the worker stand? The proletariat is usually envisaged as united, but their real interests were represented in America by four sets of people:
the freed Negro, the Southern poor white, and the Northern skilled and common laborer. These groups never came to see their common interests and the financiers and capitalists easily kept the upper hand. (216).

This is because he states “So long as the Southern white laborers could be induced to prefer poverty to equality with the Negro, just so long was a labor movement in the South made impossible” (680). This is similar to Gramsci’s observations on the failure of a united movement between northern and southern Italian workers and peasants because of the racial and class divides (“Some Aspects on the Southern Questions”). Speaking about the potential coalition between the populist and the labor movement—specifically the Knights of Labor and the Populist Party (a “rural/urban dissident bloc”)—Rossinow argues, “Of all the thwarted attempts at fundamental political change that pass along in the historiographic pageant of American paths not taken, none is more heartbreaking than the populist alternative” (19). He claims the radical coalition that could have formed a “producers’ commonwealth” was “pulled towards two separate destinations in the social imagination: the liberal-republicanism of the nineteen century and the self-concerned consumer liberalism of the twentieth” (21). Roediger agrees. While he argues, “Indeed, if there were a time when race might have disappeared in US history, it would have been precisely just after the Civil War” when the “jubilee” of emancipated slaves and the “jubilee of wage slaves” fighting for the 8-hour work day could have found common cause (How Race ... 102-103). Alas, Roediger admits “the Reconstruction-era white labor movement proved unable to shed its deep-rooted associations of African Americans with degraded work and incapacity for citizenship” (107). The republican fear of subservience was a powerful force in post-Civil War America (Saxton).

Instead of a urban/rural-north/south unity between industrial workers and agricultural
workers which could have fought for a different vision of American citizenship organized by a moral vision of a “cooperative commonwealth,” corporations and laissez faire liberals were savvy in their ability to rearticulate liberalism in such a way that was slightly kinder for certain populations (particularly skilled white male populations) but ultimately did not challenge the most egregious features of post-Civil War monopoly capitalism. Corporate monopoly/consolidation, private property, and massive wealth inequality all resulted in increasing misery for the great many—especially those at the margins of society: the poor, people of color, new immigrants, and women (Sklar; Trachtenberg; Fraser).

Most importantly, the new reform liberalism cemented a permanent subaltern status for people of color and women (in the sense of exclusion) to an isolated social position that insured their fragmentation and thus limited their agency. Furthermore, for white workers, it cemented a system of tenuous privilege based upon a “labor aristocracy” model protected by conservative unions and select government programs from the New Deal administration.13 For example, minimum wage protections and unemployment compensation excluded a majority of women workers and workers of color by excluding the occupations that most employed them—domestic work and farm labor, among others. This built a division between high-paid and low-paid workers as well as workers who received government protections and those who did not. For the mid-twentieth century, this division was largely characterized along the lines of race and gender.

13 For a discussion of the New Deal programs doling out benefits disproportionately to white workers, see Brinkley Liberalism and Its Discontents especially chapter 2 “The New Deal and Southern Politics.” See also Frasier and Gerstle, eds. Vladimir Lenin was the first revolutionary leader to popularize the concept of “the labor aristocracy” in Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism. See Hobsbawm “Lenin and ‘The Aristocracy of Labor’” from the August 1970 issue of Monthly Review. To show the significance of this article, the editors chose to reprint this article at the time of his death as a tribute. Importantly, The New Left contributed profoundly to the theory of labor aristocracy. See Weinstein “Gompers and the New Liberalism,” and Rodosh “Corporate Ideology of American Labor Leaders.” More recently, sociologists call this phenomenon “split labor market theory.” Coined by Edna Bonacich in her influential article "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market" it has enjoyed a revival in recent scholarship about tensions between native workers and undocumented workers.
But, while this pay differential reveals a clear privileging of white workers, the acceptance of this differential by white workers had detrimental consequences.

White workers acceptance of a tenuous privileged status meant forfeiting the vision of a freedom based upon commonwealth and self-determination. Possessing a “privileged” status based upon clientelism in a crisis-prone economy undergirded by a fluctuating passive revolution, is much different than possessing self-determination based upon a revolutionized society without private property. Even worse, as these divisions built up over time, they became a larger and larger factor preventing common unity among the working and subaltern classes, the basis of any project for counter-hegemony to re-store the vision of a radically free America. Like Gramsci’s argument about the failure of the Risorgimento in Italy, the failure of Reconstruction in the US left a deeply divided country between north and south, urban and rural, male and female, black and white, and pre-modern and industrial productive relations. Gramsci states:

The merit of an educated class, because it is its historical function, is to lead the popular masses and develop their progressive elements … [the Italian educated classes] said that they were aiming at the creation of a modern state in Italy, and they in fact produced a bastard. They aimed at stimulating the formation of an extensive and energetic ruling class, and they did not succeed; at integrating the people into the framework of the new state, and they did not succeed. The paltry political life from 1870 to 1900, the fundamental and endemic rebelliousness of the Italian popular classes, the narrow and stunted existence of a sceptical [sic] and cowardly ruling stratum, these are all the consequences of that failure. (My emphasis, SPN 90)

Likewise, the failure of Reconstruction in the US left a “bastard state.” The continuing
marginalization and repression of recently freed slaves and immigrants by both the government and the social movements, the defeat of the Knights and the Populist’s People’s Party, and the assimilation of the new reform liberal intellectuals into the laissez faire capitalist project represent one of the most shattering lost opportunities for the left in American history. Moreover, it dramatically changed the course of 20th century liberalism and its most important representation: the New Deal.

The “administrative mandate,” the fragmentation of the working and subaltern classes, and the promotion of corporate capitalism and consumerism hollowed out the participatory democracy envisioned in civic-republicanism and outright excluded any anti-capitalist solutions (Appleby “Republicanism and Ideology”; Young; Cohen; Rossinow; Foner The Story…). In an era where more people were gaining the right to vote—particularly angry poor people—the passive revolution led by reform liberalism allowed for a “delimitation of citizenship” without an outright restriction on voting rights. Cohen states, “Power gained by administrative agencies was unquestionably that surrendered by institutions where citizens held more direct influence” (224). Or as historian Steven Haber wrote in 1964, “The progressives who greeted efficiency with enthusiasm were often those who proposed to let the people rule through a program in which the bulk of the people, most of the time, ruled hardly at all.”14 Like Gramsci calling the failure of liberal reform in 19th century Italy the creation of a “bastard state,” Cohen argues, from the failure of radical projects during the late 19th century in the United States, we inherited “an eviscerated and anemic democracy” (256). As I will argue in the next chapter, it is the passive revolution—especially the “administrative mandate”—that Roosevelt used as his central tool of

14 Haber is speaking specifically about the “scientific management movement” led by Fredrick Taylor but supported by a large cross section of American liberals such as Supreme Court Justice Brandis and AFL president Samuel Gompers. See Haber. Also qtd. in Cohen 233.
containment during the aftermath of the Great Depression and WWII.
CHAPTER III. LEADERSHIP AND THE PASSIVE REVOLUTION IN THE NEW DEAL ERA

Pa said, I’m tired
O’waitin’ on Roosevelt,
Roosevelt, Roosevelt.
Damn tired o’ waitin’ on Roosevelt.
I can’t git a job
And I can’t git no grub.
Backbone and navel’s
Doin’ the belly-rub—
A-waitin’ on Roosevelt,
Roosevelt, Roosevelt.
And a lot o’ other folks
What’s hungry and cold
Done stopped believin'
What they been told
By Roosevelt,
Roosevelt, Roosevelt—
Cause the pot’s still empty,
And the cupboard’s still bare . . .
—Langston Hughes “Ballad of Roosevelt”

From Teddy Roosevelt’s “Square Deal” to Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom,” reform liberals had been looking for a leader and a social program to bring its synthesis between laissez faire liberals and reform liberals into a functioning, popular political existence. Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and New Deal liberalism represents the apotheosis of this project started in the 1870s (discussed in chapter 2). By the time he became president, FDR already had a reputation of bridging factions within the reform liberal movement—specifically corporations and unions. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy under President Wilson, Roosevelt oversaw ship construction during WWI. He often bragged that there was, “never a single strike, in a single trade, in a single Navy shipyard, during his tenure” (Venzon and Miles 502). Knowing full well that the recent resurgence of unmasked laissez faire liberalism in the 1920s during the Hoover administration could not contain the oncoming revolt after the collapse of the stock market and the world economy in 1929, Roosevelt argued for government intervention. The government intervention proposed would emphasize the collective good that leaned heavily on the republican tradition of
civic virtue, but all of this within a containing framework of top-down “enlightened administration” (Brinkley End...; Smith).

Some incorrectly labeled FDR a socialist for using government power to intervene in the economy, regulate big businesses, and build a tenuous yet significant social safety net. For example, Republican Party Representative Robert Rich of Pennsylvania, during a debate on the House floor on July 23, 1935 exclaimed, “Roosevelt is a socialist, not a Democrat.” However, that accusation seriously misunderstands FDR’s class project. In fact, during his 1936 campaign, he made it plainly clear: “I was convinced we'd have a revolution in [the] US and I decided to be its leader and prevent it. I'm a rich man too and have run with your kind of people. I decided half a loaf was better than none - a half loaf for me and a half loaf for you and no revolution” (qtd. in Smith 82). Combining Gramsci’s view on the passive revolution with his view of the function of intellectual leadership in the organization of hegemony provides not only a good understanding of FDR, but also allows us to understand how the largest radical organization during the Great Depression—the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA)—abdicated its previously militant critical role by opting for a silent, junior-partner status within the New Deal in a failed strategy to become a popular movement. Understanding FDR’s leadership over the passive revolution and the CPUSA’s betrayal of their once militant beliefs, goes a long way towards understanding the New Left’s frustration with the New Deal and the CPUSA.

Towards a ‘National Popular/Collective Will’: The ‘Organizational and Connective’ Function of Intellectuals

While it is common knowledge that FDR was the leader of the New Deal, it is my argument he was also an organic intellectual for the passive revolution that sought to restore the

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1 I am borrowing historians Michael Parenti and Charlie Post’s phrase “junior partner” to describe the CPUSA’s relationship to the New Deal.
2 The “organization and connective” quote is from Gramsci Q12, 1
conditions for capital accumulation and social control by disciplining lassie faire liberals and absorbing liberalism’s radical critics during one of the sharpest organic crises in United States history, the Great Depression. The power of using Gramsci’s analysis is that it avoids a one-dimensional view of FDR as either a saint, single-handedly ushering in the welfare state “Roosevelt revolution,” or as a villain, never delivering on any the radical promises of the early New Deal. It is important to see Roosevelt as a multi-dimensional leader, but still a leader who encoded the non-revolutionary desires of significant portions of the poor and working populations within his reform programs (although not all). He cleverly absorbed and united several radical factions and corporate factions around what sociologist Daniel Bell famously called “The Treat of Detroit” that eased the contradictions of capitalism and deferred the next crisis (Bell “The Treaty of Detroit”; Lichtenstein The Most Dangerous Man…283).

While the integral state and the passive revolution (as outlined in Chapter 1 and 2) are important keys to understanding the bourgeoisie’s construction of hegemony (and conversely understanding how the subaltern classes can seize power from the bourgeoisie), it is impossible to understand how Gramsci used these concepts without understanding the central role intellectuals play in their construction. Thinking of intellectuals as political organizers rather than disinterested observers fundamentally changes the political importance of intellectuals.3 Gramsci argues, “A human mass does not ‘distinguish’ itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders . . .” (SPN 323). Thomas goes so far as to argue: “Gramsci’s theorization of the role of intellectuals in modern societies constitutes the

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3 It should also be noted that the sections of the Prison Notebooks specifically devoted to a study of intellectuals were the only carceral writings Gramsci considered publishing from prison. Intellectuals also occupy a central place in his last published work before he entered prison: “Some Aspects of the Southern Question.”
point of departure for his initial historical researches, and occupies a central theoretical position
in his subsequent reformulation of the fundamentally political status of philosophy within the
Marxist Weltanschauung” (156). James Martin agrees when he asserts, “the category of
intellectuals was the Notebooks original organizing principle . . .” Further, “Intellectuals served
as an ‘interpretive category’ in so far as it permitted him to analyse social change in terms of the
recomposition of society and its historical development” (39). Gramsci defines intellectuals
politically through their role as “permanent persuaders” (Q4, 72) creating “the conditions most
favourable to the expansion of their own class” by “organising the general system of
relationships” connecting various segments of society into a cross class coalition he calls a
historical bloc and giving that emerging bloc self-awareness, unity, and coherence (SPN 10).

This Gramscian definition helps us understand Roosevelt as an organizer and permanent
persuader for a new cross-class coalition that came to be known as the New Deal coalition. But,
FDR was also an organic intellectual. While Gramsci’s category of organic intellectual is often
only discussed in terms of leftwing (often labor) activists organizing counter-hegemonic social
movements, it is crucial to understand that Gramsci was also interested in how there were also
organic intellectuals organizing the passive revolution (Thomas 406-418).

As part of his functional, organizational definition, Gramsci defines several categories of
intellectuals. It is clear that an intellectual to him is a person who is recruited to a class project,
gains class consciousness (or at least gets captivated by the project), and actively helps organize
the masses as a leader of that particular class project. The intellectual that comes organically
from the emerging class or class faction and serves that class in an integrative and organizational
role in its struggle for hegemony, Gramsci calls an “organic intellectual” (SPN 3-24). They are
organic because they not only originally come from the class and are connected to it structurally
in a socio-economic sense, but also because they see themselves culturally as active members of that class. Therefore, they understand its language, norms, and socialization. They understand the aspirations of their class at a “molecular level,” and are able to craft rhetoric that pin points those aspirations in an understandable and identifiable way. Roosevelt organically came from the capitalist class, understood its sensibilities, and could craft his reform discourse in a way that recruited a remarkable percentage—but certainly not all—of the corporate class (Brinkley End of Reform...; Smith The End Game...; Hofstadter).

At the same time, an organic intellectual’s job in the class struggle is to translate the fragmented and often incoherent common sense of what Gramsci refers to as the “simple people” into an understandable critical philosophy that recruits them to take political action rather than just make ethical statements. The critical philosophy must incorporate aspects of common sense and be spoken in an understandable language to assimilate the “simple people.” This is where FDR was most famously popular. Liberal journalist, Bill Moyers, relates a story of how his father (a poor, uneducated, west Texas cotton farmer) told him when he was 11 years old that “The President is my friend.” Moyers explains that his father mourned Roosevelt’s death as though it was a family member’s death. In fact, Moyers admits it was the only time he had ever seen his father cry in his life (Moyers). Likewise, John Lewis, the president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), created a popular recruitment poster arguing, “President Roosevelt Wants You to Join the Union” (Aronowitz 76). Working for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration during the Great Depression, Martha Gellhorn interviewed workers in textile mills towns. She reported:

Every house I visited—mill worker or unemployed—had a picture of the President...The portrait holds a place of honor over the mantel; I can only
compare this to the Italian peasant’s Madonna. And the feeling of these people for
the president is one of the most remarkable phenomena I have ever met. He is at
once God and their intimate friend; he knows them all by name, knows their little
town and mill, their little lives and problems. (qtd. in Cassano and Rondinone
421-422)

It was Roosevelt’s ability to craft a social movement that connected the interests of CEO’s and
working and poor people that made the New Deal successful.

But as Langston Hughes’s poem quoted in the epigraph above shows, even from the
beginning, the promises of reform liberalism led to unsatisfied hopes. Because the coalition was
so large and politically diverse, many of the most progressive aspects of the New Deal as
originally conceived—such as the commitment to racial and gender equality, monopoly trust
busting, and a reduction of class inequality—were forfeited in order to maintain coalitional unity
with centrists and conservatives, especially southern Democrats, late in the 1930s (Brinkley
Liberalism…). This was never more apparent than the concessions Roosevelt made to white
southern Democrats sacrificing civil rights reforms—particularly in terms of jobs and wage
equality, anti-lynching legislation, and FHA housing (Brinkley Liberalism…; Reed). That
radicals went along with these programs shows how Roosevelt—better than almost any U.S.
president—managed “unsatisfied hopes” with a successful strategy of containment and
absorption. All of this would not have been possible without the organic crisis of the Great
Depression and the capitulation of the Communist Party along with other radical forces such as
the CIO.

In order to understand, how Gramsci’s insight on intellectual leadership can be applied to
FDR and the New Deal, it is important to define the Great Depression and the radicalism it
inspired as an organic crisis; next to define the New Deal coalition and its place within the liberal passive revolution as a response to this organic crisis; lastly, show how FDR’s leadership was able to absorb dissident factions of radicals into its hegemonic class project—most notably the CPUSA.

The Great Depression as an Organic Crisis

The Great Depression was not only one of the largest economic crisis in American history, to many older workers, the Depression came as yet another in a cascading series of crises. Since the Civil War, poor and working people had marched through rivers of blood in two horrific wars (the Civil War and WWI) and seen a complete transformation of their traditional social relations due to the rapid incorporation of America: boom and bust cycles, growing income inequality, escalating unemployment and low wages (Trachtenberg; Fraser; Sklar). Add to this, the growing concentration of extreme wealth, heavily flaunted by Jazz Age propagandists, and you have the social conditions of a serve crisis of authority.

Historian Fraser Ottanelli argues that at no other time in American history were workers so open to radical ideas. He argues the Great Depression “shattered the American Dream and the philosophy of self-help, and raised for many the serious questions about the future of capitalism” (19). As will be discussed later in this chapter, for a brief time, revolutionary movements focused on building an independent counter-hegemonic historical bloc, but in response to the growing popularity of FDR and the growing crisis of fascism abroad, revolutionary movements instead opted to fold their movement into the New Deal coalition. They called this strategy the Popular

4 The next three paragraphs heavily reference research and writing I collected for my MA Thesis. See Hale “The representation of women in radical publications and proletarian literature during the Great Depression.”
This represented a failure of leadership based on a profound misunderstanding of the aims of New Deal liberalism.

The traditional cultural image of the Great Depression is crowds of desperate men standing in breadlines stretching down the street. But, that image does not begin to illustrate the abject misery the Depression brought to the entire working class—especially women and minorities, nor does it capture the fight back against unemployment organized by the most progressive sections of the working class. The worldwide economic crisis hit the United States particularly hard. By March 1930, unemployment increased to 5 million workers, a full ten times more than the previous year. It doubled in 1931 to 10 million and peaked in 1933 at 15 million (Ottanelli 28-29). So, in a period of just four years, unemployment went from 500,000 to 15 million—one out of four workers could not find any work. Because, after the Civil War, more and more people moved to the city and found jobs in industries employing hundreds of thousands of workers, when the economic crisis hit basic industry, it made unemployment particularly devastating. For example, between March 1929 and August 1931, employment rolls at Ford Motor Company dropped from 128,142 to 37,000. Those 37,000 only worked an average of 3 days per week (Ottanelli 19). In the early 1930’s, there were no Federal welfare programs

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5 The international communist movement divided its history into periods that reflected the controlling political strategy at the time. The Comintern was created in 1919 as the central deliberative body of the International Communist movement. Representatives from over fifty national Communist Parties, including the CPUSA, met every few years at World Congresses and collectively developed strategies that were designed to hasten the worldwide expansion of socialism. At the Sixth World Congress, in 1928, Comintern resolutions periodized the International Communist movement up until that time. At this Congress, the “Third Period” strategy was adopted and it guided the International Communist movement from 1928 until 1935. The Third Period was defined by the rapid decline of capitalism, the increasing radicalization of the working class, and the increasing intensification of the class war. At the Seventh World Congress, in 1935, the “Popular Front” strategy was adopted and guided the International Communist movement from 1935 until the beginning of WWII in 1939. In contrast to the Third Period, the Popular Front was defined largely by the rapid rise of fascism and the movement from Communists being on the offensive—seeking to destroy capitalism—to Communists being on the defensive—seeking to form alliances with middle-class organizations to defend bourgeois democracy against fascism. After the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939, the Popular Front alliances rapidly deteriorated in the United States until the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 and a new Popular Front was created. See Carr; Ottanelli; Kelly; Isserman *Which Side...*)
and local relief programs found themselves almost instantly overwhelmed. For example, the Birmingham, Alabama Red Cross saw its relief expenditure go from $6,000 per month in 1929 to $180,000 per month by July of 1933 (Kelly 20). The deepening crisis coupled with meager public relief opened many workers minds to radical solutions advocated by the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). Indeed, Ottanelli argues:

The reluctance of business, labor, and political leaders to deal with the increasing number of unemployed workers contrasted with the Party’s willingness to initiate immediate and concrete actions. In a situation which paralyzed traditional institutions, Communist led activities attracted many jobless workers. (28)

Early in the 1930s, the CPUSA pioneered a strategy of direct actions and protests led by their mass organization the Unemployment Councils (UC). The UC’s were predominately led by women, “who often proved more militant than their male comrades” (Kelly 21, 33; Strom 366). The unifying message of the UC’s was “Don’t starve, fight!” Liberals knew something needed to be done to contain the growing worker militancy. A reflection by Joseph Kennedy, Sr. (JFK’s father) on the Great Depression represents the feelings of many wealthy liberals who wanted to save the capitalist system: “in those days I felt and said I would be willing to part with half of what I had if I could be sure of keeping, under law and order, the other half” (qtd. in Schlesinger Robert Kennedy... 8). When thinking about the election of Roosevelt, Gramsci’s insights on the power of reform liberalism to absorb dissident social movements while transforming them into passive revolutions proves prescient. FDR successfully took advantage of the organic crisis by focusing on popular leadership in the struggle for hegemony.

For Gramsci, to understand hegemony demands pondering the questions: For whom are the intellectuals using their powers of persuasion? What is the popularity of the new culture they
are helping to build? Are they organizing for the “passive revolution” maintaining the fragmentation across several class fractions—factions that drive subordination and contain the aspirations of all people seeking freedom from capitalism that stalls them in a reformist “economic-corporate” level of struggle? Or, are intellectuals helping to organize a movement that thinks beyond liberalism? A movement where there is a cross-class coalition united by what Gramsci calls ‘a critical philosophy’ or a ‘theory of praxis’ that reveals the causality of their subordination and exercises collective revolutionary agency to bring about an anti-capitalist modernity?6 Stated simply, leadership is the key to hegemony—particularly leadership that organizes a popular common sense. This is a test the CPUSA failed and Roosevelt passed. As will be discussed below, Roosevelt appropriated a popular republican language to usher in a successful realignment strategy that gained hegemony from 1933 into the 1970s. To accomplish this, Roosevelt articulated one of the most successful and longest lasting campaign rhetorics in American history to popularize his social movement.

Roosevelt and the Language of Republicanism

While historian David Farber claims “In the 1936 election, nineteenth century [laissez faire] liberalism went down in flames, and New Deal liberalism ruled the land” (23), I will show how the New Deal represented the functional alliance of reform liberalism and 19th century American laissez faire liberalism to take over the leadership of the passive revolution and contain the growing crisis of authority in the labor, farmer, and poor people’s movements. It is in this

6 Gramsci’s study of intellectuals is therefore both descriptive and prescriptive (Martin 39). He wants to both describe how the bourgeoisie has used intellectuals to maintain their hegemony in order to prescribe how the proletariat in alliance with subaltern classes can use intellectuals to wage a counter-hegemonic struggle. Interestingly, in this way, Gramsci has a fairly integral view of ideology. Rather than the standard negative connotation (as false consciousness or mere appearance and not reality) given to ideology by Second International communists, Gramsci views ideology as an essential aspect of political struggle. The question for Gramsci was who could formulate and utilize ideology ethically in such an effective degree that it inspires popularity in the masses. The connection between political and ethical struggle was a key theme throughout the notebooks (Martin Ch 2).
sense that one of FDR’s most famous campaign speeches provides a fuller view of Roosevelt’s project. Dismissing those who called him a socialist, he wrote disappointedly about “the failure of those who have property to realize that I am the best friend the profit system ever had” (qtd. in Davis 327). More so than any politician of his time, Roosevelt was able to fulfill the reform liberal project of protecting capitalism and devaluing socialism by designing reforms that responded to the non-revolutionary desire of working and poor people. To accomplish this, Roosevelt built what Gramsci refers to as a consent-seeking “integral state” that was able to pass several significant non-revolutionary reforms. One of Roosevelt’s central goals was to squash anti-capitalist sentiment rising in the masses and forestall any kind of revolutionary organizing. To do so, he called upon the language of republicanism to animate his reform program with an understandable and popular vocabulary (Cassano and Rondinone).

In his 1936 acceptance speech a “Rendezvous with Destiny” Roosevelt uses a republican vocabulary to help build his coalition. Exulting the American Revolution, he argues, “political tyranny was wiped out at Philadelphia on July 4, 1776.” “The average man” had “won the right with his neighbors to make and order his own destiny through his own Government.” This is the republican vision of liberty. But, while we freed ourselves from political tyranny, economic tyranny still lurked. Roosevelt builds on the republican fear of subservience to unvirtuous people above and below.

For out of this modern civilization economic royalists carved new dynasties. New kingdoms were built upon concentration of control over material things. Through new uses of corporations, banks and securities, new machinery of industry and agriculture, of labor and capital - all undreamed of by the Fathers - the whole structure of modern life was impressed into this royal service.”
He continued by sketching the outline of his cross-class coalition that will fight the “economic royalists”:

There was no place among this royalty for our many thousands of small business men and merchants who sought to make a worthy use of the American system of initiative and profit. They were no more free than the worker or the farmer. Even honest and progressive-minded men of wealth, aware of their obligation to their generation, could never know just where they fitted into this dynastic scheme of things.

Roosevelt’s republican rhetoric brought together business owners, workers, farmers, and the wealthy into one grand cross-class coalition. All the while, he focused their attention on the unvirtuous people at the top and their dependents below, the “privileged princes” who “created a new despotism” which he called a “new industrial dictatorship.” In another famous speech, he declared, “Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me--and I welcome their hatred.”

Republican language speaks beautifully about unvirtuous bad actors, but it is vague on causality beyond naming villains and pointing to a time before these villains existed when the current system worked for everyone. In other words, republicanism, quite deliberately, eschews a systemic critique, and posits a non-class populist, values-based critique that leans heavily on nostalgia for a constructed past that never really existed. Roosevelt used nostalgia to organize a new coalition.

Roosevelt and the ‘Administrative Mandate’

From the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to the Works Progress Administration, from the Rural Electrification Administration to the Federal Deposit Insurance
Corporation, the New Deal established an unprecedented bureaucracy to manage its reform projects through state intervention, and brought into being the clearest fruition of what historian Lisa Cohen calls the “administrative mandate” developed by reform liberals in the 19th century (discussed in chapter 2). The New Deal enhanced the power of already-established local political machines with tremendous financing from the federal government. On one hand, this did not challenge existing racist, sexist, and imperialist power relationships that ignored the poor and people of color. On the other hand, it often emboldened corrupt local political leaders and their political machines instead of emboldening an entirely new grassroots, bottom-up coalition of the poor and unemployed. While aid did reach the poor (particularly the white poor), it often reached them on a clientelist model based upon patronism (Brinkley Liberalism... 63-79). This made local and state political leaders in the New Deal coalition very powerful. In fact, the New Deal elevated politicians like George Wallace (Alabama), Huey Long (Louisiana), Richard Daily (Chicago), Sam Yorty (Los Angeles) who had enormous sums of New Deal money to build political patronage machines. Not only could the infrastructure money be used to show how local politicians “were bringing home the bacon” for their state or city, it could also be used to create jobs for all-white craft unions, thereby reinforcing rather than redistributing the racial pay and power gap. It should be noted, it was these same entrenched politicians that the New Left and Civil Rights movement confronted on issues like civil rights and the war in Vietnam (Branch).

The New Deal’s “administrative mandate” enabled less democratic participation by the masses because “enlightened” leaders made decisions in a bureaucratic and top-down decision-making model. Efficiency was gained on one hand through the outright exclusion of social democratic or revolutionary options, and the promotion of certain “reasonable managers” who could make unitary executive decisions—who Roosevelt called his “brain trust.” On the other
hand, laissez faire liberalism and its corporate supporters (what Roosevelt referred as the “economic royalists” in his republican vocabulary) were restrained and their more greedy inclinations diminished to appear more beneficial to the masses; this included a slight redistribution of corporate profits towards social welfare (Fraser and Gerstle ix-xxiv). Roosevelt’s move was what Gramsci talks about as the movement away from an “economic-corporate consciousness” to a more “universalist consciousness.” As numerous studies conclude, New Deal institutions were not meant to revolutionize the political-economic structure of society (Zinn New Deal Thought; Williams; Smith). Instead, their primary mission was to increase consumer spending, (Brinkley End…) if need be, but also increase workers’ wages and provide welfare income to the unemployed and elderly (Rossinow Visions…).

While the New Deal attempted to build a consent-seeking integral state, it also understood Gramsci’s consent-versus-force problematic. Unlike the popular image of Roosevelt as the beneficent leader (or even a “communist”), it is important to note that he policed the boundaries around radical activism with an iron fist—willing to use state repression where consent did not work. One of the best examples of this is Roosevelt ordering the army to attack the Bonus Marchers in 1933; the Bonus Marchers were veterans of WWI who marched on Washington in order to compel the government to pay a bonus promised to them.

Furthermore, contrary to traditional story, for the millions of workers who were unemployed, New Deal relief programs did not help as much as touted. This was especially true for women workers and people of color. The Red Cross supervisor assigned to distribute relief maintained dictatorial, often racist, control over the cash and food allotments. In a letter to the CPUSA’s newspaper, Daily Worker, one southern African American woman reported, “the Red Cross stands with a pistol over us while we work, like we are prisoners working out a term”
(Kelley 20). Furthermore, as Feminist historian Sharon Hartman Strom points out, the New Deal legislation enacted by Roosevelt supposedly to give relief to workers harshly discriminated against women. The Federal work programs set up by the Roosevelt administration often took women who had worked in an industrial job and put them back into domestic service at extremely low wages (Strom); this created huge resentment and anger (Kelly 203). The 1933 Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) “sanctioned lower pay rates for women workers” and it “excluded domestic, clerical, and agriculture jobs—all major occupations for women, especially poor and minority women” (361). Moreover, while women paid the same Social Security taxes as men, they received far less in benefits upon retirement (361). In addition, domestic, agricultural, and government work was not covered under Social Security. Furthermore and crucially, agricultural and domestic job categories—predominately comprised of people of color and women workers—were deliberately excluded from the protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act and were also excluded from the Wagner Act, preventing them from collectively bargaining (Reed). Section 213 of the Economy Act of 1932 allowed women to be fired from government jobs if they were married. All these laws were developed under the guidance of Roosevelt’s Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, ironically the first women ever to hold an Executive cabinet position.

Furthermore, the reform legislation that legalized the right for workers to collectively bargain suffered a debilitating series of legislative degradations shortly after it was originally passed in 1937 until it was a rather flimsy law (Taft-Hartley Act) that empowered business owners more than it empowered workers (Fletcher Jr.). These restrictions on the law were written in direct consultation with industry leaders (such as outlawing the practice of secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes), and those same CEOs were placed in charge of regulating the
various New Deal agencies that were setup to oversee industry (Brinkley End...).

Instead of mobilizing the unsatisfied hopes of poor people who were “tired of waiting on Roosevelt,” the CPUSA abdicated its militant role in a failed effort to build popularity as the country entered an economic recovery and entered the international fight against fascism. In order to understand, how much the CPUSA abandoned its critical role, it is important to review first their original criticism of Roosevelt—during the Third Period (1928-1935), then move to an examination of their collaborationist strategy known as The Popular Front (1935-1939 and beyond).

*The CPUSA and the Popular Front: ‘Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism’*

Through a combination of Roosevelt’s mild rhetorical commitment to the collective good and his commitment to fight fascism in WWII, he disarmed and assimilated many left-wing critics.\(^7\) During what is referred to in the history of the international communist movement as the Third Period,\(^8\) the CPUSA was unflinching in its criticism of Roosevelt—a criticism that soon faded. In 1933, shortly after Roosevelt’s first election, the CPUSA asserted:

Roosevelt’s policies, as is already evident, are policies in the interests of the bankers and big industrialists and against the interests of the toiling masses. The dictatorial powers already taken by Roosevelt—already a step toward fascisization — are being used against the toilers. The militarization of labor, the economy program at the expense of the masses ... increased military and naval expenditures in preparation for a new war which the masses will be called upon to

\(^7\) It was not uncommon for communists to call Roosevelt a “social fascist” in the language of the Third Period before 1936 (See Dutt *Fascism and Social Revolution*). Interestingly, Hoover also called Roosevelt a fascist in the 1932 campaign for his “corporatist tendencies” (See Lichtenstein’s chapter in Fraser and Gerstle).

\(^8\) The Third Period extends from 1928-1935, from the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International to the Seventh World Congress.
be the cannon fodder—this is the anti-working class program of Roosevelt.⁹

Furthermore, the General Secretary, Earl Browder in an article titled, “The Roosevelt New Deal and Fascism” argued: “The ‘New Deal’ is a policy of slashing the living standards at home and fighting for markets abroad for the single purpose of maintaining the profits of finance capital. It is a policy of brutal oppression and preparations for imperialist war.”¹⁰ He continues, “Roosevelt operates with all the arts of ‘democratic’ rule, with an emphasized liberal and social demagogic cover ... Yet behind this smokescreen, Roosevelt is carrying out more thoroughly and brutally even than Hoover.” Former CPUSA General Secretary, William Foster focuses on FDR as an agent of absorption describing FDR as “a lightning rod for capitalism to protect it from danger” (“Who is Roosevelt” Daily Worker, August 29, 1933). However, this militant stance lasted only a short time. As several examples will show, the CPUSA quickly reversed its militant critique.

*From ‘Social Fascist’ to ‘Friend of the Working Man’*

Many scholars argue that the defining characteristic of New Deal Liberalism was its absorption of the reform efforts of the Progressive Era at the turn of the century and the socialist and anarchist organizing of the 1910s through the 1930s (Zinn *New Deal Thought*; Williams; Smith). While it is important to judge the New Deal for what it accomplished, it is equally important to note the limits and boundaries it placed on radical activism. Capitalism was to be reformed, not eliminated. It now appeared as a basically good system that needed only occasional intervention under terms mainly set by corporate America, but in consultation with “responsible” (meaning non-communist and non-radical) labor leaders. Various radical movements—most specifically the CPUSA and the CIO—wed themselves to the New Deal and

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¹⁰ Speech of Earl Browder at Extraordinary Conference of the CPUSA held in New York City July 7-10 1933. Published in the The Daily Worker July 8th 1933.
to “Americanization” in order to defeat fascism and build a popular base. In his essay, “How FDR Saved Capitalism,” well-known sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset argued,

If the Great Depression, with all its attendant effects, shifted national attitudes to the left, why was it that no strong radical movement committed itself to a third party during these years? A key part of the explanation was that President Roosevelt succeeded in including left-wing protest in his New Deal coalition. He used two basic tactics. First, he responded to the various outgroups by incorporating in his own rhetoric many of their demands. Second, he absorbed the leaders of these groups into his following. These reflected conscious efforts to undercut left-wing radicals and thus to preserve capitalism. (Lipset and Marks)

As an example, the CIO unions, that the CPUSA led, all signed no strike contracts with corporations such as Ford during the buildup to WWII. Thus abdicating their position as the revolutionaries leading the struggle against exploitation and war, in deference to nationalism and corporatism. Historian Jeremey Brecher’s research finds that “Ninety-two percent of contracts in 1945 provided automatic arbitration of grievances, and 90 percent of contracts pledged no strikes during the course of the agreement by 1947.” In exchange, the War Labor Board advocated for “maintenance of membership” agreements, meaning workers could not decertify the union or stop their membership during the term of the contract. Instead of fighting political dissidents in the open terrain of political repression, Roosevelt brought them inside of the New Deal, and made them middle managers of a pacified, welfare bureaucracy that did not seek revolutionary change.

Both the turn to corporate liberalism and nationalism after the 1937 recession and the growing power of fascism in Europe as an evil much worse than capitalism “muted liberal
hostility to capitalism and the corporate world,” argues Brinkley (End... 7). They, “so transformed their [the reform liberals] vision of political economy that it no longer bore much direct relation to the progressive traditions that had originally informed their efforts” (11). It was the “beginning of a new and very different liberal era.” What characterized this new era?

Brinkley argues:

When liberals spoke now [after WWII] of government responsibility to protect the health of the industrial world, they defined that responsibility less as a commitment to restructure the economy than as an effort to stabilize it and help it grow. They were no longer much concerned about controlling or punishing ‘plutocrats’ and ‘economic royalists,’ an impulse central to New Deal rhetoric in the mid-1930s. Instead, they spoke of the commitment to providing a healthy environment in which the corporate world could flourish and in which the economy could sustain ‘full employment.’ (7)

Even a member of Roosevelt’s own “brain trust” admits as much in his memoir. Rexford Tugwell argued rather than seeing a “Roosevelt Revolution,” he claimed “The New Deal was a mild medicine.” Roosevelt “could have emerged from the orthodox progressive chrysalis and led us to a new world. He chose rather rickety repairs for an old one” (xxi).

It is remarkable to view the way the radical allies of the New Deal went along with this slide towards corporate/cold war liberalism. Historian Jeremey Brecher quotes a 1944 Business Week article stating:

A more conciliatory attitude toward business is apparent in unions which once pursued intransigent policies. On the whole, the organizations involved are those which have been identified as Communist-dominated....Today they have perhaps
the best no-strike record of any section of organized labor; they are the most
evigorouvous proponents of labor-management cooperation; they are the only serious
labor advocates of incentive wages.... In general, employers with whom they deal
now have the most peaceful labor relations in industry. Complaints to the union's
national officers usually will bring all the organization's disciplinary apparatus to
focus on the heads of the unruly local leaders. (qtd. in Brecher)

Earl Browder’s leadership of the CPUSA provides a view into the extent that Roosevelt’s
strategy was to absorb revolutionary organizing. Interestingly, Roosevelt pardoned Browder
when he was sentenced to 10 year in prison in 1942 on passport fraud charges. Historians have
speculated about Roosevelt’s intentions—especially given the fact that Browder rallied more
radicals to support the New Deal than probably any other left leader (Isserman Which
side…131). The man who once called Roosevelt a fascist in 1933, argued: “in 1936, a year of
big decisions, the American people stayed true to their democratic heritage handed down from
the days of Washington and Jefferson. They gave an overwhelming mandate to Roosevelt and to
congress, saying ‘we want democracy—we want progress’” (“Communist Election Platform of
1938” 2). Browder further argued that Americans voting for FDR represented a revival of the
“people’s democracy” that “backed Jefferson, Jackson, and the Populist movement of the 90’s.”
Browder infers that all the people who voted for Roosevelt were really voting for the beginning
stages of a People’s Front government.

Writing in 1944, Browder shows how far the CPUSA moderated its former revolutionary
positions. He stated:

We must be prepared to give the hand of cooperation and fellowship to everyone
who fights for the realization of this coalition [the allied coalition fighting
fascism]. If J.P. Morgan supports this coalition and goes down the line for it, I as a Communist am prepared to clasp his hand on that and join with him to realize it. Class divisions or political groupings have no significance now . . . (The Communist 8.)

In a defense of his statement several months later before the Central Committee of the CPUSA, Browder further stated:

Marxists will not help the reactionaries, by opposing the slogan of ‘Free Enterprise’ with any form of counter slogan. If anyone wishes to describe the existing system of capitalism in the United States as ‘free enterprise,’ that is all right with us, and we frankly declare that we are ready to cooperate in making this capitalism work effectively in the postwar period with the least possible burdens upon the people.11

While he never discusses Browder, Brinkley’s description of the changing nature of the New Deal after 1937, “to providing a healthy environment in which the corporate world could flourish” fits perfectly with Browder’s committing the CPUSA “to cooperate in making this capitalism work effectively.”

The attempt to understand the emergence of a consensus around corporate liberalism and Cold War nationalism after WWII becomes a central organizing tenet for the New Left in the 1960s. The Old Left’s collaboration with the post-War New Deal, and its resignation as a revolutionary force in American life became a point upon which distrust and hostility grew.12

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11 It should be noted that while Browder was very popular during his time as General Secretary of CPUSA, his policies of Americanization and Popular Front did not go unchallenged. William Z Foster and Sam Darcy led the domestic opposition to his policies and Jacques Duclos, leader of the French CP, led the international opposition (Ottanelli).

12 See the New Left Chapters below for further development.
But, their rejection of the Old Left was not built upon a deep understanding of the Old Left’s failures. Interestingly enough, in their rejection of the working class as the agent of revolutionary change, the New Left repeated a similar mistake as the CPUSA under the Popular Front strategy.

_The Problem with the Popular Front_

The liberal/radical alliance during the early New Deal also reflected what was called the “Popular Front strategy” (Denning; Kelly) and the moderating of the CPUSA’s role as revolutionaries. The CPUSA and assorted radical groups believed that unity with liberals in the face of economic crisis and fascism was more important than anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggle (Dimitrov).

By all accounts, Earl Browder—by 1933 the sole leader of the CPUSA—supported the new line wholeheartedly. After the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, Browder became one of the largest champions of the Popular Front strategy. His main goal was to lead the CPUSA to shake off its image as “foreign Bolshevik outsiders” and build an image that portrayed the CPUSA as all-American defenders of Democracy.

Browder’s often cited 1936 Presidential campaign slogan “Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism” signified this shift. The CPUSA took “Communist national patriotism” far beyond most Communist Parties in the Comintern. If the Third Period was defined by the Bolshevization of the Party, than the Popular Front was certainly defined by the Americanization of the Party. Ottanelli points out that at major events and marches organized by the Party after 1936, like May Day, International Workers Day, “Marx, Lenin, and Stalin . . . were placed on an equal ideological standing as the [American] founding fathers” (Ottanelli 123). American songs such as “Yankee Doodle” and the “Star Spangled Banner” were sung along side the traditional Communist song the “International” during events and conventions (Ottanelli 101, 115). The
Party foregrounded the fact that Browder came from a “true-blue” American town in Kansas, and he could trace his family lineage back to Littleberry Browder who fought in Washington’s Continental Army (Ottanelli 124).

In just three short years after the Seventh World Congress (SWC), the CPUSA overhauled itself to such a degree that very little was left from the militant Third Period. From 1936-1938, Browder independently led the CPUSA to extend the resolutions of the SWC in a further reformist direction. Browder and selected supporters of the SWC resolutions renamed the Popular Front to a more Americanized name, the “Democratic Front.” Under the direction of the resolutions passed at the SWC, the CPUSA dissolved most of their radical institutions that during the Third Period were at the forefront of fighting racism, sexism, and exploitation. This was done to appease middle class liberals and give the CPUSA a more “respectable” American image (Kelly; Mullen; Foley). Some of the more salient examples include: in 1936, the Central Committee dropped the call for black self-determination and dissolved the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. In 1937, it dissolved the International Labor Defender, which had single-handedly led the legal fight against lynching terror and harassment of black labor leaders—the Scottsboro case being only the most famous.13 The CPUSA now advocated that organizers join liberal organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that disliked revolutionary politics because it threatened their legitimate status with the bourgeois. In 1933, the CPUSA abandoned dual-unionism—a policy of building parallel

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13 In 1931, nine African American teenagers were accused of raping two white woman on a train traveling in the South. Their case was first heard in Scottsboro, Alabama. The case came to be known as the Scottsboro Trial and the boys, as young as 12 years old, became known as the Scottsboro Boys. Their trial gained international attention and went all the way to the Supreme Court several times—some calling it the trail of the century. The CPUSA, through its legal arm, the International Labor Defender, took up the defense of these young men and helped build their plight into an international protest against racially biased legal systems. Harper Lee’s book *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Langston Hughes’ play *Scottsboro Limited*, and Jean Paul Sartre’s play *The Respectful Prostitute* are all based upon the trial. The defense committee for the Scottsboro Boys is also where the famous civil rights activist Rosa Parks got her start in activism.
communist-led unions alongside AFL unions, such as the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union. These “red” unions focused on organizing people of color, the poor, and the unorganized like the Sharecroppers union (Kelly). After numerous CP activists, including a remarkable number of people of color and women, committed their life to organizing these radical unions into an alternative federation called the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), the leadership of the CPUSA dissolved these institution in order to become active in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) (Zieger; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin).

Unlike its role in the TUUL, in the CIO, the CPUSA subordinated recruitment to the CPUSA in order to focus on recruitment to the CIO. Life-long black Communist organizer Hosea Hudson argues that the CPUSA lost its identity and “everyone got soaked up” into the CIO (qtd. in Kelly 147). The leadership dissolved all the factory Shop Units and Shop papers by 1937 and encouraged their members to keep their political affiliation a secret in order to appear that they were not attempting to take over the unions. Their single-handed drive to organize the unorganized in the Third Period—which was often underground and required militant determination and extra-legal fighting in cases such as the ShareCroppers Union—was abandoned for legal union drives under the CIO. Once the CIO was off the ground, the leadership replaced most of their direct action tactics with legal bargaining tactics. From 1936-1938, the Party reorganized itself to imitate traditional American political parties. It redrew its districts to duplicate traditional congressional districts. Browder placed the full weight of the CPUSA behind Roosevelt. This made the CPUSA virtually indistinguishable from New Deal Democrats in politics and indistinguishable from CIO bureaucrats in labor organizing (Ottanelli 111; Kelly 147).

The new goals of class collaboration required a serious recasting of CPUSA political
rhetoric. A move from “to the working class” to “to the people” might seem harmless, but this fact added to their abandonment of several militant organizing strategies. When combined with its new focus on middle class respectability, one can conclude that they were no longer interested in directly organizing the poor and unorganized. Nor were they interested in challenging the middle class to think beyond nationalism and patriotism. This cycle continued until the CPUSA had lost a significant percentage of its urban industrial working class base, especially its poor and minority constituencies, and became indistinguishable from any other predominately middle-class-reformist Party (Kelly 135-137). In their attempt to Americanize the Party and win mainstream liberal support, who was being converted?

Fragmentation Instead of Organization

Organized labor—particularly the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), led in important ways by the CPUSA\(^ {14} \)—had the greatest potential of changing the direction of the New Deal from a pro-consumerism direction to at least a more social democratic direction (if not an outright revolutionary direction). The CPUSA had the largest radical organization involved in the CIO, the most committed and disciplined organizers, and leadership or influence over a large number of liberal “front” organizations and in numerous professions across the country. In the early years of the New Deal (and also the early years of WWII to a lesser degree), it seemed like that potential could be activated. Workers in several enormous industrial unions voted for young, intelligent socialist-minded leaders like Walter Reuther (United Auto Workers) and Sidney Hillman (Amalgamated Clothing Workers) who while not members of radical parties, at least were sympathetic to anti-capitalist ideas and especially the organizing energy and skill of young radicals (Lichtenstein *The Most Dangerous Man…*). The outbreak of bottom-up worker

\(^ {14} \) See Zieger; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin. Both detail the role the CPUSA played in the CIO.
militancy in the mid-1930s, symbolized by conflagrations like the 1937 Flint Sit Down Strike and the recognition they received from corporations like General Motors speaks to a potential of a worker-run industrial democracy. That bottom-up movement and the potential of the new leadership were short lived however.

Not surprisingly, corporations and government officials feared this growth of labor militancy, but so did certain factions of the new labor leadership. These three forces, corporations, government officials, and certain non-radical factions of the labor movement used the 1937 recession and the need for increased war-time production to design a new labor/management accord that severely changed the direction of labor relations in the mid-century. In order to consolidate power, labor leaders Walter Reuther and Philip Murray argued for a corporatist tri-level bargaining agreement comprised of reform liberal politicians (or their appointees), “enlightened” corporate managers, and “responsible” labor leaders. At the time, some called this plan, “associationalism” (Lichtenstein in Fraser and Gerstle. eds; Brinkley End of Reform…). As will become clearer in the New Left chapters of this dissertation (especially chapters 5 and 6), the leadership of the labor movement ultimately engineered an administrative mandate of its own that took its cues from Roosevelt’s passive revolution, cutting the legs out from under the emerging bottom-up worker militancy and implementing a top down collective bargaining system that emphasized growing the economy by increasing the “American standard of living.”

Rather than a grand conspiracy, the emergence of a consensus around economic growth through consumerism (rather than the socialist focus on state-led planning and redistribution of wealth) was developed through the convergence of interests of three powerful social groups. First was the growing influence of Keynesian economics that emphasized increased spending as
a solution to the boom-and-bust-cycle of capitalism. Historian Alan Brinkley notes, the rise of Keynesianism in Roosevelt’s circles meant the decline of the anti-trust/anti-monopoly economists from the Progressive era who feared centralization, so instead of focusing on breaking up large corporations and big bureaucracies. In an address to the Economic Club of New York on November 1, 1912, Supreme Court Justice Brandeis exemplified trust-busting when he said:

We learned long ago that liberty could be preserved only by limiting in some way the freedom of action of individuals; that otherwise liberty would necessarily yield to absolutism; and in the same way we have learned that unless there be regulation of competition, its excesses will lead to the destruction of competition, and monopoly will take its place.

The depression changed this emphasis. As Brinkley argues: “…defending the rights of small producers—was a nice ideal in the abstract, but it was not the goal of the moment [post-1937]. The important thing as to ensure that prices went down and consumption went up” (64). But, their influence dramatically receded as leading intellectuals started advocating for industrial centralization to increase the production of consumer goods to spur economic growth.

Second was the growing influence of economists in Roosevelt’s “brain trust” who advocated unleashing the pent up desire for more extravagant consumer goods and services after the Great Depression. According to Brinkley, Marriner Eccles, among the most influential economists in Roosevelt’s circle—eventually becoming Chairmen of the Federal Reserve—“measured almost every New Deal initiative by one standard alone: the degree to which it

15 Just as the Progressive were purged from Roosevelt’s circle after the economic crisis of 1937, according to Brinkley, Noble-Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz made a similar argument about the Keynesianist being purged from Clinton’s administration and the World Bank at the end of the 1990s (Globalization And Its Discontents).
contributed to mass purchasing power” (82). Economist George Soule argued as early as 1933 that “high wages” and “mass consumption” were the aims of Roosevelt’s economic policies (Brinkley 70). During the Depression, the thrifty family who saved and sacrificed pleasure and convenience was considered the patriotic American family, but after the Depression, saving money rather than spending it was considered un-American. Economists William Foster and Waddill Catchings argued as early as 1931, “At least three million of the unemployed are in that plight because consumers have saved too much” (A Road to Plenty).

Thirdly, rising labor leaders like Walter Reuther and Sidney Hillman saw these trends as an opportunity to use their recent unionization victories to leverage power at the bargaining tables to pressure corporations to increase wages as a way to increase consumer spending. They were also trying to combat the growing influence of labor leader John Lewis, who led the largest strike during WWII flatly rejecting the no-strike pledge promised by labor leaders (including CPUSA–influenced unions). Lewis was more interested in building a radical labor movement independent of corporate collaboration or government protection that could be given or taken away. The failure of post-war labor leaders will be discussed at length in Chapter 5-6. Their collusion with corporations and the New Deal to create industrial peace and increase consumerism makes up the foundation of the New Left’s reject of organized labor specifically and the working class generally as revolutionary agents of change, or what Mills called “the labor metaphysic.”

The need for increased consumption to boost flagging profits, the need to stimulate spending to boost GDP growth, and the need to boost wages for union works aligned the interests of corporations, New Deal Keynesian economists, and labor leaders to a greater degree than is often discussed. It also transformed the post-Depression class struggle. Labor historian
Steve Fraser argues

The ASL [American Standard of Living] was, in a sense, the favorite answer to the labor question [labor militancy], draining it of its moral preeminence, its political threat, and its elemental social significance. The struggle of power and property, which had supplied the friction and fission of politics since at least the Gilded Age, was superseded by the universal quest for more—goulash capitalism. Mass politics replaced class politics. Labor ceased to be a great question or even a mass movement containing within it the seeds of a wholly new future. As an institutionalized interest group, it had become part of the answer, contributing to and drawing its deserts from the coricopia of American mass production and consumption (Fraser and Gerstle 57).

In other words consumerism—made possible by incremental wage increases guaranteed by favorable union contracts rather than industrial democracy, let alone worker’s power, became the order of the day.

The consumerism championed by the New Deal and agreed on by the top leaders of organized labor, was an extension of the passive revolution organized by reform liberals (coming out of the long 19th century). The ability to express one’s individualism in the marketplace by purchasing new consumer goods was a substitution for the promise of self-determination based upon independent ownership of productive property or artisanal skills. Workers learned to accept the inevitability of wage work in a bureaucratic and highly controlled workplace in exchange for the promise of the freedom of the consumer market place. While many studies have detailed this tradeoff (Marchand; Fraser and Gerstle “Introduction”; Lichtenstein in Fraser and Gerstle), and many other studies have documented the alienation and anxiety it produced in the 1950s
(Riesman; Whyte; Goodman), few studies remarked on how it fractured the working class between an increasingly prosperous mainly white skilled population and a stagnating poor population of unorganized workers many of whom where women and minority workers, but also a sizeable percentage of poor white workers. By setting up a system whereby only certain groups of people (albeit much larger groups of people than ever before) gained entrance into higher-waged work and gained protection from the new government regulations and reform programs, it created a highly segmented and unequal system of differential treatment and differential citizenship rights based upon race and gender but also region and industry. Labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein argues in the late 1980s:

The weakness of the postwar welfare state and the extreme fragmentation inherent in the American system of industrial relations did much to re-divide the working class into a unionized segment [of mainly white workers and “assimilatable” European immigrants] that until recently enjoyed an almost Western European level of social welfare protection, and a still larger stratum, predominantly young, minority, and female, that was left out in the cold. (Fraser and Gerstle 144)

While it is important to criticize Roosevelt and labor leaders for helping to organize an anti-democratic administrative mandate, it is equally important to note, they created a political form that was popular among a large section of the working class. As consumer statistics from the post-WWII period indicate, American’s increased spending habits based upon their increased wages and stable work is one of the hallmarks of mid-century American culture. Former SDS president, Gitlin wrote in his 1987 memoir,

Once the war was over, consumer demand was a dynamo. Science was mobilized by industry, and capital was channeled by government as never before. The boom
was on, and the cornucopia seemed all the more impressive because the miseries of Depression and war were near enough to suffuse the present with a sense of relief. (20)

However, at the same time, it is also this same popular consumer culture that young New Left activists found hollow and rebelled against. Gitlin argued, “Yet the affluent Fifties were, as I.F. Stone wrote, haunted. Conformity was supposed to buy contentment, cornucopia promised both private and public Utopia, but satisfaction kept slipping out of reach” (29). Instead of affluence, alienation became the watchword of the New Left, and it was this generational feeling that the New Left felt the Old Left misunderstood.

Instead of building a critique of the limitations of reform liberalism (as they watched it betray its many promises and create “unsatisfied hopes” among the masses), radicals from the CPUSA capitulated to the New Deal in a silent partner alliance and promoted a growth economy based upon consumerism rather than a socialist economy based upon planning. In addition to the CPUSA’s capitulation, a prominent group of sociologists and historians—people like Author Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Daniel Bell, and Louis Hartz—deified the reforms of the New Deal, sanctified American exceptionalism, and gloried in America’s corporate and military might in the 1950s.

Re-Thinking the New Deal as an Unstable Equilibrium Rather than a Stable Consensus

The relative stability of the New Deal coalition from 1932 up until the 1968-1972 elections led many mid-century intellectuals to refer to the post-war period as governed by a “liberal consensus.” It is remarkable how widely scholars believe the New Deal was a permanent untranscendable feature of American life, rather than a dynamic and contingent coalition built upon unstable ground. These arguments have led to a mythologizing of the New Deal. Still
today, historian Jefferson Cowie argues that for many progressives “the era of Roosevelt has become a metaphor, political principle, and guiding light for all that must be returned to American politics” (“We Can’t Go Home Again”).\textsuperscript{16} Liberal historian and arch-New Deal partisan, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. confidently argued in the early 50s: “During most of my political consciousness this has been a New Deal country. I expect that it will continue to be a New Deal country.” The United States continued, “to be a New Deal country” for less than two decades after he made this statement.\textsuperscript{17} In fairness to Schlesinger, in the later 1960s, his views adjusted to the reality of the rise of the New Right, but he did not admit the causes of failure ran deeper than just conservative backlash. In hindsight, we can clearly say Schlesinger was wrong.

At the beginning of the 1960s, in a prescient article for \textit{Esquire}, “A New Mood in Politics,” Schlesinger tentatively began considering the breakdown of the liberal consensus:

\begin{quote}
The Eisenhower epoch -- the present period of passivity and acquiescence in our national life -- is drawing to a natural end. . . it is beginning to manifest itself in a multitude of ways: in freshening attitudes in politics; in a new acerbity in criticism; in stirrings, often tinged with desperation, among the youth; in a spreading contempt everywhere for reigning cliches. There is evident a widening restlessness, dangerous tendencies toward satire and idealism, a mounting dissatisfaction with the official priorities, a deepening concern with our character and objectives as a nation.
\end{quote}

This can clearly be contrasted against Schlesinger’s earlier more hope predictions. In 1949, he wrote “Mid-twentieth-century liberalism, I believe, has thus been fundamentally reshaped by the

\textsuperscript{16} Cowie and Salvatorie have recently initiated a scholarly debate claiming the New Deal era represents a “long exception” rather than a quintessential American ideology that must be revived

\textsuperscript{17} For an example of his shifting perspective see historian Sean Wilentz’s new edition of both Schlesinger’s \textit{The Politics of Hope} (1963) and his \textit{The Bitter Heritage} (1967) that focuses on contrasting his changing views.
hope of the New Deal . . . This awakening constitutes the unique experience and fundamental faith of contemporary liberalism.” As Schlesinger predicted, activist/intellectuals from a broad spectrum of political views ended up breaking with the “fundamental faith” of New Deal liberalism.

SDS president Gitlin (1963-1964), argued in his 1987 memoir the New Deal generation were “fathers [sic] who lost their political children” and “fail[ed] to pass on its mission to its young” (The Sixties… 60). While my dissertation is ultimately critical of SDS, they must be commended for rejecting the comforting promises of their parent’s generation. Instead of being enraptured by Roosevelt, as many of their parents were, they were among the first to criticize the New Deal with a non-sectarian and disciplined analysis. This is what Gitlin means when he said they “lost their political children.” In dramatic opposition to the hagiographic studies of Roosevelt and the New Deal in the post-WWII period, by the latter half of the 1960s, New Leftists were writing critical commentaries like “The liberal reforms of the New Deal did not transform the American system; they conserved and protected American corporate capitalism, occasionally by absorbing parts of threatening programs” (Bernstein). And also SDS pamphlets stated:

The New Deal’s recognition of potentially antagonistic social groups served a conservative integrating purpose. If these groups could be led to cooperate with the dominant economic and political elite on the basis of the rules of corporate capitalism, any possibility that their demands for reform might begin to question fundamental property rights was eliminated (Wiley).

But not just the left was critiquing the New Deal; the New Right was also issuing statements critical of the New Deal. In 1964, in his popular book The Conscience of a Conservative Barry
Goldwater argued that the New Deal was the first step towards fascism. Arguing against the administrative mandate, he claimed the “first principle of totalitarianism: that the State is competent to do all things and is limited in what it actually does only by the will of those who control the State.”

Many historians portray the discontent with American liberalism as virtually falling out of the sky mainly due, according to their limited analysis, to the Vietnam War (Schlesinger “A New Mood in Politics”; Matusow; Brands). While anti-war activism was a galvanizing force that united many factions frustrated with the direction of post-war liberalism, intellectuals going all the way back to the 1940s set the ground work for the robust anti-New Deal factions that coalesced into several mass movements the 1960s. It is to their story that we now turn.
CHAPTER IV. AN INSTITUTIONAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE EARLY NEW LEFT

… strolling in the dark mysterious streets. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a white man disillusioned. All my life I’d had white ambitions. . . . I was only myself Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violent dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy true-hearted ecstatic Negroes of America. (105)

…they never dreamed the sadness and poor broken disillusion of it. They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they some day (172)

-Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Although the author Jack Kerouac was not involved in the New Left, nor did he write his famous 1955 novel *On the Road* as a mission statement for SDS, nevertheless his novel was adopted as a kind of cultural-touchstone and anti-conformist manifesto by countless young people in the 1950s and 60s (and beyond). One of the mentors of the main character, Sal, teaches that America had lost its greatness. Now it “Tain’t nothin but bureaucracy. And unions! Especially unions! But dark laughter would come again” (87). This sentiment encapsulates the frustration of a young post-WWII generation angry with liberal politicians and also with traditional institutions of worker’s militancy that had sold out for bigger paychecks. More than almost any other fiction writer at that time, Kerouac captured the structure of feeling of disaffected middle class youth who were building a defiant anti-bureaucratic ethos ground in a rejection of post-war prosperity enjoyed by a growing affluent organized working class. Moreover, Kerouac’s writing gave young people the motivation and the drive to be involved in something that went against the post-WWII liberal consensus of Cold War conformity. It also gave them an anthem of escaping the suburbs. Kerouac writes “all I wanted to do was sneak out into the night and disappear somewhere, and go and find out what everybody was doing all over the country” (42). In fact, it was reading *On the Road* that inspired Tom Hayden, the principle writer of SDS’s Port Huron Statement, to hitchhike across the country where he was introduced to leaders from the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (*Writings for a Democratic Society* 449-
A few of the Berkeley students he met had recently arrived back from civil rights work in the south. From there, he hitchhiked to Los Angeles, where he met Martin Luther King, Jr. protesting in front of the 1960 Democratic National Convention. Both the radical students and King started Hayden on the path that quickly landed him reporting on civil rights struggles in the south for SDS and for his campus newspaper, *The Michigan Daily*. A year later, Hayden was the president of SDS and the primary author of arguably the most important manifesto in the second half of the twentieth century. But, it was Kerouac that gave him his first push.

On the 50th anniversary of *On the Road*, in a style imitating Kerouac’s exuberance, Hayden wrote, “I was a high school senior in Royal Oak, Michigan, when I read, absorbed and lived the spirit of *On the Road*” (*Writings...* 449). He focuses in on what “the road” meant to restless middle-class young adults in the late 1950s:

> . . .the road was . . . beyond the suburbs, the dream road, the fantasy road, the road out . . . [I hitchhiked] on my way to Telegraph Avenue [in Berkeley] where I was dumped in front of the still-there Mediterranean for a coffee where I met a girl who led me to an apartment to crash amidst the drums of the new radicalism. All of this was the influence of Kerouac and the times. There were tens of thousands of us, wandering, searching, experimenting, just living. (450)

But, while *On the Road* certainly contains wildly frenetic passages extolling the joys of anti-conformity, it also seeks answers to the post-WWII alienation through nostalgia for a lost American freedom which “was wild and brawling and free, with abundance and any kind of freedom for everyone”). This romantic primitivism praises the outsider—particularly the drifter, poor people of color, and third-world people that Kerouac referred to as the *fellahin*, as existing beyond the reach of corporate control and mass society. At the same time, the novel is highly
critical of average working people who are just cogs in a bureaucratic machine, “doing what they think they’re supposed to do” (42) creating “a sinister new kind of efficiency” (Hayden Writings… 451). As will be explored at length below, taken all together the novel represents a microcosm of the problems SDS inherited from the intellectual and cultural milieu of the 1950s.

This chapter explores the longer institutional, intellectual, and cultural history that helps situate SDS’s rejection of the working class as an agent of social change and their quest for a replacement proletariat. New Leftists tried to sort out their positions with very few mentors, with a moribund institutional center that was out of touch with their concerns, and with little understanding of American radical history, all while trying to navigate a dangerous and confusing time in America’s history that isolated and oppressed non-conformists. As Norman Mailer wrote, “A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve” (“The White Negro”). Mailer expressed that feeling in 1957. It was the same year that On the Road was published and the same year Hayden graduated from high school in Detroit. SDS’s adoption of an unsuccessful strategy to overcome the limitations of New Deal liberalism did not emerge fully formed from their isolation in a summer camp on the shores of the Lake Erie in Port Huron, Michigan, nor did their anti-bureaucratic ethos and view of the modern worker as a cheerful robot. SDS’s views developed from a swirling tumult of American radicalism—fractured by the poor leadership of the Old Left that could not devise of popular strategy to overcome the common sense of the Cold War with its tyrannical McCarthyism and its pressures to conform to a narrowly defined nationalism.

By studying the institutional, intellectual, and cultural history of SDS, one can find the development of a dissident anti-New Deal ethos grounded in Dewey and Mills’ view of participatory democracy influenced by republicanism. Dewey’s concerns about democracy were
transmitted through his writings, through his leadership of SDS’s parent organization (the League for Industrial Democracy) but also through two of his disciples that had a tremendous impact on SDS: Mills and Arnold Kaufman (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 224-238). Mills took Dewey’s foundation in republicanism and placed a greater emphasis on a critique of the stultifying effects of mass society on the prosperous working person. Following the typical republican pattern, the fear of the “power elite” at the top was only matched, in Mills thinking, to the fear of the average worker at the bottom so mired in mass society that he or she was unable to mount an effective fight back against what he saw as growing corporate totalitarianism. This view built a pessimistic prognosis of social change in the United States and sent the New Left on a quest to find a replacement for the traditional agent of social change—the proletariat. They found this new agency in people who, like themselves, choose to refuse liberal Cold War conformity.

The history of SDS and its failings has been the subject of great attention and writing. As I discussed in the Introduction, the bulk of this work perpetuates an empirically and analytically flawed theory of “rupture” between the good, moderate, rational early 60s and the bad, violent, irrationally radical late 60s. The cultural and intellectual history developed below creates a heretofore un-attempted synthesis of existing research and new empirical work, in order to get to the heart of the particular failures of the New Left. These failures are best seen from a Gramscian perspective on intellectual leadership within existing social conditions and the struggle to build alliances between class factions. And, to that end, it focuses—as most do not do—on the institutional, intellectual, and cultural foundations of the movement’s strategies and tactics, its choices, and on the consequences of those choices for its competing struggle against other critics of post-war liberalism. This chapter extends my previous argument (see Chapters 1-3) that a
focus on republicanism had key cultural and intellectual foundations that must be explored to understand the movement’s failures. That focus affected the leadership in SDS’s organizational projects and had concrete connections to its failures. In order to better understand the pieces to this puzzle, we start with a brief institutional and intellectual pre-history of SDS. Then we move to a brief look at the principles of republicanism and their relationship to Dewey and Mills. Because Mills was one of the most crucial mentors of SDS’s intellectual framework regarding the search for a new agency, this early history of the New Left requires an understanding of Mills’ complex theory and its relationship republicanism. He wished to expose the stultifying post-war bureaucratic mass society. Lastly, I explore the influence of Kerouac and how his creative work and sensibilities came to affect leaders in SDS. In so doing, I locate SDS’s development not only institutionally and intellectually, but also culturally.

In the end, these lenses help us understand the failure of the New Left as a failure of particular choices, namely: 1) misplaced nostalgia, 2) moralistic abandonment of the white working classes, and 3) romanticization of the poor and “Third World.” This framework emphasizes that the perceived “radical break” in the mid-decade—where the “good” SDS was crushed by the “bad” SDS—was actually dependent on identifiable choices made earlier in the history of the New Left.

*Before SDS, There Was SLID, and Before SLID, There Was ISS*

Most people who are familiar with SDS think that it emerged as an independent organization from the student movement in the early 1960s. In fact, a large percentage of late-
decade SDS members probably thought the same thing.¹ Most people do not know that SDS had an institutional pre-history that went all the way back to the turn of the century.

In 1905, several socialist intellectuals, led by literary giants Jack London and Upton Sinclair, founded the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS). Building in many ways on the socialist Eugene Debs’ popularity and his impressive presidential campaigns, the American Socialist Party saw stunning growth during this period—increasing membership from 100,000 to over 400,000 and democratically winning several important local offices throughout the country.² The ISS was created to “promote an intelligent interest in socialism among college men and women” (LID “35 Years of Educational Pioneering”). Their motto in the early years was “Light, more light.” They founded a magazine, the Intercollegiate Socialist Review, which became a leading beacon of socialist thought in the US. In fact, at an international socialist conference in 1912, Karl Liebknect, a German Communist (and co-founder with Rosa Luxemburg of the Spartacus League, one of the most influential communist parties in Europe), told John Reed, the radical American journalist, it was the only American magazine of which he had heard (“Handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy” 4). Jack London and other prominent socialists like Victor Berger³ traveled coast-to-coast speaking at universities from the University of California to Harvard. In the 1920s, ISS renamed itself the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) to more closely identify with industrial workers and changed its

¹ Kirkpartick Sale, an early reporter on SDS, argues that the later recruits to SDS “were people generally raised outside of the East, many from the Midwest and Southwest, and their ruralistic dress reflected a different tradition, one more aligned to the frontier, more violent, more individualistic, more bare-knuckled and callus-handed, than that of the early SDSers. They were non-Jewish, nonintellectual, nonurban, from a nonprofessional class, and often without any family tradition of political involvement, much less radicalism. They tended to be not only ignorant of the history of the left and its current half-life in New York City, but downright uninterested” (134)
² See James Weinstein’s Decline of Socialism in America…; Nick Salvatore Eugene…
³ Berger was the first socialist elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1910, but he was also credited with visiting Eugene Debs in prison and introducing him to socialist ideas. Debs later became one of the leading socialists in American history, receiving the largest number of votes for a socialist presidential candidate in 1912 and 1920 (slightly over 900,000 votes both elections).
motto. “Production for use, not for profit” reveals their location in the early 20th century American socialist left (LID “50 Years of Democratic Education”).

LID’s leadership was a veritable who’s who of left intellectuals during the 20th century. Beyond famous authors Jack London, Upton Sinclair, the perennial Socialist Party presidential candidate Norman Thomas,4 served as president in the 20s and 30s. Philosopher John Dewey became president in the late 1930s, and helped develop a focus on the protection of democracy against fascism using a republican vocabulary. Walter Reuther, a young leader in the UAW, who eventually became one of the most important union presidents in the US, was also in the leadership of LID at Wayne State University in Detroit. American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr served as president in the 1940s. Lastly, Michael Harrington, Socialist Party intellectual and author of the famous study _The Other America_ acted as a link, however troubled that link was during the early 1960s, between LID and the emerging New Left. He became president in of LID in 1964 (LID “Fifty Years of democratic education”).

After the “red scare” and the anti-communist “Palmer Raids” in 1919, the American socialist movement went through a period of intense factional fighting in the 1920s, mimicking the international communist movement, which saw the breakup of the Socialist Party of America. Several radical left-wing factions coalesced into the Communist Labor Party of America under the leadership of journalist John Reed. They went by several different names until all of the various factions were centralized into the CPUSA under the leadership of labor

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4 While not often recognized in the history books, Thomas was much admired by activists in the mid-century. When Martin Luther King, Jr was notified that he won the Nobel Peace Prize, he urged the committee to instead give it to Norman Thomas (West).
organizer William Z. Foster in 1928 (Ottanelli; Weinstein *The Decline of Socialism*…). At the same time, LID, representing more centrist forces, stayed connected to the Socialist Party of America and took an increasingly anti-Soviet position; they were hostile specifically to the Communist Party of the United States because of the CPUSA’s militant revolutionary positions. LID’s base of financial support came from the Socialist Party-influenced needle trade unions in New York’s garment district. By the 1930s, the American Socialist Party and the CPUSA existed in open hostility towards each other. This hostility only grew worse as Trotskyist factions merged with the American Socialist Party in the mid-century, specifically the Independent Socialist League where Michael Harrington was a young leader.

In 1933, LID created an autonomous student organization named the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID). In the mid-30s, against the advice of the LID leadership, young people in SLID voted to function in a united front with the CPUSA and other radical groups in the National Student League. LID saw the CPUSA as ultra-leftists that wanted to discredit or destroy institutions like unions by boring from within to take control of the leadership. SLID and NSL merged briefly in the mid-1930s to form the American Student Union. Arguing against collaborating with CP members, the parent organization, LID, brought the student organization back under its control in the 1940s. In 1947, SLID’s constitution directly banned cooperation

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5 There are only two Americans buried in the hero’s grave in Red Square in Moscow. John Reed was the first. CPUSA leader William Z Foster is the other. Reed was a journalist who covered the American Revolution and the Russian Revolution. His most famous book was *Ten Days that Shook the World*. Foster was a long-time labor organizer who led one of the largest steel strikes in American history in 1919.

6 All of this factional fighting in the United States closely followed the factional fighting internationally a decade before between socialist forces loyal to the Second and Third Internationals. Leftwing forces from the Second International broke away during 1915 in opposition to Second International socialist parties who wanted to support their national countries during WWI instead of vowing to turn WWI into a revolutionary civil war as they did in Russia. Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg led the breakaway faction (known as the “Zimmerwald movement”) and later formed the Third International in 1919.
with communists and many other radical movements—a point that would become very problematic for the founders of SDS in the early 1960s.

In the late 1950s, Robert “Al” Haber (the future founding president of SDS) affiliated with SLID and recruited students to a small but burgeoning radical social movement at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Al grew up in a Michigan family deeply embedded in New Deal labor politics. His father was a University of Michigan economist and labor mediator with deep connections to the UAW, the Michigan Democratic Party, and Jewish labor organizations. In the early years, all of Al’s recruitment and all of his activities fell under the auspices of SLID under close advisement of LID and the AFL-CIO (Miller Ch. 3). In 1960, spurred by Haber and his fellow student activists, SLID changed its name to Students for a Democratic Society to more closely identify with students rather than industrial workers. This clearly reflected the changing attitudes towards the working class as the traditional agents of social change.

Comparisons between SDS and SLID

Most scholars who acknowledge the longer institutional history of SDS focus on the differences between SLID and SDS (Miller Ch.3; Isserman and Kazin 176-178; Gitlin 109-126; c.f. Sale 7-25); differences that in truth did ultimately lead to a very hostile relationship and a bitter split in 1965 (Miller 126-33, 235). For instance, Todd Gitlin quotes Al Haber, the founder of SDS, as saying the Port Huron conference was:

the first time our politics surfaced. [The League for Industrial Democracy] could tolerate searching young minds but not a group of people who were four-square against anti-Communism, eight-square against American culture, twelve-square against sell-out unions, one-hundred-twenty-square against an interpretation of
the Cold War that saw it as a Soviet plot and identified American policy fondly”
(Gitlin 109-110).

The differences between LID and SDS will be highlighted in chapter 6. However, here it is important to emphasize their similarities because they are so often overlooked in memoirs and scholarship. They both saw themselves as a vanguard organization that was emerging from a period of stagnation to lead the masses out of apathy; they both wanted to focus on greater civic participation to bolster democratic, humanistic values; and they both found New Deal liberalism problematic.

Just as SDS saw the 1950s as alienating and vapid, Jack London argued that the universities at the turn of the century were, “clean and noble, but I did not find the university alive. I found that the American university had this ideal, …'The passionless pursuit of passionless intelligence’” (LID “Handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy” 3). Likewise, the Port Huron Statement (PHS) states “Our professors and administrators sacrifice controversy to public relations; their curriculums change more slowly than the living events of the world” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 243). LID described the 1920s as “the Dark Ages…” In the PHS, SDS described the beginning stirrings of campus activity in 1960 supporting the civil rights movements as “breaking the crust of apathy and overcoming the inner alienation that remain the defining characteristics of American college life” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 243). SLID and SDS both targeted the culture of conformity and apathy as central to initiating a progressive social movement.

Responding to a culture of conformity and repression, both SLID and SDS placed a high importance on free expression, open debate, and civic participation as essential principles of democracy. Both saw the university as a training ground that could teach these values, but their
potential was being subverted to teach conformity to the status quo instead. SLID stated, “Classrooms are not places in which differing points of view are hotly contested and vigorously defended, but are shrines from which the voices of authority drone meaningless phrases into willing, but unlistening ears” (“Handbook…” 17). SDS went even further with its condemnation of 50s culture where “[p]olitical debate is restricted, thought is standardized, action is inhibited by the demands of ‘unity’ and ‘oneness’ in the face of the declared danger [communism]” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 259). Instead of universities being institutions that fostered “independent, critical participation by intellectuals in the political process,” the “American Establishment” has succeeded in “integrating the university system into more faithful service of the status quo” (“American and the New Era”). “[T]he grim irony of the 1950s,” is that universities and intellectuals “provided the manpower and organizational facilities which lubricated the efficient operation of the military-industrial-complex” (“New American Era”). Even worse, students who are thought to be idealistic, providing radical new energy to movements, felt “disillusionment” and “don’t even give a damn about apathy” according to PHS (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 244). In the post-war period, the university became a training ground for subservience with “administrators ordering the institutions, and faculty the curriculum, the student learns by his isolation to accept elite rule within the university, which prepares him to accept later forms of minority control,” instead of providing a training ground for independent critical thought and debate.

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7 “The American Establishment” was SDS phrase for Mills “power elite.” In the “New American Era” they state “By the ‘Establishment’ we mean those men who have direct influence over the formulation of the national domestic and foreign policies. These include the President and his advisors, major officials of the executive branch . . . mazny [sic] corporate leaders, foundation officials, some labor leaders, and some leaders of the Republican Party” (6). One paragraph later, they also include “economic and military institutions.”
Just like SLID, the students in SDS knew they were facing a stultifying status quo. Earlier in the century, the ISS and LID faced the first Red Scare and the Palmer Raids. Led by Attorney General, A. Mitchel Palmer, who recruited a 24-year old J. Edgar Hoover to organize the repression of radicals—what came to be known as “The Palmer Raids.” This is the same Hoover who organized COINTELPRO against the New Left in the 1960s and 70s. All these factors contributed to a hostile organizing environment and “most ISS chapters were snuffed out” during WWI and had to be reorganized in the 20s and 30s (LID “Handbook …” 8).

This hostile environment was matched in the mid-century by the fear of yet another “red scare” combined with the more all-encompassing culture of the Cold War. “McCarthyism and other forms of exaggerated and conservative anti-communism” SDS argued, in what became the most controversial section of the PHS: “seriously weaken democratic institutions and spawn movements contrary to the interests of basic freedoms and peace. In such an atmosphere even the most intelligent of Americans fear to join political organizations, sign petitions, speak out on serious issues” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 259). Repression and a culture of hyper-nationalism not only had a chilling effect on radicalism in both movements due to the fear it created, it often created a situation where emerging radical movements had to start from scratch without the benefit of mentors. The would-be mentors were repressively crushed by the state or too anxiety-ridden to provide helpful guidance. In the notes he typed and circulated while drafting the Port Huron Statement, Tom Hayden said “I have the impression that we have been our own leadership to a far greater degree than most ‘student radicals’ of the past.”

As the above history shows, both LID and SDS faced a similar problematic: trying to rebuild a popular American left in the face of mass apathy, conformity, and government repression. They also both tried to navigate a difficult independent radical path between European or Soviet communism on the one hand and New Deal reform liberalism on the other—both of which, in their respective opinions, relied too heavily on top-down, administrative state bureaucracies. They both wished to develop a reform liberalism that did not led to “unsatisfied hopes” that avoided the word socialism because some felt it was alienating or because some truly wanted to build a radicalism from indigenous American sources (Lynd “Socialism, the Forbidden Word”). When they went looking for a vocabulary from which to describe their independent radicalism, you will see below, they both choose the republican vocabulary.

Commentary from several thinkers, ranging from scholars writing about the New Left today to the actual participants in the 1960s, show how the New Left and its mentors were inspired by republicanism. In fact, as intellectual historian Robert Westbrook argues, this was the positions of the two most famous reformers of the late 19th and early twentieth century—Dewey and Debs. He claims, both men found it difficult to overcome “the conservative dimensions of producer-republicanism” (Democratic Hope … 97). Philosopher Daniel Malachuk argues that this is not surprising. He states political pragmatists (William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, and even recently Richard Rorty) all use a republican vocabulary, claiming “…when pragmatists turn to politics they consistently turn to the beliefs of republicanism…” (“Loyal to a Dream County” 90). SDS’s intellectual mentor, Mills, wanted to use the same plain spoken indigenous vocabulary of American republicanism as Debs and Dewey. In a letter to his parents, Mills wrote that Patrick Henry:
was a great old guy coming from the small farmers and artizans [sic] and fighting
the Big Holders who ran the government and everybody else. There are lots of
guys like that, but the history books don’t tell you about ‘em. When I get through
they’ll think American history was one big farmer-labor rally, which in large part
it damn well was. (qtd. in Croker 72)

Staughton Lynd, an early New Left historian and theorist, also the son of Mills’ Columbia
University colleague Robert Lynd, argued the New Left movement needed to connect not to
Marxism but the history of left American republicans, specifically “Henry George, Edward
Bellamy, and Henry Dermarest Lloyd.”

All of this led intellectual historian Kevin Mattson to remark recently in his study of post-
WWII activist intellectuals that the New Left:

drew less upon Marxism (or a confidence in the working class as an agent of
change) and more on the concept of participatory democracy. The roots of this
concept grew out of a ‘radical republican’ tradition of politics, one that related to
the writings of Thomas Jefferson. This tradition—with its faith in small virtuous
farmers building an egalitarian commonwealth—was then updated in the modern
intellectual exploration of John Dewey…” (Intellectuals in Action 13).

Historian James Miller, author of the most widely cited history of SDS, agrees when he says
“They took their central ideas not from the civil rights movement, but rather from the tradition of
civic republicanism that links Aristotle to John Dewey” (16). That being said, Mattson and
Miller only passingly refer to the importance of republicanism to Dewey, Mills, and the New

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Left. In fact, Mattson mentions the word twice and Miller once. This chapter will build upon their insight and provide them more historical depth and explanatory power for exploring the implications of SDS relying on a republican vocabulary. This will also serve to underscore my overriding Gramscian investigation: why did the New Left social movement fail to become popular? The republican tradition SDS taps into, through Dewey and Mills, establishes a backwards-looking, moralistic-based politics that condemns more than it unites. It fueled a growing pessimism about social change because the left’s traditional agent of social change, the working class, had been consumed, according to their thinking, in the growth of a mass corporatized society. This fear of an uneducated, “subservient” people at the bottom of society overwhelming the “virtuous” people is an animating concern of republicanism.

*John Dewey, SDS, and Republicanism*

In opposition to administrative bureaucracy and elite rule, both SLID and SDS argued for the need to extend democracy to increase the potential for human freedom. While scholars often quote the more lyrical passages of the PHS, what is less understood is that Dewey had a large influence on the later SDS. While Dewey’s influence on Mills is clearer (Mills wrote his dissertation and his first book on John Dewey), Dewey’s influence on SDS is not discussed as much (Rinn). Many of the early original SDS members openly acknowledge Dewey’s foundational influence. In his recent book chapter on the “Roots of the American New Left,” Richard Flacks, a founding SDS member, describes “John Dewey, Arnold Kaufman, and C. Wright Mills [as] the key intellectuals most influential in shaping the thoughts of those who wrote the Port Huron Statement” (15). In fact, he calls the Port Huron Statement “More Dewey than Marx” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 229).
Most interestingly, Tom Hayden, the primary author of the Port Huron Statement, plainly states that the concept of participatory democracy was “a concept inherited from John Dewey through a University of Michigan professor of mine, Arnold Kaufman,” Kaufman was a student of Mills at Columbia University (*Writing for a Democratic Society* 35). Hayden calls Mills a “decendent of Dewey and a prophet of the New Left” (377). Both Dewey and Mills’ influence was driven home clearly by Hayden’s keynote address in Ann Arbor on the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Port Huron Statement (PHS). On November 1st 2012, Hayden started his talk with a video montage of thinkers that influenced the PHS and pictures of SDS’s founding members set to Dylan’s song ”Bob Dylan's Dream.” Dewey’s picture was the first thinker to appear followed by French philosopher Albert Camus and then Mills. In his keynote remarks, he cited Dewey’s statement “democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint community experience” as a foundational idea that inspired the sections on participatory democracy in the PHS. For Hayden it meant, “the participation of every mature human being in the formation of the values that regulate the living of men together” (*Writings…*233).

Beyond direct statements of Dewey’s influence by members, a few textual examples will also help reveal the clear resonances between Dewey’s philosophy of democracy and the PHS. For example, when the PHS says:

> As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be

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10 Even as late as 2005, in an article titled “Missing Mills,” Hayden wrote about him as “the mentor, perhaps the father figure, I needed at the time. Even today I think of him as an absent parent” (*Writings…*377).
organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation” (Flack and Lichtenstein, eds 242).

Also when the “America and the New Era” statement says, "Our hope is human freedom. We care that men everywhere be able to understand, express and determine their lives in fraternity with one another” they were channeling Dewey’s philosophy. Dewey attempted to rethink liberal individualism in a new a radical way—as being community-serving and not just self-serving. By doing so, he was trying to develop a non-Marxist radicalism based in American republican thinkers. For example, Dewey was influenced by Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson’s republicanism promoted a pluralistic definition of participatory democracy that valued vigorous debate and conversation among diverse, informed citizens as a means of social revolution. This helped avoid a violent revolution.

More than anything, Dewey condemned administrative solutions. The attempt to build a non-Marxist indigenous American radicalism focused on participatory democracy intrigued the early SDS members. In fact, Dewey’s 1927 book The Public and its Problems was printed on all of SDS’s early reading lists. In it Dewey argues:

No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few…The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses. (208)

In Dewey’s 1940 “Address of Welcome” to the 35th anniversary of LID, speaking against the rise of fascism abroad and a “defense culture” bent on war preparation at home (he described as an “armed quarantine”), he argued: “The only sure way to defend democracy in the long run is to fight to extend it . . . to fields of action hitherto not touched . . .” He spoke particularly about
extending democracy to “the industrial field” (LID 35 Years… 5). Dewey was trying to
resuscitate the Progressive vision of trust-busting and industrial democracy based upon a
commonwealth that the Roosevelt administration had recently purged from its circle of advisors
(Brinkley End of Reform). Again, this fascinated SDS, and deeply influenced the drafting of their
early manifestos the Port Huron Statement (PHS) and America and the New Era (ANE). In fact,
ANE directly states “Unable to disassociate themselves from the errors or the immoralities of
Democratic officeholders, the major liberal organizations…have abandoned the populist and
progressive strands of their tradition” (13). The early SDS saw it as their job to resuscitate those
dying strands of liberalism along the lines indicated by Dewey,

Dewey also argued that the “noble distinction of a democratic society” is participation in
vigorous debate. Dewey said, further, it is for “the people to instruct their officials, not for a few
officials to regulate the sentiments and ideas of the rest of the people.” The extension of
democracy, will result in the “growth of a public opinion which is capable, enlightened and
honest” where people “learn what we need to know in the very process of acting together to
create of democracy that shall be a living reality in every aspect and reach of our common life”
(6). These ideas were an important philosophical precursor to SDS famous emphasis on
“participatory democracy.”

Dewey is commonly associated with education reform. But, the connection between his
republican values, his ideas about education reform, and his philosophy of democracy is not
always clearly understood by contemporary activists who usually latch on to one of these strands
(generally education reform) and fail to see the interconnection between them in Dewey’s
philosophy. His concern with declining civic education does not exist as an isolated concern. His
argument to break up big school bureaucracies and instead build small, local decentralized
Schools grows out of a sensibility that is grounded in republican concerns. Only an educated public can rise above the manipulation of the elite and engage in the debate and discussion over policies necessary for a functioning democracy. Uneducated people cannot grasp the contingency and pluralism that pervades every social problem. Not only was the public losing its grasp of governmental policy because of lack of education, according to Dewey, it is withdrawing from participation because the scale of government bureaucracy is growing beyond the scope of meaningful local participation.

Like Mills years later, Dewey focuses on a nostalgic view of 18th and 19th century America. Sociologist Filipe Carreira da Silva writes:

Echoing the agrarian commercial theses of Jefferson’s republicanism, Dewey believed that ‘American democratic policy was developed out of genuine community life, that is, association in local and small centers where industry was mainly agricultural and where production was largely carried out with hand tools’ (363).

But, with the development of large scale industry, mass migration to cities, and the growth of government bureaucracy, the best parts of the early American republic were being crushed to the detriment of what Dewey holds up as the ideal of the “Great Community” were democracy is “a way of life.” Dewey argues, “Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself” (Dewey Later Works 2, 328).

According to Dewey’s biographer Robert Westbrook, American republican thinker Thomas Jefferson influenced his views of democracy. Westbrook writes, “Dewey emphasized the importance Jefferson attached to small self-governing communities.” He was especially attracted to Jefferson’s idea of dividing the country into “wards” because “then every man would then
share in the governing of affairs not merely on election day but every day” (qtd. in Westbrook 455). In fact, Dewey felt so strongly about Jefferson that in 1939 he edited a collection of his writings for a popular audience for the “Living Thoughts Library” in an effort, according to Westbrook, “to insure that the influence of Thomas Jefferson was not completely eclipsed in the American left” (454).

According to founding SDS member Richard Flack, Dewey’s republican fears animated the SDSers who gathered at Port Huron. He argues “[Dewey] envisions the potentiality of a democratic public as the center of political decision making” (Flacks in Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds. 231). By their reading of Dewey’s *The Public and its Problems*, they learned, according to Flacks. “All of the forces of modern industrial society… are arrayed against such a public. Yet he insisted on the possibility that people will seek to reestablish community—including efforts to locate political initiative in face-to-face interaction” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 231). Flacks continues: “Dewey saw that the threat to democratic potential lay not only in traditional forms of despotism, and not only in social inequality deriving for capitalist political economy—but also in the growth of large-scale bureaucratic organizations, mass media, and the monopolization of knowledge by experts” (231). It is Dewey’s concern with growing industrial and governmental bureaucracy and the declining of vigorous civic participation from a democratic and pluralistic base that built a foundation for SDS to explore post-WWII society.

But, what if “the possibility that people will seek to reestablish community” is not actualized? What if the post-war working class does not want to become or cannot become the “center of political decision making?” These are the questions that Mills takes up after Dewey. It was the combination of Dewey and Mills along with Albert Camus, according to historian David Steigerwald, that allowed Hayden to write sentences like, “the cause of the New Left…was to
prevent the coming of the cheerful robot by transforming these drifting individuals into self-aware citizens, the amorphous mass into an educated public” (Flamm and Steigerwald 13; Hayden *Reunion* 80). I show in the next section, the focus on republicanism built a fear-based moralistic framework that enabled Mills and SDS to reject the working class and seek new more “virtuous” agents of change that existed, in their minds, outside the reach of the corporate bureaucratic state. Dewey and Mills’ models of civic participation were the 19th century independent agrarian and artisan “masterless men” who resisted absorption into bureaucratic structures. This nostalgia guided the choice of new agents of change.

*From ‘Masterless Men’ to ‘Cheerful Robots’: 19th Century Liberalism vs Mid-20th Century Liberalism*

At the heart of Mills critique of mid-twentieth century America is an elegy for a lost independent spirit that he believes could be found in 18th and 19th century America. The epigraph in Mills’ study *White Collar* quotes Fabian socialist R.H. Tawney: “Whatever the future may contain the past has shown no more excellent social order than that in which the mass of people were the masters of the holdings which they plowed [Jeffersonian yeoman farmers] and of the tools with which they worked [Jacksonian artisans]...” At the heart of 18th and early 19th century liberalism, Mills claims, is the desire of individuals to be free from arbitrary absolutism and tyranny. Through rationality, rule of law, and democracy, men and women could exercise their freewill to control their fate and make history for themselves. He speaks often about 19th and early 20th century “masterless men” and “recalcitrant Americans” meeting in town halls and pubs to debate and discuss the affairs of the state (*Politics of Truth* 68).11 He speaks poetically about

11 He makes these references while speaking about one of his intellectual heroes, 19th century populist economist Thorsten Veblen. The only 20th century men he puts on this pedestal is the International Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies). It is reported that if Mills liked someone, he would say “that guy’s a real wobbly” (Miller Ch 4). Evidence of this will be reported in Ch. 5 in Mills’ discussion of the UAW.
freedom, but not in an abstract sense. “Freedom” and “security,” argues Mills, depend on people having “effective control over what they are depended upon” (People, Power, Politics 297). The history of the 20th century is the history of America’s drift away from the social arrangements that make freedom possible, according to Mills.

He summarizes this drift succinctly. In the 19th century, “The economy, once a great scatter of small productive units in somewhat automatic balance.” Now, in the 20th century this economy is “internally dominated by a few hundred corporations, administratively and politically interrelated, which together hold the keys to economic decision” (“The Structure of Power in America” 33). However, Mills focuses his analysis on the “expanded and centralized and interlocked hierarchies” which “determine politics in the mid-century.” Mills says: “The most important relations of the corporation to the state now rest on the coincidence between military and corporate interests, as defined by the military and the corporate rich, and accepted by politicians and public” (“The Structure of Power in America” 33). Over fifty years later, Hayden stands by Mills analysis when he blames “the System.” In 2012, he writes “By ‘System’ I mean the intersecting (though not coordinated) hierarchies of banks, corporations, the military, the media, and religion, which were dominant then and are now…” (Inspiring…14). Mills and, subsequently, Hayden see American’s passive acquiescence to those hierarchies, all functioning together to suffocate America’s tradition of independence and freedom.

Crucially, this acquiescence did not come from out of the blue. Mills sees the “main drift” historically, as the result of a failure of leadership in the social movements to organize an effective class struggle in the late 19th early 20th century, or to put it in Mills’ language, the result of a successful struggle waged by the “power elite.” He sees the power elite as the functional, yet still contentious, alliance of highly placed government officials, military leaders, media
institutions, and key civic institutions (such as universities) all in the service of corporations. He summarizes: “The agrarian revolt of the 'nineties [1890s], the small-business revolt that has been more or less continuous since the 'eighties [1880s], the labour revolt of the 'thirties [1930s]—each of these has failed as an independent movement which could countervail against the powers that be” (“The Structure of Power in America” 38). But, rather than an outright and complete failure, Mills focuses on the power elite’s strategy of absorption and containment. He writes, “they [the three social movements mentioned above] have succeeded, in varying degree, as interests vested in the expanded corporation and state” (38). Rather than simply prosecuting a war of total repression which the power elite also prosecuted against certain subaltern factions of the social movements—particularly radicals, immigrants, and people of color,12 they instead absorbed and contained the majority of the insurgents by relegating them “to the middle level of politics” (36). “The middle level of politics,” Mills continually points out in his writings after the *Power Elite* (1956), “is not a forum in which there are debated the big decisions of national and international life” (36). Accepting a junior partner status that has no real power runs contrary to the focus on autonomy and virtuous participation at the heart of the fight against feudalism.

Mills’ analysis of the power elite was intended to offer a dissenting perspective from the Consensus historians and Pluralist sociologies who felt that American life in the mid-century was a “balance of powers” beneficially organized around a liberal consensus. Young activists praised Mills for not behaving like an ivory tower intellectual. He was iconoclastic, drove a BMW motorcycle, wore workmen’s clothing to teach at Columbia University, and spoke in a common language relatively free from old left jargon still typical in progressive circles at the time. A

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12 This is an area where Mills was very different than Gramsci. He did not have a sharply articulated theory of how racism (against people of color or immigrants) functioned within American history or functioned as a social control mechanism of the power elite. These differences will be developed further below. Tom Hayden takes Mills to task for this failing in his MA thesis *Radical Nomad*, which was not published until 2007.
lifelong outsider, he came from Texas, and imbued his writing with a plain-spoken populism that revered independence, self-reliance, and grassroots democracy. Mills’ analytical strength rested in his ability to compare the present arrangement of social relations to an ideal set of social relations based upon values such as democratic participation and civic virtue. His purpose was to instigate moral outrage by showing how, under present social arrangements with the growth of big corporations and big government bureaucracy, it was impossible to obtain the values he claimed Americans should cherish and did cherish in their more revolutionary past. He also wished to express urgency because he believed that Americans were witnessing a dangerous acceleration of undemocratic forces working against their cherished values.

Mills charted the resignation of the very fighting individuals that moved from “masterless men” to “cheerful robots.” Arguing against the dominant sociological trends stating that after WWII America was a “balance of powers” in a “peaceful consensus” in the mid-century, Mills defiantly asserts:

The idea that this society is a balance of powers requires us to assume that the units in balance are of more or less equal power and that they are truly independent of one another. These assumptions have rested, it seems clear, upon the historical importance of a large and independent middle class. In the latter nineteenth century and during the Progressive Era, such a class of farmers and small businessmen [sic] fought politically—and lost—their last struggle for a paramount role in national decision.

Instead, he argues:

Society in brief, has become a great sales-room—and a network of rackets: the gimmick of success becomes the yearly change of model, as in the mass society
fashion becomes universal. The marketing apparatus transforms the human being into the ultimately-saturated man—the cheerful robot—and makes ‘anxious obsolescence’ the American way of life. (*Politics of Truth* 197)

But, worse of all to Mills was the willingness of people to resign. He claims: “We know that men can be turned into robots—by chemical means, by physical coercion, as in concentration camps, and so on. But we are now confronting a situation much more serious than that—a situation in which there are developed human beings who are cheerfully and willingly turning themselves into robots” (*Politics of Truth* 231). As will be explored further in the next chapter, it was what he saw as the willingness among the masses of prosperous working people to resign their independent fighting spirit for a larger pay envelope that promoted him to give up on organized labor and seek a new agent of change.

Mills’ theory of the “cheerful robot” had a deep and lasting impact upon SDS. Hayden glosses his own interpretation of Mills cheerful robot as:

…an individual in a mass society having only an illusion of reason and freedom, existing in an isolated personal context divorced from the larger structures where his or her destiny was being determined. Thus cut off, the individual took life’s problems to be the workings of a mysterious fate, not the responsibility and doings of bureaucratic elites. (*Reunion* 80)

Mills’ image of a cheerful robot struck a personal cord with Hayden because as he realized, “Mills was describing the world of my father” (80). It is a world were virtue is lost. Mills says, “Among the cheerful robots of the mass society, not human virtue but human shortcomings, attractively packaged, lead to popularity and success” (*Politics of Truth* 166). It was a fear of the deadening effects of mass society that motivated SDS into action to praise the virtuous outsider
who, quoting Herbert Marcuse, made the “great refusal” to be absorbed into the post-WWII Cold War liberal bureaucracy. But, using a formula deeply ingrained in the history of civic republicanism, while praising the outsider who maintains his/her virtue, they vilified the insider who succumbs to domination and becomes unvirtuous.

Towards the end of his life, in the face of what he believed to be the crushing weight of administrative bureaucracy and mass society that locked the average working person in an administrative cage (an intellectual inheritance from his work on sociologist Max Weber, developed at greater length in chapter 5), the dissident intellectual activist or Third World national liberation guerilla rises, in Mills’ writings, to become the new agency of historical change. No longer believing in a collective agency like Marx’s proletariat, Mills argues, “It is a mistake for us to swallow ourselves in a vague political ‘we’” (“Decline of the Left” 221). This also connects to Gramsci’s view of Renaissance-style politics. Mills later view was that the “structure of modern [twentieth century] society, in particular it’s bureaucratic and communication systems, virtually expropriates from all but a small intellectual elite the capacity for individual freedom” (My emphasis Power Elite 195). Mills’ increasingly pessimistic view about the future locked him in a cage of despair. Due to the corrupting influences of a mass society, he foreclosed most possibilities of a collectively organized radical politics based upon long-term educating and organizing in the trenches of civil society.

The models for Mills’ vision towards the end of his life were the Cuban revolutionary in his book Listen Yankee or the young intellectual throughout the world who is disgusted with “all the old crap” and “who reveals the resolution of at least one human being to take at least his own fate into his own hands” (222). This is an affirmation of 19th century agrarian and artisan individualism. In Mills’ mind, the frontier represented a time in American history, before the
Civil War and industrialization, where small producers lived autonomous lifestyles not beholden to central authorities, and where they created their own lives through their ownership of land or their artisan skills. He sees this as freedom from tyranny. Speaking from the persona he created for *Listen Yankee* he liked to say to audiences, “I don't know what you guys are waiting for. You've got a beautiful set of mountains in those Rockies. I'll show you how to use those pistols. Why don't you get going?” As was well-known at the time, the Cuban revolutionaries trained for and consolidated their revolution from the Sierra Maestra Mountains in Cuba. As sociologist Don McQuarie explains, “A subtle displacement takes place in Mills’ later works in which the political end of an equalitarian social order is no longer seen as the goal of Western industrial society, but rather becomes rooted in America’s pre-industrial past and in the contemporary Third World” (McQuarie 92). We see here the conclusion of a condition of profound failure and disappointment for the Left generally and Mills specifically.

*Beyond Intellectual History: Towards a Cultural Intellectual History*

SDS members like Hayden held their anti-conformist, anti-bureaucratic ethos so deeply and were so fervently convinced of the correctness of their path that it could not have come just from intellectual sources like Dewey and Mills. By building an institutional and intellectual history above, one gets a good understanding of SLID, Dewey, Mills, and SDS’ shared values, but it is also important to examine important cultural touchstones that allow those shared values to gain such wide popularity. More than almost any other novel of the post-war generation, Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1958) was able to give expression to the feelings and ideas of frustration with the bureaucracy and conformity to the post-war liberal consensus. And like Mills, with whom he shared mutual friends at Columbia University, he developed an anti-bureaucratic ethos

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This was quoted in his campus newspaper. *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Volume CV, Number 38, 29 November 1960.
that also viewed working people as cheerful robots and viewed people who existed beyond the reach of corporate-influenced modernity—particularly the dropout, the drifter, people of color, and third world “fellahin” people—as being the only agents of change.

*Jack Kerouac: How His Hatred for Bureaucracy and His Romantic View of the Poor and Third World Affected SDS*

Not only do at least two early presidents of SDS (Hayden and Gitlin) cite reading *On the Road* as one of the most important texts that radicalized them (Hayden *Writings*... 449-455, Miller 45; Gitlin *The Sixties*... 51-57), historian Kirkpatrick Sale argues the original decision to write the PHS was because a group of students interested in civil rights who had been meeting at National Student Association conferences in 1960 and 1961 had organized a loose caucus called “The Liberal Study Group.” They felt “in getting together they found a real identity of interests and attitudes. There was among them a shared style, a kind of open Bohemianism filtered through the Beats that put a premium on honesty and naturalness” (23). Hayden celebrates Kerouac by saying:

> His was a quest beyond Conquest, taking enormous will as the Cold War was enshrouding the rest of us. His work was about the interior of life, the big questions of meaning and death, at a time when nearly everyone else was conditioned to face the exterior, to fall under the spell of the Organization Man and the Feminine Mystique rather than surrendering to Godless Communism. (*Writings*... 451)

It is easy to note the similarities between SDS’s values-based criticisms of America under the spell of Cold War liberalism and Kerouac’s prose when Kerouac writes, “This is the story of America. Everybody’s doing what they think they’re supposed to do” (*On the Road* 42). Like SDS, Kerouac glorifies America’s past where individual autonomy and freedom were cherished
values, and detests what American has become. In the mid-20th century, citizens are robbed of their individual autonomy and “a sinister new kind of efficiency appeared in America . . .” where, as Kerouac argues, “beat characters after 1950 vanished into jails and madhouses, or were shamed into silent conformity...” (“Philosophy of the Beats”). The author John Clellon Holmes could not have summed up the searching attitude of SDSers better when he wrote, “Everywhere the Beat Generation seems occupied with the feverish production of answers—some of them frightening, some of them foolish—to a single question: how are we to live?”

In other words, following the republican fear of the unvirtuous: how do we live a meaningful moral life surrounded by immoral people? When trying to explain what the word “beat” meant, among the litany of definitions, Kerouac said, “More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used ...” (“The Philosophy of the Beat Generation”). Kerouac expressed an anti-bureaucratic politics that broke through to the popular culture shared by young middle class students like Hayden and Gitlin in the 50s and 60s. New Left hero, Bob Dylan lists *On the Road* as one of the motivations for him traveling to New York (Wilentz Ch 2). Just like Kerouac, Dylan was from a declining industrial town and went to New York to live a more authentic life. Kerouac’s *Mexico City Blues* was the first poetry Dylan read that, he claims, spoke his “American language” (Wilentz 49). Moreover, Ray Manzarek, the keyboardist for the Doors, said the band would not have existed without Kerouac’s *On the Road* (Manzarek). Lastly, while on the famous Merry Pranksters Further bus, Ken Kesey says *On the Road* was “more important than the drugs” in helping the counter-culture find themselves (Ellwood).

Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* resonated with early leaders of SDS by showing them the creation of a subjectively constructed identity that is open and flexible in its willingness to reject middle class conformity and connect with the poor by voluntarily becoming poor themselves. In
so doing, Kerouac and his friends as well as SDS and its members become authentic moral agents looking to revive a lost America past. Sal Paradise, the main character in *On the Road*, sets out on a journey to remake himself, “rising from the underground, the sordid hipsters of America, a new beat generation that I was slowly joining” (34). Traveling to the west coast, the American south, and to Mexico allows Sal to not only leave his boring middle class life behind where he said “everything was dead,” (1) but also allows him to transform himself by voluntarily living a life of poverty while also experiencing the ecstasy of an unconfined life. Sal says, "Somewhere along the line I knew there would be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me" (7). As literary scholar Robert Holten argues *On the Road*, “contributed significantly to the alteration of postwar culture's universe of possibilities by making an image of white male subjectivity defined in terms of alienation, rebelliousness, intensity and spontaneity widely accessible-qualities repeatedly associated in the book with America's marginalized racial others” (265). Nothing could ring more clearly for middle class young people that made up the American New Left who traveled to the American segregated south and the northern ghettos to escape their middle-class suburbs and campuses.

Sal’s character models for the New Left what it means to search for a more authentic life where love and human connection is more important than consumerism or bureaucracy, but he also models the dangers of overly romanticizing people deemed to be uncorrupted by post-war society. Sal seeks mentors in the novel who have a romantic nostalgia for a lost America. This is nowhere clearer than when he visits Old Bull in New Orleans (William Burroughs).

Bull had a sentimental streak about the old days in America, especially 1910, when you could get morphine in a drugstore without prescription and Chinese smoked opium in their evening windows and the country was wild and brawling
and free, with abundance and any kind of freedom for everyone. His chief hate
was Washington bureaucracy; second to that, liberals; then cops. (85).

As stated above, Old Bull complains that America: “Tain’t nothin but bureaucracy. And unions! Especially unions!” Sal says “He spent all his time talking and teaching others. Jane [Joan Vollmer] sat at his feet; so did I [Kerouac]; so did Dean [Neal Cassidy]; and so had Carlo Marx [Allen Ginsburg]. We’d all learned from him” (85). The lessons that Sal was absorbing, Hayden and the larger New Left generation were absorbing as well. Kerouac popularized the lessons of a values-based republicanism in a hip language that grounded itself in a backward looking nostalgia for a lost American frontier liberty and a moralistic dichotomy between us, the cool hipster dropouts, and them, the soulless workers under the spell of big bureaucracy, big liberalism, and big unions.

While Kerouac’s literature taught them to seek individual transformative experiences, it also taught them to romanticize escape through travel and idealize outsiders living on the margins of society—“dealing with the pit and prunejuice of poor beat life itself in the god-awful streets of man”—as a means to access those experiences. One can see glimmers of Keuroac’s strategy in SDS’s political strategies throughout the early 60s, which prioritized transforming yourself more than transforming others or transforming systems. While SDS had a much clearer political edge to its strategies influenced by theorists like Mills (who had his own problems which will be discussed in the next chapter), they were nonetheless both negatively and positively influenced by the bohemian culture of escapism and romanticization of the racialized outsider.

Borrowing from German philosopher and historian Oswald Spengler, Kerouac uses the term fellahin to talk about racialized outsiders. Kerouac places a tremendous amount of hope in
the fellahin as moral agents because they are non-white people living freer, uncorrupted, more authentic lives outside of established society. While no New Leftist used the word (to my knowledge), it is a useful discussion because they did use a similar romantic identification with poor African Americans, interracial ghetto residents, and third world militants. Holten glosses the term as follows:

Kerouac employs it very generally to designate all those peoples-in North America and throughout the world-who appeared to him to be culturally situated outside the structures and categories, the desires and frustrations, of modernity. Whatever their own problems, problems of which he seems for the most part unaware, Kerouac's fellahin appeared to exist in a more authentic, more real and vital space beyond the confines of a consumer culture. (267-268)

Hayden reflected on his experience with SNCC activists by saying they, “lived on fuller level of feeling than any people I’d ever seen. Here were the models of charismatic commitment I was seeking. I wanted to live like them” (qtd. in G. Hale 2). By merging with the poor through a subjective identification, Kerouac’s and other 1950s bohemians escaped the modern administrative “machine” and reconnected with a pre-modern, pre-industrial life that still valued autonomy and freedom. His model proved inspiring for SDSers.

Sal’s relationship with Terry in the novel provides an interesting view into this problematic dynamic. After Sal fell in love with a Mexican-American woman, “a Pachuco wildcat,” nicknamed Terry, in a bus station in Bakersfield, CA, he thinks he will settle into a family life as a farmworker in a migrant labor camp with Okies and Mexicans. “I forgot all about the East and all about Dean and Carl and the bloody road. . . I was a man of the earth, precisely as I had dreamed. . .” (58). Kerouac’s philosophy embraced Mexican-American, Native
American, African American, and poor Mexicans as self-actualized people living outside of modern industrialized America and its corruption. “Sighing like an old negro cotton picker,” Sal worried about being able support his new family and the Okies, who would at times “go mad in the roadhouse” and beat up Mexicans. “They thought I was a Mexican, of course; and in a way I am” (58). At no point, does Sal try to mediate the tense situation between the Mexicans and the Okies and win the ethnic white migrants who came from the east, just like him, to an anti-racist position.14 His affirmation of a subjectively appropriated racial identity based upon love must have struck a chord with the New Left. Even middle class kids could adopt beat lifestyles and join in what Marcuse called the “great refusal.” By identifying with outsiders, they voluntarily became one with the poor and enjoyed not only the ecstasy of life “adventuring in the crazy American night” (59) outside of the suffocating conformity of the 1950s suburb “where everything was dead” (1), but also learned about the failures of post-war liberalism by getting outside of their controlling routines of college-job-family normativity. While the world they were trying to escape was real, what they imagined would set them free was a nostalgic idealization of a world and a people untouched and uncorrupted by post-war corporate and administrative bureaucracy. It was, in other words, an escape fantasy built upon an idealized narrative.

Grace Elizabeth Hale’s study of white middle class fascination with outsiders draws important lessons for understanding SDS’s adoption of Kerouac. Hale asserts, “The romance of the outsider” as she calls it, “provided an imaginary resolution for an intractable mid-century cultural and political conflict, the contradiction between the desire for self-determination and autonomy and the desire for a grounded, morally and emotionally meaningful life” (3). By

14 Sal, like Kerouac, is Franco-American.
traveling away from the static zone of middle class conformity and containment, SDSers were able to recreate themselves and live more authentic, self-aware lives often by connecting culturally, politically, and/or sexually with people of color. Author and literary scholar Toni Morrison calls this cultural and political act “playing in the dark.” Morrison argues, “We need studies that analyze the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters. Such studies will reveal the process of establishing others . . . so as to ease and to order external and internal chaos” (Morrison 52-53). This strategy as adopted by SDS in the Education Research Action Project program produced liberatory results for certain alienated middle class individuals. However, like prominent scholars (Holden, Grace Hale, and Morrison), I am ultimately critical of it because of the short-term nature of the project and the inconclusiveness of the project’s success at community empowerment. The problem has always been translating that sense of self-actualization into a political program that moves beyond the individual.

The growing gap between individual liberation and a stagnant poor community often created frustration and alienation. How one processes that frustration is a telling commentary on their guiding ideology. For example, Kerouac’s Sal becomes frustrated with the life of a poor farmworker and abandons Terry and her child and the migrant community where, shortly before, he claimed he had “found his life’s work.” His hands bleed from picking cotton, and he was not a very good farmworker—both Terry and the child can pick faster than he can. The whole time he works in the fields, he wears the child’s toy hat, symbolically indicating to the reader that he is just playing at being a farmworker.15 Sal says, “I could feel the pull of my own life calling me back. I shot my aunt a penny postcard and asked for another fifty across the land.” Certainly, by

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15 I thank Dr. Sandra Stanley for pointing this out to me during an American Novels course at Cal State Northridge during my undergraduate experience.
living as a migrant farmworker, Sal has the “beat” experience that makes him a more liberated individual (and a better writer), but what liberation does Terry experience? She is a single Mexican-American mother who loses a partner and still lives in a community where exploitative labor, domestic abuse, and drunken racist Okies control her existence. Literary scholar Justin Thomas Trudeau argues:

With the flick of a postcard he requests and receives the money needed to exit one life and enter into another. Jack’s white mother bails him out, an option Beatrice [Terry] and her son do not have. It is this invisibility of white privilege, in this case easily accessible capital, which provides one of the lingering contradictions that Kerouac, the liminoid actor, is haunted by. (161-162)

What haunts Sal also haunts the young SDSers. A similar nostalgia that haunts Kerouac, haunted SDS blocking them from a more thoroughgoing critique of their strategy to escape conformity.

After returning home to the east coast, Sal quickly leaves for Denver to recapture a moment when he lived a truly “mad” and “free life” with Dean and Carlo. His friends are not in Denver, and he wanders around lonely, haunted by Terry and his guilt. The conclusions he draws from his guilt are telling, and help the reader draw the connections to Hayden and the larger white New Left.

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night … strolling in the dark mysterious streets. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a white man disillusioned. All my life I’d had
white ambitions. . . . I was only myself Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violent dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy true-hearted ecstatic Negroes of America.

Holden argues, “Sal's response finally, as always, is sadness, a kind of nostalgia for the vanishing American ‘real’ which increasingly, he feels, can only be located in the fellahin” (276). But, it is a fellahin that does not define its own existence. People of color never get to narrate their own feelings of racism, exploitation, or alienation, or for that matter, perhaps their own possible desire to live the middle class life Sal is trying to escape. Grace Elizabeth Hale describes this interaction as: “Insiders who wanted out and outsiders who wanted in . . .” (188). People of color, the fellahin, exist in the novel as a means to a liberatory end for white people looking to escape middle class lives by temporarily breaking through the corruption and bureaucracy of post-war society while “on the road.” But, it leaves the larger hegemony of post-war liberalism untouched because it rejects the long-term project of organizing and educating for a collective political struggle among working people and the majority of middle class people, for a politics of escapism and romanticization of racialized outsiders that only frees the individual. Furthermore, this constant wishing to be an overly idealized racial other is a dangerous lesson adopted by many SDSers, and it was among the main criticisms leveled at them by Black Power activists. SNCC organizer and Guardian newspaper reporter Lester Julius called this situation “Oh I wish I were black syndrome” which was “merely whites once again side-stepping the difficult work of organizing in the white community.”

Towards the end of On the Road, Sal and his buddies travel to Mexico where he finds an even more uncorrupted fellahin who were “the source of mankind and the fathers of it” (160).

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16 “From the Other Side of the Tracks” Guardian May 10 1969.
He writes, “We had finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic either” (160). Sal’s best friend and mentor, Dean, says Mexico is “where we would finally learn ourselves among the Fellahin Indians of the world, the essential strain of the basic primitive, wailing humanity . . .” This commitment to a “basic primitive, wailing humanity” makes poor Mexicans into moral agents and defenders of a lost freedom that can save the “self-important moneybag Americans on a lark in their land” (162). Dean enviously argues they are not alienated like the white kids: “they never dreamed the sadness and the poor broken delusion of it. They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday” (172). But, Dean seems to know nothing about colonialism or the larger institutional and cultural forces weighing down on indigenous Mexicans who he so admires.

The novel presents a microcosm of many of the problematic ideas that the New Left struggled with when developing their political strategies in the 1960s. At its heart, *On the Road* seeks to break away from the conformity and bureaucracy hollowing out cherished American values of freedom and autonomy that have been poisoned by post-war consumerism and militarism. The character’s strategy to break away is twofold. Firstly, they seek individual escape from the static suburbs and affluent ethnic white urban areas like Paterson, New Jersey through a deep rejection of the people who live in those places and a self-imposed exile among the poor and disenfranchised. As moral agents seeking to revive a lost American greatness where people lived more autonomous, de-centralized lives, they find idealized racial outsiders the best models for their liberation because on one hand, they seem to live uncorrupted and incorruptible lives, and on another hand, they seem to be more fully connected to an authentic freedom alive in America’s past because they never let post-war society sever them from this connection. Lastly,
outside America in the third world exists a “magic land” where poor people have even more authenticity and self-awareness. Rather than just simply looking at the Beat Generation as doped up hipsters breaking with the status quo by living outlandish lifestyles, one must look at the their nostalgic view of America’s past and their mythologized view of racialized “others” as a strategy that was doomed for failure.

By bringing together the institutional and intellectual pre-history of SDS and the deep current of non-conformity in the cultural history of the 1950s, we learn SDS inherited an institutional history (SLID) influenced by republicanism and participatory democracy, but deeply fragmented and scarred from the Red Scare and the Cold War. They also inherited a bohemian culture that valued freedom and self-definition, but was deeply committed to an individualistic political strategy of self-recreation through identification with an orientalist idealization of non-white, non-middle class outsiders. In this confusing time, it was the problematic synthesis of moral prophetic agents wishing to combat corporate corruption and administrative bureaucracy fused with a problematic political strategy weighed down by romantization that set SDS on a deeply inspiring but ultimately unsuccessful road. One of the least researched aspects of SDS’s failed political strategy was its rejection of what Mills called the “labor metaphysic.” The next chapter will investigate the intellectual and cultural history of that political choice.
CHAPTER V. C. WRIGHT MILLS’ DRIFT FROM POLITICS

Hey, hey, Woody Guthrie, I wrote you a song
'Bout a funny ol’ world that’s a-comin’ along
Seems sick an’ it’s hungry, it’s tired an’ it’s torn
It looks like it’s a-dyin’ an’ it’s hardly been born
-Bob Dylan “Song to Woody”

Many scholars who comment on Mills’ views on the left’s traditional agent of change mainly focus on his 1960 advice to the New Left that they should abandon the “labor metaphysic” (“Letter to the New Left”). The few scholars who acknowledge Mills’ earlier pro-labor writings mainly contrast his 1940s opinions to his post-1951 opinions and conclude he had a drastic change of heart (Coker; Mattson). In 1951, Mills published *White Collar*, a book that had a much less favorable opinion on organized labor and the middle class in general than his 1948 book *New Men of Power*. In his next published works and lectures, including *The Power Elite*, he castigated organized labor and his own earlier opinions about their potential to be a revolutionary force in America. Mills wrote in the late 1950s, “the labor unions have become organizations that select and form leaders who, upon becoming successful, take their places alongside businessmen in and out of government and politicians in both major parties among the national power elite” (*Power, People, Politics*). At the same time, there was no space in Mills’ theory to consider a dissident rank-and-file movement. Mills like SDS considered union leaders the only hope for radicalizing workers. While the contrast between Mills 1940s optimism and his 1950s pessimism is important, a closer examination reveals that while he placed a great deal of hope in an increasingly radicalizing labor movement in the immediate aftermath of WWII, at the same time he always viewed organized labor suspiciously. He always believed that organized labor had the potential to become “middle-level” “yes men” for the power elite, thereby taming the militancy of the working class, and helping to usher in corporate totalitarianism (“People, Power, and Politics” 31-35). Mills’ slide from optimism to pessimism during the 1950s is
important to identify because it is largely the same trajectory SDS followed in the 1960s: i.e. initial guarded support that grew into looming suspicion built upon on a moralistic judgment of subservience to the corporate Cold War power elite. Because both of their analyses rested upon a republican foundation, when their view of the working class shifted from the “new men of power” to the “cheerful robots,” their fear of subservient people controlled by corporations led them to condemn the working class and seek new agents of social change. Even worse, because they substantiated their republican fears with a “power elite,” “mass society” thesis influenced by Max Weber, they saw inter-locking institutional hierarchies as overwhelming average working people. Except for small groups of dissenting young intellectuals, they felt the “iron cage of bureaucracy” was almost inescapable for the majority of working people.

This pessimistic conclusion led Mills and SDS to reject the working class as sell outs to “the power elite” in Mills language or “the establishment” or “the system” in SDS’s language. The limitations their theory placed upon their search for a replacement proletariat had dramatic consequences for their struggle to realign New Deal liberalism. This chapter will survey Mills’ theoretical trajectory, and the next chapter will survey SDS’s similar trajectory in regards to the labor question. Before exploring the specific content of Mills suspicions of organized labor, first it is important to view the striking contrast in his writing from the 1940s to the 1950s.

*Mills’ View of the Working Class 1940s vs. the 1950s*

In his book, *New Men of Power*, published in 1948, he asserted: “Inside this country today, the labor leaders are the strategic actors: they lead the only organizations capable of stopping the main drift towards war and slump...” (My emphasis *New Men of Power* 3). Ten years later, he was much less optimistic. In 1958, Mills came to the dismal conclusion:

> There is nothing, it seems to me, in the make-up of the current labour leadership
to allow us to expect that it can or that it will lead, rather than merely react. In so far as it fights at all it fights over a share of the goods of a single way of life and not over that way of life itself. The typical labour leader in the U.S.A. today is better understood as an adaptive creature of the *main business drift* than as an independent actor in a truly national context. (My emphasis “The Structure of Power in American Society”)

The contrast is clear enough. The common interpretation of Mills changing views is the idealism of his youth gave way to the pessimism of his older age (McQuarie). But upon further investigation, it is easy to see that Mills was always (even in the 1940s) at least slightly pessimistic about the potential of the working class to become agents of revolutionary change. To read Mills writing in the 1940s—especially his work at the journal “Labor and Nation” and others (*Politics*, *Commentary*, *New Republic*, *Dissent*, and *Partisan Review*)—is to imagine what an independent, indigenous, radical, pro-labor left could have looked like if Mills was able to quell his own republican fears. Instead, fear of subservience overwhelmed his intellect resulting in his inability to imagine a mass-based political movement.

*Labor and Nation* was a fascinating publication of the Inter-Union Institute for Labor and Democracy (IUI). Founded and run by J.B.S. Hardman, a Russian, socialist immigrant and veteran labor reporter from the radical Amalgamated Clothing Workers union, the institute and the monthly publication drew a sizable readership of rank-and-file workers, a feat rarely accomplished in 20th century American history; it was a clearinghouse and discussion space for radical intellectuals and radical labor leaders. The socialist-led unionized needle trades were the primary sponsors of the League for Industrial Democracy (Lichtenstein “New Men of Power”).

1 McQuarie also makes an intriguing related argument that sees Mills’ academic development as an incomplete journey from Pragmatism to Marxism. Robert Westbrook makes a similar argument about John Dewey.
When Mills moved from his first academic appointment at the University of Maryland to Columbia University’s Bureau of Applied Social Research, he opened its first Labor Research Division (LRD) in 1946. He met Hardman and quickly became involved with the IUI. Mills committed the resources of the LRD to the IUI while continuously writing articles and serving on its board until the early 1950s. Many of his articles and a sizeable amount of his research, from this time period, went into his book on labor leaders titled *The New Men of Power* (1948), which he dedicated to J.B.S. Hardman.

In 1943 he wrote for *Labor and Nation*, "The chief social power upon which a genuine democracy can rest today is labor. . . . fructified [made fruitful or productive] by pro-labor intellectuals" (*People, Power, and Politics* 75-76). This statement stands in direct opposition to what we generally think about Mills’ view of the working class with his commonly repeated advice to the New Left to “abandon the labor metaphysic.” However, in the 1940s, it was the connection between workers and radical intellectuals that he was most interested in developing. In the *Labor and Nation* article titled “The Politics of Skill” Mills wrote, “the new research people” are “morally unhappy,” “selling their minds to people they don’t like” (35). He said, “there is a crying need for the kinds of skill these social technicians possess. People who have contact with these new skill groups as well as with labor leaders are beginning to think seriously of ways and means of getting the two together for the benefit of the working people” (35). A survey of his 1940s pro-labor writing reveals a deep concern for 1) labor leaders acting as fighters for independent progressive politics and not just “plain and simple” unionism focused on economic issues, what he called “pork chop contentment” (“Grassroots Union with Ideas.”) 2) radical intellectuals (particularly young social scientists) acting in service to labor leaders who in turn could provide intellectuals not only with a “new public” of “rank-and-file” workers but also
a new “sense of belonging” to a moral project (“The Politics of Skill”), and 3) an independent and fighting spirit that directs its energy to defeating the “main drift” towards bureaucratic centralization, corporatization, and militarism in the mid-century (“The Case for the Coal Miners”).

Mills’ post-war, pro-labor optimism is most clearly illustrated in his reporting on the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). In their early years, he cheered both unions’ critiques of the New Deal and their unwillingness to be swept along an administrative path. He called the UAW the “vanguard of the democratic Left in America” (“Grassroots Union . . .” 245). On one hand, he was fond of Walter Reuther for saying things like "Our watchword must not be: back to the New Deal, but forward from the New Deal" (247), but he was much more fond of the disobedient attitude of the rank-and-file:

The rank and file of the UAW carries its disrespect for authority to the point of being principled about it. To see them in convention is to realize that this union is their creature. Underlying their collective mood is a common denominator: the basic psychology of the "wobbly," the member of the radical Industrial Workers of the World of pre-World War I days. They disrespect authority, even when they have elected it and even when it is expressed quite feebly. (“Grassroots Union . . .” 240)

Equally, Mills took the extremely unpopular position of defending the coal miners when they voted to strike during WWII. In a well-researched and carefully argued article titled, “The Case for the Coal Miners,” geared towards a popular audience, he supported their militancy. Under the leadership of John Lewis, the miners took a bold and unpopular step at the time that broke with the New Deal consensus but also broke with war-time super patriotism by striking in an industry
critical to war production. To Mills, disrespect for a centralized, bureaucratic authority and the fight to maintain your individual freedom through collective action are among the most important criteria of being radical. But while Mills admired this anti-authoritarian impulse in the rank-and-file, surprisingly, he did not believe it could outshine the power of their leadership once they became a “vested interest” in post-war corporate liberalism. To understand Mills’ theory, it is important to explore examples of Mills’ pessimism and then try to locate its theoretical and historical roots.

Mills Was Always Suspicious of Organized Labor

A deeper analysis of his pro-labor writings reveals an equivocal stance rooted in his looming suspicion that the power elite could and would adjust itself in such a way as to recruit a sizeable number of formerly militant labor leaders into the power elite thereby moderating the labor insurgency after WWII. If one just reads a little further from the above-quoted sentence above from New Men of Power “they lead the only organizations capable of stopping the main drift towards war and slump,” it is possible to see that revolutionary potential, to Mills, here remains an open political question of leadership. He says in the next sentence, “What the labor leader does or fails to do, may be the key to what will happen in the U.S” (My emphasis). The key phrase here is “or fails to do.” Mills is confronting an open political question in a fluctuating political-economic environment, rather than a scientific certitude about the revolutionary potential of the working class common in many CP circles at the time. Moving forward to the conclusion of New Men of Power, he plainly states, “Never has so much depended upon men [labor leaders] who are so ill-prepared and so little inclined to assume the responsibility” (291). For Mills, it came down to the question of effective leadership in a political struggle; however, he could not theoretically envision a rank-and-file rebellion organized by organic intellectuals
internal to the movement.

In one of his most labor-friendly articles published in the *New Republic* in 1947, Mills hypothesized a possible outcome of the power elite’s strategy to recruit labor leaders. Speaking in glowing terms about the UAW throughout most of the article (245), Mills pivots towards the end and holds open the possibility that labor can be out organized by the Power Elite.

But it may well be that, after a limited period of Taft-Hartley toughness, of trying to weaken the union, the companies will take the line of the sophisticated conservative: to set up amiable management-labor cooperation and make material economic concessions in return for the union disciplining the rank and file; in effect, transforming the union into a personnel department for the industry.

(“Grassroots Union with Ideas” 246)

The Taft-Hartley bill was passed as the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, confirming many fears of radicals. To many labor organizers, it hamstrung their efforts to organize the unorganized—particularly in the south. It made illegal many of the most successful tactics that helped industrial workers win union recognition in the 30s and 40s such as: sympathy strikes, wildcat strikes, secondary boycotts, and closed shops to name only a few examples. It also instituted loyalty oaths against communist union leaders and allowed for “right-to-work” laws in certain states. To other radical labor organizers, the bill became simply another excuse for union bureaucrats to not support ambitious and militant union drives (Fletcher Jr.). Interestingly, at the time (1947), Mills saw this outcome as unlikely (at least in the UAW). Mills held out the hope that in the afterglow of the militant victories in the 30s and 40s, the younger educated leadership would hold off any attempt of Reuther to enter into corporatist agreements. He believed the new leadership would be able to capitalize on the general lack of respect for authority in Reuther’s
circle of advisers and extend it to the general attitude of the rank-and-file. Mills argues delegate buttons to the 1947 UAW convention read, "support the Reuther program," not just "support Reuther" (245). He quotes an autoworker as saying “if he [Reuther] gets out of line, I'll personally throw the bastard out next year” (245). However, Mills optimism was short lived.

Four years later (1951), Mills argued there is nothing left but to concluded that the hope he placed in a relationship between radical intellectuals and labor leaders was misplaced due to the overwhelming influence of corporate-led liberalism that brought labor leaders into a functional alliance with key politicians, corporate leaders, and key civic institutions—what he eventually called the Power Elite (White Collar…; Power Elite). In the 1940s he imagined the possibility for labor leaders to become middle managers of “some sort of state capitalism guaranteeing industry disciplined workers, and in effect, by drawing the teeth of the rank and file, making them easy prey to an American variant on the corporative set-up.” However, by the 1950s what he once saw as only a possibility for labor leaders to become transformed into a gnawing fear that overwhelmed his otherwise optimistic intellect. The slow decline of social movement unionism and the rapid ascent of corporatist business unionism that wedded itself to the Democratic Party, Cold War militarism, and corporate-friendly collective bargaining, shocked and dismayed many post-war radicals and set the precedent for the New Left and their initial interaction with organized labor (Boyle; Croker; Lichtenstein Labor’s War… and “New Men of Power”).

But, what happened in those few short years to convince Mills that the Power Elite had out organized labor? Mills explanation of labor’s drift away from a militant, potentially revolutionary, force during the 1940s and 1950s is one of the most important keys to understanding both Mills and later SDS’s search for new agents of social change. First it is
important to discuss it theoretically and then historically.

Accepting Weber and Rejecting the ‘Labor Metaphysic’

Interestingly, Mills’ dedicated study of Dewey’s pragmatism was closely followed by his dedicated study (and translation) of German sociologist Max Weber. Along with his University of Wisconsin professor, Hans Gertz (who was involved with the Frankfurt School before he immigrated to America), he translated several of Weber’s texts into English in 1946 (From Max Weber…). It is through Weber that Mills rejected a Marxist class-based exploitation theory and developed his theory of the Power Elite (Barrow). Mills famously argues in The Power Elite:

‘ruling class’ is a badly loaded phrase. ‘Class’ is an economic term; ‘rule’ is a political one. The phrase, ‘ruling class’ thus contains the theory that an economic class rules politically. That short-cut theory may or may not at times be true, but we do not want to carry that one rather simple theory about in the terms that we use to define our problems; we wish to state the theories explicitly, using terms of more precise and unilateral meaning. Specifically, the phrase ‘ruling class,’ in its common political connotations, does not allow enough autonomy to the political order and its agents, and it says nothing about the military as such. It should be clear to the reader by now that we do not accept as adequate the simple view that high economic men unilaterally make all decisions of national consequence. We hold that such a simple view of ‘economic determinism’ must be elaborated by ‘political determinism’ and ‘military determinism’; that the higher agents of each of these three domains now often have a noticeable degree of autonomy; and that only in the often intricate ways of coalition do they make up and carry through the most important decisions. Those are the major reasons we prefer ‘power elite’ to
‘ruling class’ as a characterizing phrase for the higher circles when we consider them in terms of power” (The Power Elite 277).

Political scientist Clyde Barrow argues “. . . it has always been a source of consternation for Marxists that Mills elaborated this concept [of the power elite] by starting from the Weberian position that societies consist of analytically distinct and autonomous economic, political, social, and cultural orders” (403). A theory that sees social forces as autonomous undercuts believing in collective social struggle. By losing class, he loses a view of collective agency. Are we all just individuals in an epic struggle to maintain or lose our virtue and our freedom? Even worse, Mills combines his rejection of a class-based conflict theory with Weber’s view that modern society was moving towards a bureaucratic iron cage, a mass society that was virtually inescapable. This fed his moralistic rejection of modern working people as cheerful robots. Rejecting class-based theories and judging individuals based upon their subservience models closely Republican rhetoric.

In Mills’ theory, access to decision-making and leadership over institutions that control and distribute key resources important for the effective functioning of society at that particular historical moment represents his view of power (Barrow 403). Rather than discussions of collective agency or rank-and-file rebellion, interlocking institutional hierarchy was, throughout his work, the key to understanding the drift towards totalitarianism in the twentieth century. Barrow shows this explicitly, as he explains that Mills believed, “. . . institutions (and not classes directly) organize power in society by vesting certain positions, and the individuals occupying those positions, with the authority to make decisions about how to deploy the key resources mobilized by that institution.” In stark contrast to a Gramscian view in which power is organized by educating and organizing in civil society and forming cross-class coalitions, for Mills, power
was found in interlocking yet analytically autonomous institutions. In other words, institutions move history rather than people. Therefore, it is more important to influence key institutional leaders than it is to influence and educate the masses. Barrow further explicates Mills position:

…it is the authority to make institutionally binding decisions that makes an individual powerful. Thus, power can be imputed to particular groups of individuals to the degree that they occupy the decision-making positions in the organizations that control wealth, force, status, and knowledge in a particular society. (403)

Weber’s influenced the early part of Mills career; Mills was very interested in studying labor leaders, whom he called the “new men of power.” They controlled institutions that were among the key forces that asserted, “effective control over what [people] are depended upon” in post-war consumer society—particularly autoworkers. According to Mills, once these leaders abdicated their direct access to decision-making power and accepted a passive role in “the middle levels of power,” they become docile and no longer self-determining agents, subservient to corporations and the Democratic Party. Even worse, he argued in 1958, they become leaders, not of working class militancy, but rather as “a vested interest of the new society.” They lead workers away from militancy and provided the power elite the “regulation of such irregular tendencies as may occur among the rank and file” (“The Structure of Power in America” 37).

Mills contends that once the leadership of the union movement was “vested” in the interests of the corporations so went the rank and file. Even during his pro-labor period of scholarship (early 1940s to 1951), Mills never believed that an independent rank-and-file rebellion was possible. He believed this despite the fact that there were numerous wildcat strikes throughout the late 1940s—especially by workers of color (Lipsitz). Mills’ theory does not have
an agent, akin to Gramsci’s “organic intellectual,” to oppose and transform the passive revolution of the power elite. The average individual worker is easily overwhelmed by power in his view. Therefore, he believed once the current leadership of organized labor was bought off, so went the rank and file, because of the top’s ability to buy off the people at the bottom with larger pay envelopes and distract them with mass culture. He does not see divisions, inconsistencies, and factions within institutions as leading to intra-organization class struggle, which is strange because this is how Reuther rose to power in the UAW in a dissident faction in opposition to a faction composed of the CPUSA and the conservative business unionist (Lichtenstein Walter Reuther…). But, where did his belief in dissident radical action go?

While Mills believed in a radical anti-bureaucratic individualism, the experience of widespread individualism, according to his theory, was only possible under specific social and institutional arrangements, which he found in the 19th century, and which he believed modern mass society had ruled almost impossible. Under the corporate institutional arrangements during the mid-century, only heretics, like himself, or small enlightened groups, like SDS, were able to break free from “the big corporate setup.” According to Barrow, “In fact, Mills' concept of power renders ‘the masses’ powerless almost by fiat, since power is a function of occupying the command posts of the major institutions that control key resources” (406). By the end of Mills’ life, his view was that it was only the individualistic, macho (read male) young intellectuals or Third World guerrillas that could stand (somewhat hopelessly) against “the main drift.”
'Lonely Prophet without a promised land'\(^2\)

Mills wrote at a time where the American left suffered a cascading series of disorientations and disappointments in the post-WWII period. In the late thirties, after launching one of the most successful grassroots organizing campaigns on the legitimacy of capitalism in the twentieth century, radicals, particularly those involved with the CPUSA, found themselves consenting to a silent partner alliance with New Deal liberals and their corporate allies in a “united front” against fascism (See Chapter 3). CPUSA-led unions signed “no strike pledges,” and other unions went along with increased production and increased workplace discipline. As was illustrated in chapter 3, a 1944 *Business Week* article stated, "Today they [the CPUSA] have perhaps the best no-strike record of any section of organized labor; they are the most vigorous proponents of labor-management cooperation” (qtd. in Brecher). While the general mood of the country advocated shared sacrifice during the war effort, corporate interests in America wasted no time using the crisis to reorganize reform liberalism for their own purposes (Brinkley; Boyle). This meant removing power at the level of the workplace/shop floor and community/civic organization and concentrating it into smaller undemocratic administrative bodies that had unilateral control. For example, the National War Labor Board, the War Production Board, the Office of Price Administration, and the Business Advisory Council among others. The discussion coming out of the War Labor Board did not try to hide the fact that they were looking for cooperation with “responsible” labor leaders so that the union leaders could discipline their membership. Brecher quotes a War Labor Board report:

> Too often members of unions do not maintain their membership because they resent the discipline of a responsible leadership. A rival but less responsible

\(^2\) Hayden’s description of Mills in his recent memoir *Listen Yankee*… 43.
leadership feels the pull of temptation to obtain and maintain leadership by 
relaxing discipline, by refusing to cooperate with the company, and sometimes 
with unfair and demagogic attacks on the company. It is in the interests of 
management, these companies have found, to cooperate with the unions for the 
maintenance of a more stable, responsible leadership.

Thirteen years before Eisenhower’s famous farewell address, Mills called this relationship an 
“industry-armed forces-state department axis” (New Men of Power 25). Administrative solutions 
touched a nerve with Mills’ sense of independent radicalism and his deep suspicion of 
centralized bureaucracy. To emphasize how important it was to him to be against bureaucracy, 
Mills writes in Letters to Tovarich: You've asked me, 'What might you be?' Now I answer you: 'I 
am a Wobbly . . . I take Wobbly to mean one thing: the opposite of bureaucrat . . . I am a 
Wobbly, personally, down deep, and for good. I am outside the whale, and I got that way through 
social isolation and self-help.” Independence and self-determination from the manipulation of the 
Power Elite became key criteria by which he judged social movements, but one he believed 
became harder to maintain for the masses of post-war citizens.

Unlike most of the post-WWII radicals, Mills was more a product of WWII than the 
sectarian struggles of the 1930s. He was 19 in 1935. Speaking about the Great Depression, Mills 
admitted, “I do not know how typical I am of that generation in one very important respect. I did 
not personally experience ‘the thirties.’ At the time I just didn’t get its mood. . . Only with the 
onset of WWII did I become radically aware of political affairs . . .” (Letters... 249). But, 
because he did not participate in the strike waves and the unprecedented upsurge in radical 
activity during the 1930s, he did not maintain a deep awe and appreciation for the power of class 
struggle and the accomplishments of the CPUSA and other radical groups. Nor did he build the
trust in comrades or the faith in radical parties that many partisans of the 1930s built. In his recent biography of Mills, Stanley Aronowitz argues this attitude is a serious limitation of Mills’ analysis, a limitation that was passed on to SDS. He argues while it is certainly justifiable to criticize the CPUSA, he does not recognize their important successes, partially in organizing black workers (*Taking It Big* 118-123). And yet, at the same time, he never went through the “The God That Failed” depression associated with many in the 1930s radical generation (Koestler). Instead of the class struggle of the 1930s, Mills is more a product of the bureaucracy and corporatism of the post-WWII era. He saw both weighing down individualism and participatory democracy not only in the Democratic Party but also in the labor movement (interestingly also in the Soviet Union to which he often compared America). Moreover, Mills saw the 40s and 50s as not only disorientating, but also as disappointing. It is hard to enumerate his disappointments because there were so many, but among the most important were the following.

The failure of Henry Wallace’s third party campaign in 1948 profoundly affected Mills (Lichtenstein “New Men of Power”). Truman’s landslide reelection all but eliminated the potential for a left-labor-farmer third party (Schmidt). He was particularly bitter about Reuther, president of the UAW, supporting Truman instead of Wallace, in a backroom deal. He hypothesized:

That might be the unconscious temptation of Reuther: to become a ‘human engineer’ for some sort of state capitalism guaranteeing industry disciplined workers, and in effect, by drawing the teeth of the rank and file, making them easy prey to an American variant on the corporatist set-up. This is indeed the temptation of many American labor leaders, and a far greater threat to labor than
that presented by the policies of Tafts and Hartleys (“Grassroots Union with Ideas”).

Wallace’s Progressive Party only received 2.4 percent of the vote mainly coming from the state of New York. President Truman used the defeat of the Progressive Party as a mandate to ignore countless progressive demands. At the same time that third parties were hamstrung, 1939-1956 saw a mass resignation from the CPUSA and larger loss of faith in communism that fractured radical movements world-wide. This was in many ways accelerated by the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary and the “Secret Speech” of Nikita Khrushchev revealing Stalin’s crimes. Dissent and bitter feelings had been bubbling for some time among members and fellow travelers of the CPUSA, especially after the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (also known as the Hitler-Stalin Pact) (Isserman If I Had a Hammer…).

Mills certainly had no love for the Soviet Union nor for the CPUSA, but he thought the mass resignation and feelings of defeat plunged many former communists into what he called a “tragic sense of life.” This tragic sense of life pushed them into the arms of the New Deal and the Cold War (he liked to refer to ex-CPers as “the Old Futilitarians”). In a popular speech he gave in England, which was re-broadcast throughout the 1960s on Pacifica stations in the US, Mills summarizes his bitter take on the post-WWII left:

The remnants of the left circles of the ’thirties have often become what I should like to call ‘The Old Futilitarians.’ In their United States version, these ex-fighters are often quite shrill: they have stood up in another fashion in another era, but now they are done with fighting. They have not carried forth into the ’fifties any traditions of the left. Rejecting these altogether, they have come to embody and to display a kind of weariness with any politics of moral concern. (“Decline of the
According to Mills, these ex-radicals not only gave up fighting for left principles, but they actively participated in building the culture of Cold War nationalism.

Most distressing to Mills was the “drift” of his colleagues in the radical left from the position of critic and skeptic to a position of Cold War supplicant and conformist. While Mills critiqued many of his colleagues, he singled out Dwight McDonald (Politics) and Daniel Bell (The End of Ideology) (Mattson Intellectuals in Action Ch 1 and 2). In fact, the last few sentences of his famous “Letter to the New Left” belittles his colleagues, “Let the old men ask sourly, ‘Out of Apathy- into what?’ [MacDonald] The Age of Complacency is ending. Let the old women complain wisely about ‘the end of ideology.’ [Bell] We are beginning to move again.” With the growth of prosperity and the growth of a hyper-nationalist Cold War culture came what Mills termed the “new American celebration” (Power Elite 25). The 1950s become an exceptional time unparalleled in human history, according to these “ex-fighters” as Mills called them.

Interestingly, while it is common for conservative thinkers today to be associated with an argument about the “good old days” of the 1950s, Mills argues that leftists-turned-liberals helped build this mythology. They celebrated American exceptionalism not only domestically—with its increasing home ownership, rising wages, and dizzying consumerism—but also abroad—with its aggressive posture in the Cold War and sense of cultural superiority vis-a-via the communist countries.3

To an independent radical like Mills, that many progressive liberals and union leaders

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3 Importantly, there has been a resurgence of 1950s exceptionalism among the liberal-left today. Left labor historian Jack Metzgar argues “If what we lived through in the 1950s was not liberation, then liberation never happens in real human lives.” Economists Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez along with Paul Krugman and Robert Reich calls the midcentury decades after WWII “the great compression” and herald it as a time reduced income inequality and economic growth. Labor historians Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore have recently published an article and a forthcoming book called “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History” to combat the renewed 1950s exceptionalism.
allowed themselves to be cowed by McCarthyism, absorbed into the super patriotism of the Cold War and enchanted by the spoils of capitalist wartime prosperity was not only tragic but revolting. Mills thought the CPUSA leadership defended an indefensible nation like the Soviet Union and acted as a silent partner in the New Deal. This made Mills look for other radical options (while still remaining a socialist). He liked to play coy about words like socialist and Marxism. In a letter to William Miller, who questioned the definition of the word “intellectual,” much used in *The New Men of Power*, Mills responded, “by intellectual here we mean humanitarian socialist. What the hell else? So I’ll say so in some innocent, hard-boiled way” (qtd. in Lichtenstein “New Men of Power” 125). In his last publish book (*The Marxists*), Mills referred to himself as a “plain Marxist.”

While he was not a Soviet supporter, he found Cold War anti-communist hysteria to be indefensible. It was unproductive at best and a serious limitation on US foreign policy at worse. “Anti-anti-communism” was one of the most important perspectives the New Left adopted from Mills. Rather than finding communists subversive and dangerous, he found them ineffective and laughable (“Decline of the Left”). But in laughing at them, it made the New Left treat them as a comedy that could be pushed away rather than a tragedy that needed to be understood. While the CP was ultimately a failure, its members and former members had decades of experience in the class struggle fighting for radical issues like unionism, civil rights, and gender equality. Most importantly, it rejected mentors that could have explained the tragedy from their own perspective and could also have warned the New Left of dead-end roads they already traveled.

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4 Mills wrote “Included among plain Marxists, although by no means exhausting the list, are such varied thinkers as the later William Morris, Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, G.D.H. Cole, Georg Lukacs, Christopher Cauldwell, Jean-Paul Sartre, the later John Strachery, George Sorel, Edward Thompson, Lezlo Kolokowski, William A. Williams, Paul Sweezy, and Eric Fromm” (*The Marxists* 98). Mills also admits here that plain Marxism “...is, of course, the point of view taken in the present essay [referring to himself].”
Mills thought too many of his colleagues fell victim to a well-organized red scare—led by Senator McCarthy but aided and abided by many New Deal liberals—that defined patriotism in a ridged Cold War vocabulary. Anything that did not fit that narrow definition was marked as disloyalty, subversion, deviancy, or outright treason. Using the Smith Act, Sedition Act, Logan Act and other anti-“subversive” legislation, many radical leaders were put into lengthy trials, into deportation proceedings, or into hiding. In his rye tone, Mills argued, “The young complacents of America, the tired old fighters, the smug liberals, the shrill ladies of jingoist culture - they are all quite free. Nobody locks them up, nobody has to. They are locking themselves up - the shrill and angry ones in the totality of their own parochial anger, the smug and complacent ones in their own unimaginative ambitions.” The Cold War cultural climate frightened many progressive liberals and leftists so badly that many did not openly talk about anything that seemed radical.

Most importantly, with the growth of prosperity in the post-WWII period and the institutionalization and bureaucratization of the labor movement, Mills spent the rest of his life arguing, came containment, passivity, and a reluctance to rock the boat on political issues, let alone worker’s power or democratic socialism. Mills argues in 1958:

Now without the mandate of the slump, labour remains without political direction. Instead of economic and political struggles it has become deeply entangled in administrative routines with both corporation and state. One of its major functions, as a vested interest of the new society, is the regulation of such irregular tendencies as may occur among the rank and file. (“The Structure of Power in America” 37)

Union leaders signed long-term patterned contracts that traded worker’s democracy and shop floor control for higher wages and a rising standard of living. As discussed in chapter 3, Brecher
finds that “Ninety-two percent of contracts in 1945 provided automatic arbitration of grievances, and 90 percent of contracts pledged no strikes during the course of the agreement by 1947.” In exchange, the War Labor Board advocated for “maintenance of membership” agreements, meaning workers could not decertify the union or stop their membership during the term of the contract. Significant sections of the American working class became more economically comfortable than they had ever been before. “Wages and benefits grew dramatically after World War II; real wages for factory hands were 65 percent higher in real terms in the 1950s than they had been in the 1920s,” according to historians Michael Flamm and David Steigerwald. Mills believed that the increased shop floor militancy directly after the war would prepare workers for a revolutionary push for democratic socialism once the “next slump” materialized. For instance, in “Grassroots Union with Ideas,” Mills argues, “Victory through militant action feeds militancy.” He quoted a veteran autoworker giving his audience a sense of the feeling of growing militancy, “‘In six or seven years we licked the biggest corporations in the world,’ a delegate says. The auto workers are a union of men proudly amazed at themselves” (240). Surprisingly, when the economy kept growing,5 Mills’ predictions proved false, and he bitterly concluded that most working class Americans—but specifically labor leaders—fell under the “spell, as it were, of the corporate state.” This spell allowed them to go along with the building of what Mills called “business-labor cartels” instead of bottom-up institutions that fought for democratic socialism and self-determination (New Men of Power 230-231).

Above all, Mills, being an ultra-independently-minded American radical, could not stand the idea of “party discipline” or towing any kind of “party line.” Ralph Miliband, the well-known

5 The long boom in the post war era has confounded many researchers. Here are some interesting independent socialist studies that attempts to understand it. See Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order by Paul Sweezy and Paul A. Baran (1966). More recently, see The Economics of Global Turbulence Robert Brenner (1998).
British New Leftist, fellow sociologist, and friend of Mills said “politically and temperamentally, Mills was a determined non-joiner, with an intense dislike of togetherness, including political togetherness” (78). To his closest American friend, Harvey Swados, a lifelong socialist, he wrote in 1956 “deep down and systematically I’m a goddamned anarchist,” but he also said “let's not forget that there's more still useful in even the Sweezy kind of Marxism [Sweezy was an independent Marxist economist and publisher of Monthly Review] than in all the routineers of JS Mills put together” (Letters… 217-218). He was briefly attracted to the “third camp” Trotskyist movement (particularly Shachtman’s Workers Party), but he concluded that they were “bureaucrats without a bureaucracy” (qtd. in Lichtenstein “New Men of Power” 126). It should be noted that Mills’ anti-bureaucratic socialism was by no means unique. A small, but well-organized group of independent radicals, gathered around publications like Partisan Review, Commentary, Politics, Dissent, Liberation, and Monthly Review. However, as the Cold War intensified over time, several of the once-outspoken members of this circle moved to the right, either forming the backbone of the Kennedy-Johnson war machine or forming the vanguard of the emerging New Right.

In addition to Mills, a growing group of left academics in the 1950s and early 1960s began to conclude that post-WWII consumer capitalism had produced “cheerful robots” and “one dimensional,” “organization men” that hollowed out the rank-and-file militancy and grassroots democracy envisioned in the 1930s and in the populist movements in the 19th century. To see how profound this drift towards a pessimistic view of the seemingly endless post-war prosperity

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6 “Third Camp movement” was a title give to socialist movements in the United States, Latin America, and Eastern Europe that sought to find a separate space between the two super-powers at the time, Soviet Russia and its sphere of influence and Western capitalism and its sphere of influence. At times, it meant anti-Stalinism. At times, it meant Trotskyist. At times, it just meant unaffiliated to the Soviet influenced-Communist International. Shachtman’s Workers Party is an example of a third camp party in the United States, also International Socialists and Solidarity.
was for the Left, one need only look to the string of books published in the 1950s and early 60s that had a powerful influence on the emerging New Left: Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956) or Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964). Mills refers to the American working class as “cheerful robots” in numerous studies, but most especially in *White Collar, The Sociological Imagination*, and lectures given in Latin America and Britain collected in *The Politics of Truth*. Add to this list David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique* (1957) and the reader has a pretty good reading list of academic studies influential to the New Left detailing the alienation and disorientation of especially the middle class in Post-WWII America.

*The Search for a Replacement Proletariat*

Mills stands out as one of only a handful of independent radicals in the mid-century who refused to be absorbed into what he termed “the main drift” or the big corporate “setup.” This is why he was adopted as a role model for young people in the emerging New Left who did not want to succumb to conformity or apathy and who did not view the working class as their saviors.

More than anything, it was his “Letter to the New Left,” which fired the imagination of the young activist who formed SDS. In fact, an early collection of New Left writings from England was titled, *Out of Apathy* edited by E.P. Thompson (1959). It was the publication of this book that prompted Mills to pen his famous, “Letter to the New Left.” Stanley Aronowitz, SDS member and Mills biographer, argues it “was, perhaps, the single most influential document in the early history of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)” (“A Mills Revival?”). Mills argued in his letter “. . . what I do not quite understand about some New-Left writers is why they
cling so mightily to ‘the working class’ of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency,
or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands
against this expectation.” He continued, “Such a labour metaphysic, I think, is a legacy from
Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic.” Finally stating, “generally it would seem that
only at certain (earlier) stages of industrialisation, and in a political context of autocracy” would
create the historical condition for a labor metaphysic.

One of the most important ideas that made the New Left new was their nearly
unprecedented and self-confident reliance on a new agency, namely themselves. Mills stated:

It is with this problem of agency in mind that I have been studying, for several
years now, the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals — as a possible, immediate,
radical agency of change. For a long time, I was not much happier with this idea
than were many of you; but it turns out now, in the spring of 1960, that it maybe a
very relevant idea indeed.

Mills increasingly pessimistic view about the future locked him in a cage of despair that
foreclosed any possibility of a mass-based politics based upon Gramsci’s theory of a war of
position due to the corrupting influences of a mass society. The intellectual as agent of social
change is a shortcut out of the cage of despair. Rather than having their collective hands on the
levers of industrial production, the individual intellectual cultural worker has his or her hands on
the levels of the cultural apparatus, what Berkeley Chancellor Clark Kerr called in the 1960s, the
“knowledge factory.” In a widely distributed speech composed of material from his last
(unfinished) book, *The Cultural Apparatus*, Mills expounds:

> Intellectuals have created standards and pointed out goals. And then, always, they have looked around for other groups, other circles, other strata who might realize them. Is it not now time for us to try to realize them ourselves? It is easy for intellectuals to talk generously of the need for workers to control the factories in which they work. It is somewhat more difficult for them to begin to take over their own means of work. What we ought now to do is repossess our cultural apparatus, and use it for our own purposes (*Politics of Truth* 221).

He makes this clearer when he says intellectuals must, “offer alternative definitions of reality… If we as intellectuals do not define and re-define reality, who will?” It is their ability to disrupt the cultural apparatus with new messages or new symbols that mediate reality in a new radical and progressive way that gives intellectuals their power. In a “Note to the Reader” Mills admits:

> it has been said in criticism that I have been too much fascinated by power. This is not really true. It is intellect that I have been most fascinated by, and power primarily in connection with that. It is the role of ideas in politics and society, the power of the intellect, that most fascinates me as a social analyst and as a cultural critic (qtd. in Aronowitz 232).

While this sounds Gramscian, it is not.

While arguing that intellectuals are the key to organization and societal change seems elitist, it is important to realize that Gramsci had something different in mind than the

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7 This was a widely distributed speech in intellectual circles in the New Left. The new edited collection of Mills writings and letters states that the speech “was given in London on January 15, 1959, then broadcast on the BBC’s Third Programme on March 16, then published in the April 2 issue of its magazine, The Listener. Mills read “‘The Decline of the Left’” again on April 15, at Stanford University. Pacifica Radio broadcast it on May 13, and the magazine Contact, reprinted it in its 1959 issue. On August 7, 1961, WBAI Radio in New York City rebroadcast it at 9:00 a.m” (*Mills Politics…* 213)
commonplace definition of an intellectual: a pedantic, disinterested observer in an ivory tower.

He claims:

The methodological error with the widest diffusion seems to me to be that of seeking this essential characteristic in the intrinsic features of the intellectual activity and not instead in the system of relations in which it (or the grouping which embodies it) is found in the general complex of social relations. (Q4§49)

He states elsewhere in his letters, “I greatly amplify the idea of what an intellectual is and do not confine myself to the current notion that refers only to the pre-eminent intellectuals” (Gramsci 1993, Volume 2, p. 67). Furthermore, Gramsci argued against the common interpretation that defined intellectuals solely by their economic position or their class background—most intellectuals being slightly-to-moderately better off than the average proletariat. He also argued against intellectuals being narrowly viewed as comprising their own class: “the intellectual class.” Lastly, Gramsci famously argued that “although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist” in order to broadly expand the category. He argues:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. (SPN 9)

Gramsci argues, “all men are intellectuals, in that all have intellectual and rational faculties, but not all men have the social function of intellectuals” (SPN 9). Gramscian scholars Demirovic and Jehle argue:
He [Gramsci] comprehended them [intellectuals] not primarily from the circuit of capital as a professional group or according to the measure of their self-image as great intellectual heroes, but rather, under the aspect of their organising function in the ensemble of social relations and division of labour” (1268-9).

To Gramsci, intellectuals work as a mediating and integrating force among disparate sectors of society both at the level of civil society and political society with the goal of stitching together a cross class coalition around a critical philosophy. They use their skill as “permanent persuaders” with groups of people to gain their consent. Thomas expounds on Gramsci’s definition:

As the ‘non-commissioned officers’ of ‘fundamental’ social groups or classes, the intellectuals are thus mediating moments of transmission of a class’s hegemonic project from one ‘attribute’ of the integral state to another, the agents of the condensation of social forces into political power” (413).

Organic intellectuals on the right or the left do this by articulating a critical philosophy, meaning a philosophy that is counter-hegemonic, that embodies 1) an organic explanation of an average person’s lived experiences in a language he/she understands 2) important elements of “common sense” philosophy that has sedimented from the layering of past and present hegemonic projects 3) an understanding of how, who Gramsci refers to as “the simple people,” are included in the universalistic message of the new class project—meaning that intellectuals have the capacity to extend the dominant class’s struggle beyond a simple “economic-corporate” to a “purely political struggle” where they articulate a ‘universal’ project that the subaltern classes can see themselves as participants and benefactors (to a certain degree at least). The main purpose of articulating a critical philosophy is to inspire “the masses to concrete action, to the transformation of reality.” Gramsci made a key distinction between inspire and force. Organic intellectuals inspire. The
Catholic Church and other feudal institutions force. Voluntary consent, in his opinion, is more powerful than coercion forced on someone from above. Gramsci argued, “a philosophy is ‘historical’ in so far as it gets disseminated, in so far as it becomes the conception of reality of a social mass (with a “conformant ethic”) (Q10II, 31i). He further claims, “Ideologies, rather, are the ‘true’ philosophy since they are then those philosophical ‘popularizations’ that lead the masses to concrete action, to the transformation of reality” (Q10II, 3i). Gramsci thought without action (or what is referred to as praxis), critical philosophy means nothing. The leading class’s ability to see beyond their narrow selfish interests and inspire masses of people around a class project defines, for Gramsci, their ability to organize a successful path to hegemony.

Mills understood the importance of intellectuals, and he is certainly arguing for a new common sense, but rather than a mass-based collective politics where organic intellectuals (broadly defined and embedded in the working and subaltern classes) empower people to become popular leaders, Mills maintained a vanguardist politics. To his thinking, the masses are easily manipulated and basically helpless, so intellectual elites (narrowly defined) need to build the structural requirements for a sane society for the benefit of the masses. Gramsci used a historical metaphor of the Italian Renaissance, which he saw as an elitist, cosmopolitan movement, to critique this type of organizing and contrast it to the Reformation, which he saw as a popular movement among the masses.

*Mills Strategic Weakness Explained through Gramsci’s Renaissance and Reformation Distinction*

Gramsci’s renaissance metaphor is important because, I argue, Mills maintained what Gramsci labeled a renaissance-style politics. The Italian Renaissance, while being a noteworthy intellectual movement, was not able to forge a popular relationship to the masses, Gramsci argued. They maintained a highly segregated and “formal” relationship to the masses similar to a
priesthood believing wholly in their intellectual superiority over the masses. They were not interested in being popular educators, beyond the transmission of a dogmatic ideology, and instead retreated into an insular caste believing they possessed knowledge that the masses did not and could not possess. This was one of the main criticisms Gramsci had of the Italian traditional intellectual, Benedetto Croce:

He has not gone ‘to the people,’ he has not become a ‘national’ element . . . because he has not been able to create a group of disciples who could have made his philosophy ‘popular,’ so that it could become an educational factor even in the elementary schools (and thus an educational factor for the ordinary worker and peasant, in other words, for the common man) [sic] (Q7§1: 852).

Gramscian scholar, Peter Thomas argues, “they [renaissance intellectuals] were structurally incapable of making the transition from knowledge [sapere] to comprehension [comprendere] to feeling [sentire], and vice versa” (424). Gramsci placed deep importance on the level of feeling—a state of the mass absorption of an ideology where feeling crosses over to the level of common sense.

It is here that Gramsci made a lasting contribution to the study of ideology; he focused on the material weight of ideology in the class struggle and the everyday lives and actions of people (Eagleton Ideology... 112-123). How do people come to believe in an idea so deeply, at the level of both thought and feeling, that they are willing to fight for it in a prolonged class struggle? It is here you see both Gramsci embrace and criticize of Croce. One of the ways he reformulated Second International Marxism was to synthesize it with Croce idealism. Gramsci thought both idealism and Marxism were historicist philosophies that could be integrated (Martin 80-81). Gramsci’s model for Renassance-style politics was the Risorgimento in Italy (Gramsci SPN 44-
A key element of his historical analysis was his study of the persistent cosmopolitanism of Italian intellectuals that led to the failure of building a popular unity among a nationwide cross-class coalition. A parallel argument could be made about Mills in the 1950s and the New Left in the 1960s.

Mills' analysis of a bureaucratic mass liberal society that overwhelms and dominates the average working individual to such a degree that resistance is almost futile contains several problems that can be evaluated by Gramsci’s popular unity criteria. The first problem lies in the group of people he identifies as having the agency to resist the totalitarian direction of the New Deal. It is Mills’ conclusion that the, “structure of modern [twentieth century] society, in particular its bureaucratic and communication systems, virtually expropriates from all but a small intellectual elite the capacity for individual freedom in any adequate psychological meaning of the term” (My emphasis, *Power Elite* 195). Mills’ notion that a “small intellectual elite” are the only group who can understand encroaching totalitarianism and have the “capacity for individual freedom” is reminiscent of Gramsci’s critique of the culture of Renaissance intellectuals. In fact, Mills argues, “The values involved in the cultural problem of freedom and individuality are conveniently embodied in all that is suggested by the ideal of The Renaissance Man. The threat to that ideal is the ascendancy among us of The Cheerful Robot…” (Mills *The Politics of Truth* 201). Mills argues again very specifically, “The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely lively things” (My emphasis, *The Politics of Truth* 19). It is hard to overstate how influential Mills’ ideas were to the emerging generation of New Leftists. Mills’ promotion of a “small intellectual elite” and his demotion of the “labor metaphysic” because the majority of working people were “cheerful robots,” (too bought off by
mass consumer society to provide the necessary agency to lead a revolution) can be found at the foundation of the New Left’s strategy (see Ch 6-7).

The contrast to the Renaissance style of politics followed by the New Left is what Gramsci called a Reformation-style politics. The Reformation, while Gramsci admits was an inferior intellectual movement, was nonetheless a more popular movement based in a more understandable spirituality and morality for the masses. It connected to the lived experiences of ordinary people. His ultimate model of Reformation-style politics was the French Revolution. Gramsci wrote, “the Reformation is to the Renaissance as the French Revolution is to the Risorgimento” (Q§340). He argued the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie (still a revolutionary anti-feudalist force during the French revolution) were able to fuse their economic-corporate interests with a land reform program that absorbed the peasant class thus moving to a higher level of universal political struggle. Jacobinism, like the Reformation, was a mass political movement that sought to unify the various classes through political struggle with a universalistic campaign. It sought to “awaken and mobilize popular energies through a set of absolute representations of unity and equality which embraces the nation as a whole. . .” (Frosini 65).

For Gramsci, Machiavelli was a forerunner in understanding the political importance of a national-collective will. Gramsci understood, “the necessity of closely linking power to the popular masses within the framework of a nationalization process, but also of uniting horizontally the popular masses themselves within a homogeneous cultural space, in order to give the state a solid and enduring basis for consent” (Frosini 66). Gramsci argued that Marxism was a “new Reformation” and its model was “Reformation + French Revolution, universality + politics” (Q3§45). Therefore, he looked for a synthesis between the popular struggle unified
around a universalistic campaign like the Reformation and political struggle like the French Revolution (Frosini 60-68). The left, in the United States, has rarely been able to reach a mass audience through the effective deployment of Reformation-style politics. It is much easier to examine the New Right during the post-1960s for the development of this type of politics, which will be addressed in chapter 8.

Mills’ dismissive attitude towards the “cheerful robot” working class, a population that made up a large faction of the New Deal coalition and a large percentage of the America population in general, was a major theoretical and political weakness—particularly at a time when working people were experiencing their own frustration with the New Deal and their own feelings of unsatisfied hopes. That the New Left adopted Mills’ perspectives on the working class represents one of the largest strategic failures of the 1960s and reveals one of the lasting impacts on left thinking in the second half of the 20th century. The New Right was all too happy to exploit this weakness with their New Majority strategy (Cowie *Stayin’ Alive…*; Mason).

Mills’ ongoing engagement with the question of agency shows three distinct stages: 1) the guarded pro-labor writings during his early career at Columbia, 2) the more skeptical Power Elite studies of bureaucracy and mass society, 3) his later rejection of the labor metaphysic for new agent: the charismatic intellectual revolutionary (be it Third World or campus-based radical). The arch of Mills’ intellectual career reveals a pattern that can be used to understand SDS engagement with the labor question. We now turn to that analysis.
CHAPTER VI. FOLLOWING MILLS: SDS SEARCH FOR A NEW PROLETARIAT

While riding on a train goin’ west
I fell asleep for to take my rest
I dreamed a dream that made me sad
Concerning myself and the first few friends I had
With half-damp eyes I stared to the room
Where my friends and I spent many an afternoon
Where we together weathered many a storm
Laughin’ and singin’ till the early hours of the morn
By the old wooden stove where our hats was hung
Our words were told, our songs were sung
Where we longed for nothin’ and were quite satisfied
Talkin’ and a-jokin’ about the world outside
With haunted hearts through the heat and cold
We never thought we could ever get old
We thought we could sit forever in fun
But our chances really was a million to one
As easy it was to tell black from white
It was all that easy to tell wrong from right
And our choices were few and the thought never hit
That the one road we traveled would ever shatter and split
How many a year has passed and gone
And many a gamble has been lost and won
And many a road taken by many a friend
And each one I’ve never seen again
I wish, I wish, I wish in vain
That we could sit simply in that room again
Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat
I’d give it all gladly if our lives could be like that

--Bob Dylan “Bob Dylan’s Dream”¹

Reflecting, ten years later, on a heated debate between himself and Tom Hayden during his visit to the Port Huron conference in 1962, Michael Harrington asked an important question: “if one dismissed the entire American labor movement and the liberal middle class, what hope was there of ever building a majority coalition that could transform the most powerful and imperial capitalist power in human history?” (Fragments of a Century 146). Harrington’s question uncovers a critical blind spot inside of SDS’s realignment strategy that existed from the very beginning of the organization. If SDS members hoped to realign the Democratic Party and

¹ Played by Tom Hayden before his Keynote Address in Ann Arbor Michigan Nov 1, 2012 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Port Huron Statement.
organized labor using a value-based politics, who was going to be the agent for realignment if they dismissed a large percentage of the constituency within the groups they wanted to realign? As Gitlin pointedly asked in 1987 “who was going to do the realigning?” (The Sixties … 114). The solution to the contradiction between rejecting the majority of the New Deal coalition as hopeless and pinning your political strategy to realigning that same coalition came to SDS slowly over the course 1963. But once it did, it had the force of gospel that converted disenchanted middle class students into ghetto missionaries, nominated the interracial poor and lumpenproletariat as the new agent of social change, and justified this transformation by arguing poor people were not (and some thought could not be) bought off by an immoral corporate consumerism in collusion with an administrative Cold War liberalism that had corrupted the middle and working class in postwar America. To bring their new strategy into practice, SDS formed the Economic Research Action Project (ERAP), and setup 10 organizations throughout low income northern urban areas. Like American radicals in the 19th century, SDS was out organized by a new cadre of laissez faire liberals emerging out of the New Right social movement. SDS’s rejection of the labor metaphysic proved to be a tragic strategic failure that kept the working class—especially the white working class—without radical leadership and trapped in a fragmented subaltern consciousness—even if relatively materially privileged—and more susceptible to the New Right’s appeals.

‘Labor Continues to be the Most Liberal -- and Most Frustrated -- Institution in Mainstream America’

While several scholars have commented on the intense political debate and acrimonious aftermath of the 1962 Port Huron Statement’s (PHS) position against the Cold War consensus of anti-communism (Breines Community… 13; Gitlin The Sixties …121), few scholars have commended on the larger debate between Michael Harrington and Tom Hayden at the drafting
convention over the role of organized labor and the left elements of the middle class. While it does not appear related on the surface, part of the reason SDS took the “anti-anti-communism” position was to break the stranglehold the Cold War had upon critical thought and activism in the post-war period (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds. 22-28). Most labor leaders in the country at the time were inextricably locked in the Cold War stranglehold (Lichtenstein Walter Reuther... 370-420; Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds. Port Huron...22-28). After reading the draft of the PHS, Michael Harrington, long-time Socialist Party activist, leader of the League of Industrial Democracy, and mentor to Tom Hayden, not only thought it was soft on communism (as is widely reported), but he also believed it was too hard on organized labor and what he termed leftwing liberals. Before Port Huron, Hayden and Harrington had debated each other often on friendly terms. They knew each other from the National Student Association. Harrington had even tried to recruit him to the Socialist Party. In an article he wrote for Mademoiselle, Hayden described Harrington as “one of three people over thirty whom his generation trusted” (Aug 1961). The two others were C. Wright Mills and Norman Thomas. Hayden had also invited him to his wedding a year before the Port Huron convention (Harrington Fragments... 142).

However, feelings changed during the convention. Hayden describes their debate at Port Huron in his memoir, “The tension exploded on the first evening in an impromptu debate that began with some critical remarks by Harrington and lasted into the night” (Reunion 90). While Hayden acknowledges that Harrington was upset about the lack of anti-communism, he underscores “The section on organized labor was even more upsetting to Harrington, Horowitz, and Don Slaiman [representatives of LID and the AFL-CIO]” (My emphasis Reunion 89; Gitlin The Sixties ... 114). Interestingly, despite the fact that most scholars focus almost exclusively on the inter-generational fight over the interpretation of communism and anti-communism, Hayden
argues, “Behind the argument over communism, Harrington and Slaiman were much too invested in defending the American labor movement. They were true believers in the ‘labor metaphysic’ Mills had described” (90). This reveals an under-explored theme in SDS history that contains important lessons for answering why SDS failed to realign the New Deal coalition.

**SDS’s Search for a New Agency**

Because SDS started as an insurgent movement within the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID, 1959-1965), it is useful to look at how differently both organizations viewed the working class. These differences help paint a clear picture of how far the radical student movement in the 1960s had drifted away from the over one hundred-year history of the socialist-inspired left’s focus on organizing the working class. SLID—the student wing of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) argued forcefully for an alliance of students, workers, and farmers. In 1935, LID argued, “A strong dash of idealism will not be enough to stop the juggernaut of fascism, once it gets under way. Only a student movement that is rooted deep in the struggles of labor and the farmer for liberation that has a socialist understanding of international conflicts is worth promoting” (“Handbook …” 11-12). And again they drive home the point, “Those students who desire social change of a revolutionary character must throw in their lot with the working class—with labor and farmers. Only if they do, will they be able to participate in the building of the new social order which they seek” (14). Coming out of the New York socialist-led needle trade unions, LID’s supportive vision of a worker-based revolutionary movement is not surprising. They were part of what historian Jeffery Coker calls the “consensus era for the left” that ended in the post WWII period. “Never before and never again would the left enjoy such universal agreement about the role organized labor could play in reforming society” (9). Following a similar trajectory as Mills, SDS broke from this consensus.
While it is true that much of the original funding for SDS came from supportive social democratic sections of the labor movement—as historian Peter Levy’s study accurately details (13-20; see Introduction), it is easy to make too much of these facts. SDS did take their money and support, and did “rejoice” after having received the money, but they were always interested in maintaining their own independence. They never viewed themselves as an auxiliary committee of organized labor the way SLID viewed themselves at times. In contrast, Tom Kahn, a leader of SLID at the time of SDS’s emergence, later became president of LID when SDS broke off relations with SLID. He ended his career as the assistant to the president of the AFL-CIO under both George Meany and Lane Kirkland’s terms (See Hayden’s critical summary of LID and the Socialist Party’s collaboration with the AFL-CIO in *Reunion* 86-92).

The difference between the public letters from SDS leaders to union leaders and the internal private memos circulated among only SDS members reveals two different interpretations of what support for labor meant to SDS. While it is not conclusive, one interpretation is that SDS told the union leaders what they wanted to hear in order to build initial support for their movement and receive critical startup funds. For example, when applying for funding for their early projects, Hayden told Reuther about “The need for creating different student attitudes towards labor and the American economy is imperative.” He continued, “[The present] mood [is] disturbing, to those of us who believe that the labor movement remains the critical agency in the future advancement of democratic and egalitarian solutions to our economic troubles” (qtd. in Levy 24). While this sounds like a ringing endorsement for organized labor, when compared to the private memos Hayden circulated among SDS members while drafting the PHS (ironically partly funded by the UAW), he wrote: “Organized labor, the working class ect., is just not the missionary force we can count on; again, labor is more a group we do things for than a group
whose banner we rally ‘round” (Original emphasis, “re: manifesto” Series 1, No 6). This private communication reveals a not so ringing endorsement of organized labor.

LID leader, Harrington, understood this dichotomy about SDS well. He wrote in a reflective essay in 1973: “They thought that Walter Reuther should give them UAW money and accepted it gladly when he did; but they also regarded Reuther as an establishmentarian trade unionist who had sold out the rank and file” (Fragments of a Century 147). While Reuther held a complex view of civil rights and student organizing that many scholars still vigorously debate, few disagree that he used the money the UAW donated to SDS, Congress of Racial Equality, and Council of Federated Organizations (a coalition of civil rights groups organized around voter registration) as a means to control their agenda. His paternalistic leadership was especially put on display during the 1963 March on Washington, when he censored John Lewis’s speech. Lewis was the youngest speaker and a representative of SNCC. Moreover, during the 1964 Democratic Convention, Reuther restricted labor leaders and supportive Democrats from trying to have the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party seated (See Lichtenstein Walter Reuther…370-420).

The New Left started their movement with a critical assessment of their political forbearers. As stated in chapter 3, SDS president Todd Gitlin argued in his 1987 memoir that the New Deal generation was comprised of “fathers [sic] who lost their political children” and “fail[ed] to pass on its mission to its young” (60). Gitlin was referring to the New Deal establishment, but this is not only true of New Deal liberals, who did not pass along their zeal for top-down administrative governmental reform, but also social democratic labor leaders, who did not pass along their zeal for administrative collective bargaining, and finally, it is true of communist leaders, who did not pass along their penchant for disguising their radical politics in a

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2 See the exchanges between Herbert Hill and Nelson Lichtenstein in the journal New Politics throughout 1999.
vague progressive Americanism in a silent partner relationship with New Deal liberalism (see chapter 3). To SDS’s way of thinking, a new generation, living in new times and new conditions required a new agent for a New Left. Hayden argued “Everything for us had to be new. We thought our vision lay in the tradition of the left, but that they had to be reconstructed all over again, in our time and place” (qtd. in Miller 147). This reconstruction project required a new agent of change.

In his 1973 memoir, Michael Harrington claimed “The history of SDS . . . is the story of a search for a new proletariat” (Fragments... 152). This search started deliberately in the early decade, then defiantly by the middle, and finally, when all of their projects failed to realign liberalism, their search turned to desperation and implosion by the late decade. Instead of seeing the early decade as the “golden age” that was disrupted by rogue revolutionaries and Black Power militants in the later decade, I argue ineffective strategies implemented in the early years created the frustration that led to an unstable radicalization. While there are many avenues to explore, I will focus on how their elevation of a values-based morality, over political theory, led them to overly-critical interpretations of the white middle class and the prosperous working class (see chapter 5). Because they saw this population as sold out to “the system,” they sought not only escape from the suburbs but—like Mills—a romantic idealization of people and places they deemed existed outside of the grasp of corporate America or administrative liberalism. Like Kerouac, this was often assorted lumpenproletarians like the long-term unemployed, welfare mothers, and other ghetto residents.

Dropping out of suburban life, proved to be highly effective for individual SDSers to provide them with a sense of authenticity and self-actualization, but highly ineffective as a social movement strategy. First, most SDSers had no organic connection whatsoever with the
lumpenproletariat, and their organizing efforts, while highly passionate, were episodic at best and deemed by 1966 an inspirational failure by most participants. Second, the poor did not turn out to be the uncorrupted/incorruptible revolutionary force that SDS romantically theorized. Third, by leaving the suburbs, they left their own communities unorganized and open for recruitment to the New Right. Lastly, by not organizing the white middle class and prosperous working class, they disregarded a critical task that Black Power activists asked of them as an act of strategic solidarity because they, as black people living in segregated America, had limited-to-no access to white prosperous working class communities.

In order to study the development and decline of SDS’s search for a new proletariat, I will examine three periods. The first period will be 1960-1963, where SDS attempted a tentative and cautious engagement with organized labor. The second period will be 1963-1965 where they establish Education Research and Action Project (ERAP) and put it into practice. Lastly, the third period from 1966-1970 will focus on the aftermath of ERAP’s failure and decline. In each of these periods, I will analyze the factional debates that informed SDS’s decision making process. These underexplored debates are rarely studied and offer a surprising view of the development, trajectory, and decline of SDS. They also over a surprising view of roads available but not taken by the early SDS.

**First Period 1960-1963: Creative Engagement with Labor Leaders Tempered With Measured Skepticism**

The successes of the last generation perhaps have braked, rather than accelerated labor’s zeal for change. Even the House of Labor has bay windows: not only is this true of the labor elites, but as well of some of the rank-and-file. (PHS)

While SDS did eventually almost totally “reject the labor metaphysic” towards the end of the decade, as their mentor C. Wright Mills mentor advised them in his “Letter to the New Left,” they did not start from that position (See chapter 5). Just like Mills’ early pro-labor period in the
immediate aftermath of WWII, SDS started from a guardedly optimistic position on the labor question. In fact, the PHS argues “Historically, there can be no doubt as to its [the union movements] worth in American politics -- what progress there has been in meeting human needs in this century rests greatly with the labor movement” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 253). Like Mills, they, at first, had a nostalgic view of reform liberalism informed by their civic republican ideals inherited from Dewey. Like him, they believed the Democratic Party could be saved from the main drift towards corporatism. The early vision expressed both in Port Huron Statement (PHS 1962) and SDS’s revised and greatly condensed publication “American and the New Era” (ANE 1963) was “to galvanize the quiescent populists in the ranks of labor and liberalism.” In a section in ANE titled “The Decay of Liberal Militancy” they write:

Unable to disassociate themselves from the errors or the immoralities of Democratic officeholders, the major liberal organizations—and even more so, their public spokesmen—have abandoned the populist and progressive strands of their tradition; strands which dictated a positive, change-orientated political role with militant rhetoric” (13).

Their goal was to revive this tradition. ANE goes on to argue:

…the populist impulse in labor and organizations of liberalism can be reinforced by the emergence of new popular movements... It ... seems likely that popular upsurge in many communities ... could provide a stimulus which would move labor to become an important center of power and leadership ... A democratic insurgency could also provide for many middle class people a revived and inspiring vision of a humane society order -- a vision that might stir them out of privatism.
Through “the creation of a decentralized, democratic, interracial” coalition of poor people, civil rights workers, social democratic unions (like the UAW and the Packinghouse Workers), and progressive students, they were going “to goose” liberalism and labor out of its “current corruption” and return it back to its turn-of-the-century “reformist roots” (Rothstein “ERAP: Evolution…” 1).

This was the grand project of realignment that focused on ejecting the Southern Dixiecrats and other openly racist, militarist, and corporatist forces from the New Deal coalition. SDS’s thoughts about realignment were influenced by their interaction with the Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Gitlin 147; Hayden Inspiring… 7-10). SNCC organizer, Bob Moses summarized the realignment plan well “Only when metal has been brought to white heat can it be shaped and molded. This is what we intend to do to the South and the country, bring them to white heat and then remold them” (qtd. in Gitlin The Sixties…146). Through their superior morality and intellectual skills—the fusion of Dewey and Mills’ pragmatism and civic republicanism, SDS would on one hand, win over politicians and labor leaders who were “below the middle levels of leadership”3 and who were on the fence or uncritically floating along in the main drift since the 1950s and had functionally abandoned the civic republicanism of the 19th century (Rothstein “ERAP… 6). On the other hand, they would break through “the crust of apathy” surrounding middle class students by inviting them to live a more authentic life of political engagement and direct action building on Camus’s concept of the “genuine rebellion.”4

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3 Notice the use of Mills’ terminology and analysis.
4 Camus’s ideas particularly affected Hayden See Hayden Reunion. For an extended discussion of SDS’s use of existentialism, see Rossinow.
Early on, SDS had limited but significant success building friendly relationships with the social democratic wing of organized labor (Levey; Lichtenstein in Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds). Because SDS was founded initially at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, it was almost a foregone conclusion that some of their members were involved in organized labor (because of the nearby auto industry in Detroit). Al Haber’s father was a University of Michigan economist and labor mediator with deep connections to the UAW, the Michigan Democratic Party, and Jewish labor organizations. Sharon Jeffery and Paul Bluestone, among Haber’s first recruits, both came from staunch UAW families. Their parents were in the leadership of the union. Irving Bluestone was the administrative assistant to UAW president Walter Reuther himself, and later in the 1970s vice-president of the union. Millie Jeffery was the union’s civil rights leader and was in Reuther’s inner circle of advisors. She was the first woman to be a department head in the union (Levy 11-12). Beyond connections to organized labor, SDS’s founding members came from families deeply connected to New Deal liberalism. Giltin reports:

The son of an economist who helped write the Social Security Act founded Students for a Democratic Society. The son of another liberal economist, a member of Harry S. Truman's Council of Economic Advisers, coordinated SDS's community-organizing projects, then helped organize the demonstrations that disrupted the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. My own parents, high school teachers and not activists, were committed New Dealers of the Roosevelt-Truman-Stevenson stripe; my father hung pictures of Lincoln and FDR on his office wall. (The Sixties…64)

This intensive family background in liberal politics provide an interesting starting point for their critique of liberalism.
Indeed, the little known backstory of SDS was that its initial projects were funded by the social democratic wing of the labor movement—particularly those unions who were involved in the civil rights movement (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 95-108). In fact, the UAW donated their summer retreat in Port Huron, Michigan (thanks to the lobbying of Millie Jeffery) for SDS’s convention where the founding SDS members finished drafting the “Port Huron Statement” (Miller Chapter 9). Interestingly, the name of one of the most important left documents in the 1960s was underwritten with organized labor’s own donations. Furthermore, the printing costs of distributing the first printing of 20,000 copies of the Port Huron Statement (a hefty 52-page single-spaced document) was donated by the Packinghouse Workers Union (Levy 14). Beyond one-time donations, the UAW gave ongoing financial support for the Economic Research and Action Project until 1964 with modest but substantial donations. In return, SDS members maintained a civil correspondence with several labor officials including Walter Reuther. They also periodically walked picket lines with striking workers and encouraged campus workers to unionize, but they often felt like a fish out of water. In fact, their newsletter gave tips on how to fit in at a trade union meeting. One SDS organizer advised in the SDS Bulletin “Never go to a trade union meeting with a pack of Camels in your pocket. They are scab cigarettes, and the whole affair can be grizzly” (Levy 33).

In addition to organized labor, SDS had access to certain sections of the Kennedy administration’s New Frontier program and to the Johnson Administration’s Great Society

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5 That being said, if one compares the money they were spending on promoting anti-communist unions abroad, then the money they were spending on civil rights and SDS projects was minimal. See Lichtenstein Walter…; Boyle.
program. Through critical yet mildly sympathetic liberal intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger Jr., SDS was allowed access to the Kennedy and Johnson Whitehouse. Schlesinger gave a copy of the PHS to Kennedy telling him to read it (Kazin “The Port Huron Statement at Fifty”). In addition, the Peace Corps, the creation of which was announced by JFK at the University of Michigan in the same Student Union that the PHS was drafted, sought SDS’s advice in creating its programs (Miller 251). SDS members also taught for the VISTA program (Rothstein “ERAP: Evolution…” 17). Lastly, Johnson’s War on Poverty created several community based programs that sought “the maximum feasible participation of the poor” that SDS organizers influenced this policy through direct action, particularly in Newark and Cleveland (Miller 191-217).

However, just like Mills, even in their more labor-friendly beginnings, the AFL-CIO unions were still, in SDS’s opinion, part of a bloated New Deal-Cold War “establishment” that only had a vague “potential” to be “revitalized” by a coalition of civil rights, students, and peace movements away from its “top down” “bureaucratic” “drift.” From the very beginning, SDS clearly stated in the PHS:

Today labor remains the most liberal "mainstream" institution -- but often its liberalism represents vestigial commitments self-interestedness, unradicalism. In some measure labor has succumbed to institutionalization, its social idealism

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6 The phrase New Frontier refers to Kennedy’s 1960 acceptance speech where he said “We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier — the frontier of the 1960s, the frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, the frontier of unfilled hopes and unfilled threats. ... Beyond that frontier are uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered problems of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.” The New Frontier became the title of the Kennedy administrations brand of liberalism. It modeled itself on the later New Deal in that it combine welfare and labor protections with Cold War foreign policy and a particular disregard of issues associated with race and civil rights. In their documents PHS and ANE, SDS aimed a vast majority of its early criticism at the limitations of the New Frontier. Both Kennedy and Johnson’s programs represent the last administrations organized along the model of the New Deal (Milkis and Mileur). While Nixon and Carter’s administrations continued certain New Deal programs, the tide had clearly turned by 1972 (Stein).
waning under the tendencies of bureaucracy, materialism, business ethics. (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 253)

Echoing Mills’ mass society analysis, they argued most union workers are “lulled to comfort by the accessibility of luxury and the opportunity of long-term contracts.” They concluded, “As a political force, labor generally has been unsuccessful in the postwar period of prosperity” (253).

Al Haber, writing in the most labor-friendly pamphlet SDS ever distributed in its early years, still affirmed SDS’s basic skepticism of labor:

It appears not as an opposition group but as a reform club within the ‘establishment.’ It does not call for militant rank and file action, it does not basically challenge the structure of the Democratic Party, it does not challenge the economic privilege of corporate elites. Even more disheartening to students, its failure to banish discrimination from within its own house making it a party to the racism that pervades almost every institution of American life. And after surrendering its possibility of independent social power in favor of the more respectable role of lobby and critic, it appears to acquiesce as well before the icon of bipartisan unity, in a tacit, if not active, support of the Cold War. (“Students and Labor”)

Haber, one of the most optimistic SDS leaders, paints a rather pessimistic picture. The early leadership still maintains this pessimistic picture more than 50 years later. Writing in 2015, Hayden glowingly agrees with Mills’ assessment of the Cuban Revolution. Mills asserts the Cuban Revolution “…is not a revolution made by labor unions or wage workers in the cities, or labor parties, or by anything like that.” After quoting Mills, Hayden then argues, “The SDS document [PHS] said the same thing…” (Hayden *Listen Yankee* … 40). As Haber and Hayden’s
analysis states, organized labor was: reformist, not radical; agents of the status quo, not militant
direct action; enforcers of bureaucracy, not democracy; conformists to the Democratic Party and
corporate elites, not grassroots coalitions expanding poor and working people’s access to
decision making; conciliatory to racism, not civil rights leaders; subservient to the Cold War, not
independent-minded activists. In other words, organized labor represented every point of
criticism that animated the New Left in the post-WWII era.

Rebels in Search of a Cause

Like many alienated middle class youth, they wanted to break away from their class
origins and seek a more authentic life far from the stagnant middle class life they knew. They
wanted to escape the suburbs but also “to escape a university system which they saw ever more
clearly as an unyielding and uncaring bureaucracy which turned them into holes on the edge of
an IBM card” (qtd. in Sale 64). In an interview, Hayden reflected that their protest went beyond
issues like civil rights:

But there was something else: the middle-class emptiness of alienation that people
talk about, and then suddenly confronting commitment. The whole emotion of
defining not only yourself, but also your life by risking your life, and testing
whether you were willing to die for your beliefs, was the powerful motive, I
believe. (qtd. in Miller 59).

While it is not directly equivalent, Hayden’s statement about the self-awareness one receives by
“risking your life” and being “willing to die for your beliefs” does provide a view that the end-
of-the-decade militancy and willingness to take extreme actions was prevalent early on as well.
While being prepared to die for your cause is not the same as the Weathermen blowing up
buildings, the same logic of propaganda of the deed is operating. This sentiment also connects to
a popular pamphlet Hayden wrote in 1964 “Liberal Analysis and Federal Power” when he argued against gradualism by saying “it will take extremism to create gradualism in the south . . .”. In short, they wanted to live more authentic lives. They found that life by abandoning the campuses and suburbs and working among ghetto residents who they believed were not “sold out” to “the system.”

SDS could dismiss New Frontier Democrats, trade unionists, Old Left radicals, and older civil rights leaders because they, themselves, would become the new agency of social change. However, they quickly realized that students alone would not be a sufficient agency. Paul Potter, SDS president 64-65, gave a talk in 1963 (when he was vice-president) at Harvard titled “The Intellectual as Agent of Social Change” which was later turned into a SDS pamphlet. His talk provides an interesting look at the evolution of SDS’s perspective about students and the poor as they were forming their ERAP strategy. After detailing how intellectuals had been trapped “serving the establishment” in a university system that since the WWII had been “well integrated into the power structure,” he goes on to talk about the emergence of the “new intellectual” who has found a home outside of the university “by dropping out of the system.” No longer does he/she think power comes through association with the power elite, the new intellectual wants to build power from the bottom up. “. . .power is something that can be created, that it can be generated at the base of the social structure; and the intellectual can obtain power by involving himself in the emerging centers of power in society: to civil rights movement, the peace movement, the discussion of economic issues.” According to my research, this pamphlet is the first use during the 1960s of the phrase “dropping out of the system” by an SDS member (a phrase typically attributed to counter-cultural guru Timothy Leary during the 1968 summer of
love). This shows the wide impact SDS had on not only political movements but also on the cultural and ethos of the 1960s.

If the working class could no longer be trusted because it fell under the spell of mass society, it would have to be people who had no stake in the system, and who were not bought off by the pleasures of capitalism (Hayden “Politics of the Movement”). Historian Kirpatrick Sale described their enthusiasm “as a psychic drive to identify with someone else who is, as you wish to be, outside of the system, is by circumstance nontechnical, nonmoneyed, nonmanipulative, alienated and powerless” (66). Michael Harrington’s book *The Other America*, published in 1962, was the first scholarly book to gain a popular audience that uncovered the issue of continuing extreme poverty amidst prosperity in the postwar period in a powerful and moral appeal. Along with Harrington’s study, Beat Generation writers like Jack Kerouac and folk musicians like Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger helped to romanticize poor people in the popular imagination of the New Left and counter-culture. The poor, in coalition with radical students, would serve as the replacement proletariat the New Left had been searching for since Mills’ “Letter to the New Left.”

Using a modification of the traditional civic republican framework, SDS pointed its criticism at the unvirtuous bad actors at the top—the power elite—and instead of thinking the people on the bottom were manipulated by being subservient to the people at the top, they thought the people in the middle were subservient due to the fact that they were comfortable. Affluence had made them subservient and unvirtuous. While this is a modification to civic republicanism, it is by no means a repudiation. It maintains the same dominant-subservient dichotomy and the same focus on protection of virtue.
Contrary to the popular story of SDS of coalitional harmony, there were always clear opposing factions with opposing strategic plans from the beginning. An investigation of those debates, provides a surprising history of roads not taken.

Second Period 1963-1965: The Politics of Authenticity or the Politics of a War of Position?

… I wish to descend in the social scale.
  High society is low society
  I am a social climber
  climbing downward
  And the descent is difficult …
“Junkman's Obbligato” - Lawrence Ferlinghetti 1958

This section will analyze the debates leading up to SDS’s decision to form their Education Research and Action Project (ERAP) “ghetto organizing projects.” The debates moved from the south during 1963’s freedom summer to the north during the several conferences in late 1963 to the pages of their internal organizing publication SDS Bulletin. These debates highlight an important division between those SDSers who wanted to engage in a politics of self-discovery and authenticity or a war of position strategy.

‘Go Organize White Communities in the North’

SDSers found organizing in the Southern student civil rights movement (1960-1963) a deeply rewarding experience that provided them with the escape from the suburbs and feelings of authenticity and agency they sought (Hayden “Revolution in Mississippi”). Rather than a clearly articulated theoretical foundation, Hayden and other SDS organizers were animated more by strong feelings. Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale argues was “…trying to build coalitions based in shared emotions—alienation from white middle-class suburban America and love for rebels and the margins—rather than shared class positions and political ideology. Often, in fact, they assumed shared emotions meant shared interests” (Hale 164). While organizing in the south
proved deeply inspiring for SDS members, it did not prove entirely popular nor strategically wise to a growing faction of young black southern organizers—especially SNCC organizer Stokley Carmichael.

SNCC leaders grew increasingly frustrated with liberal north students traveling south with a missionary attitude of rescuing the poor black people while leaving their own white northern communities unorganized. While this growing resentment famously came to a head when SNCC ousted white northern activists from its organization, it had been building for a long time (Sale 102). As early as 1963, Stokley Carmichael asked Tom Hayden at the National Student Association conference to rethink their strategy of sending northern white organizers south (Sale 67). By the time, LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) said at the 1966 Atlanta Black Power Conference:

Don’t tell us [black people] about how the world is being run and misrun … we know. If you have something to say, tell it to your white brothers. Set up Freedom Schools for the white liberals and for the white racists; talk to the lily-white trade unionists and the politicians who are drafting colored boys to die in Viet Nam for the democracy they don’t have here. (qtd. in Barber 26)

that sentiment had already become a common sense in the growing Black Power movement (Forman 452).

ERAP was developed by SDS partly in reaction to Carmichael and other SNCC leaders’ admonitions for white middle class organizers to leave black communities in the south and “go organize white communities” in the north. The ERAP strategy grew out of a successful student and community collaborative organizing campaign in Chester, Pennsylvania (with Swarthmore students). The Chester organizing was reported in two influential SDS documents “An Interracial
Movement of the Poor” and “Chester, PA: A Case Study In Community Organization.” In his 1988 memoir, Hayden also admits that he was inspired by Malcolm X’s organizing in northern ghettos. He wrote that he wanted to prove that “at least some whites were not ‘devils’” (*Reunion* 126). The southern black student movement came to a strategic conclusion that in order to head off the white backlash in the north, white middle class organizers needed to organize white allies into “civilizing committees” (Rothstein “ERAP: Evolution…” 9). Black student leaders in SNCC were responding to a real organizing dilemma. They could not go to white suburbs and white trade unions and effectively organize. The northern middle class students could (Barber 18-19).

In response to SNCC leaders, Hayden began to develop the outline of a new strategy in his “President Report” in the March-April 1963 issue of the *SDS Bulletin*. This report led to a discussion at the upcoming SDS Pine Hill conference. He asked, can we create genuinely independent political constituencies who will not be satisfied with the New Frontier. Can the methods of SNCC be applied to the North? … Can we spread our organizational power as far as our ideological influence, or are we inevitably assigned to a vague educational role in a society that increasingly is built deaf to the sounds of protest?

Hayden’s report marks a critical turning point in SDS political strategy. Before this report, they had a clear goal to agitate, educate, and organize students on the campuses and in the movements targeted specifically at socially conscious liberals. This report clearly begins to doubt whether certain people could be educated and organized.

The June 1963 Pine Hill SDS Conference established the Education Research and Action Projects (ERAP), which would ultimately advocate an “into the ghetto” political strategy. Instead of organizing the middle class and prosperous working class campuses and suburbs where SDS
members largely came from, their response to SNCC’s call for strategic solidarity was to search
for another location invested with quixotic revolutionary appeal like the south. Instead of the
suburbs surrounding Detroit or campuses like the University of Michigan, they opted to work
among poor and disenfranchised ghetto residents.7

SDS’s political strategies were debated in the *SDS Bulletin* and at SDS’s national
conventions. Then ultimately decided by a majority vote at the annual convention. Historian
Kirkpatrick Sale reports:

The vote [to establish ERAP] when it came was lopsided: the Hayden position
won twenty to six. There were still to be campus programs of research and
education around poverty and civil rights, there was still to be work in peace,
disarmament, educational reform, and electoral politics—but the main energies of
the organization would now go into ERAP (70).

For an organization committed to participatory democracy, they used questionable means to
force the ERAP agenda. Sale reports, “Webb [SDS’s 1963 National Secretary], as he now
admits, ‘staged’ the meeting so that it would be heavy with those, especially from the
Swarthmore area, who shared the into-the-ghetto view.” As will be further developed below,
several people in SDS opposed the ERAP strategy, including Steve Max who ran SDS’s Political
Education Project and Al Haber, SDS’s founder.

In addition to SNCC admonitions, much of the decision to form ERAP and move into the
ghettos was influenced by the grim economic predictions given at a conference many SDSers

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7 For a view of the theoretical justification of ERAP projects from SDSers, see Haden and Wittman “An Interracial
Movement of the Poor?” See also the debates in Studies on the Left in Spring and Summer of 1964. Lastly, see Sale
71-77 and Hayden *Reunion* Ch 4. For criticism of the ERAP strategy, beyond Al Haber’s criticism, which will be
discussed below, Kim Moody offered an interesting early criticism from an actual ERAP participant. See Moody
“Can the Poor Be Organized.” He was an ERAP organizer in Baltimore.
attended shortly before their June 1963 national convention as well as what was called the Triple Revolution Statement,\(^8\) which had recently been drafted with the involvement of both Hayden and Gitlin. According to Ray Brown, an economist friendly with SDS, America would soon face an economic downturn as a result of the incompatibility of the sharp demographic “labor force increase” with the aging of the Baby Boomer generation on one side and job-cutting automation on the other. Brown argued in “Our Crisis Economy: The End of the Boom,” “The labor force will expand by a million and a half each year in the coming decade. Add to this demand for jobs the number of jobs destroyed each year by automation (estimates range from one to one-and-a-half million), and the problem takes on monumental proportions …” (2B:57, SDS Papers). The 1964 Triple Revolution statement made a similar prediction about the “cybernation revolution increasing automation,” but also included a discussion of the “weaponry revolution” increasing “mutually assured self-destruction” (Agger, et al). Both of these statements underscored the urgency to SDSers that dramatic steps needed to be taken. Sale reports the conference in Nyack, New York, in June 1963, from which there grew a National Committee for Full Employment, guided by a brilliant young New York radical, Stanley Aronowitz, and designed precisely to meet the coming economic collapse. At the conference, attended by many SDSers, the most influential paper was one by Ray Brown, then working for the Federal Reserve System. (65)

Many SDSers who supported the grim predictions thought that by organizing among the poor “SDS would be in a strategic position to rally the populace when the [economic] downturn occurred” (Levy 30). As will be developed further below, the predictions made by Brown’s crisis

\(^8\) The Triple Revolution Statement was a letter to President Johnson drafted over 1963 by dozens of leading activists and intellectuals. It identified three revolutions the president must focus his attention on: “the cybernation revolution of increasing automation; the weaponry revolution of mutually assured destruction; and the human rights revolution.”
theory and the Triple Revolution statement were incorrect at least in the timing of the crisis and proved to be a strategic miscalculation for SDS, which several of the conference participates and statement co-signed admitted to later.

The decision to forego campuses and suburbs and go “into the ghetto” had two immediate consequences. First, they abandoned their realignment vision. While the Democratic Party realignment vision was kept alive in SDS for some years in a small faction led by Steven Max named the Political Education Project (PEP), not only did its influence as an explanatory framework and political strategy shrink, but its membership and funding dwindled.9 Founding SDS member Steve Max bitterly acknowledged that after ERAP was developed, PEP “did not reflect the dominant political mood of the organization as a whole, and certainly not of its leadership” (Sale 73). Second, they abandoned their campus-based work. With a five-thousand dollar grant from the UAW and fifteen thousand in donations from various unions, non-profits, and private donors,10 ERAP set up ten projects throughout the East and Midwest. According to Sale, these were the cities: Boston, Baltimore. Chester, Chicago, Cleveland, Hazard, Louisville, Newark, Philadelphia, and Trenton (Sale 73-74).

Despite having been asked to leave southern black communities and go home and organize white communities against racism in the north, a select group of leaders, which will be discussed below, organized, some say deceptively, to put SDS’s efforts in ghetto projects rather than organizing closer to their home communities in middle class suburbs and prosperous

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9 The realignment strategy did not reemerge as a dominant strategy until after Nixon’s 1968 election and the breakup of SDS with McGovern’s 1972 campaign and the emergence of the “New Politics movement” within the Democratic Party and a few small social democratic groups (Cowie Stayin Alive).

10 Levy reports this included unions such as The Packinghouse Workers, Machinists, Operating Engineers, and Shoemakers donating smaller amounts of money as well as labor leaders like Jack Conway from the AFL-CIO and Irving Bluestone and Ralph Henstein from the UAW encouraging their friends to donate money (See Levy 30). Sale reports “They had raised what for SDS was the incredible sum of nearly $20,000, $5,000 of that from the New Land Foundation and $5,000 more from Joseph Buttinger, a Dissent editor and patron” (74). Sale also lists several famous intellectuals including AJ Muste and I.F. Stone that sent out fundraising appeals on ERAP’s behalf.
working class filled with disgruntled ethnic white communities in cities like Detroit and Chicago. In other words, instead of organizing exactly where the white backlash was growing in the late 1960s (Dochuk; Kruse; McGirr; Sugrue). As will be developed further below, the ERAP project was built on a faulty economic theory, a questionable political strategy about a new agency, and a disregard of what black activists asked them to do.

‘Into the Ghetto’

Not all SDSers agreed with the ERAP strategy proposed by Hayden. In fact, the man who help recruit Hayden to SDS was among ERAP’s most uncompromising critics. The “Hayden-Haber debate” in the pages of the *SDS Bulletin* between December 1963 and June 1964 reveals another key fork in the road for SDS strategy. The question again hinged upon whether mainly middle class student intellectuals would use their organic connections to the growing group of prospering unionized or professional workers (as black activists in the south asked them to do) or whether they would abandon their communities for the romance of the ghetto (Grace Hale Ch 5).

Haber started his argument in the *SDS Bulletin* stating “I am highly critical of the substance of such community work because it has been without radical direction; clarity of goals, or significant differentiation from liberal reform” (March-April 1964 23). In fact, the debate revealed a clear discrepancy over how the New Left would define what it means to be radical. By not connecting with mentors from the CPUSA, the dominant radical tradition at the time, this was a much harder question to sort through for SDS than it had been for previous generations of leftists. To Hayden, what was important was to live an existentially self-aware and actualized life: “Students and poor people make each other feel real . . . if poor people are in the movement because they have nothing to gain in the status system, students are in it because in a sense they have gained too much.” The poor can teach them that “their upbringing has been based upon a
framework of lies” (*SDS Bulletin* March-April 1963). Rather than researching a community and providing intellectual-based analysis (ERAP’s original mission under Haber’s brief leadership), ERAP organizers moved into a poor community with a self-deprecating attitude that they had nothing to teach; their job was to “let the people decide.” An early ERAP organizer argued “SNCC organizers . . . managed to impress ERAP with the image of an organizer who never organized, who by his simple presence was the *mystical medium* for the spontaneous expression of the ‘people’” (My emphasis, Rothstein “A Short History of ERAP”). Reflecting on this phenomenon in his memoir, James Forman, an early leader in SNCC, was critical of this attitude among intellectual black and white middle class volunteers that traveled to the south. He called it “what I describe as ‘local people-itis’—an ailment often contracted by middle class elements when they went to Mississippi.” He called it a “liberal, bourgeois abdication of responsibility” (435). Likewise, Harrington’s evaluation of ERAP in a 1966 *New Republic* article identified a similar mystical theme (“Mystical Militants”). “They identify precisely with the lumpen, the powerless, the maimed, the poor, the criminal, the junkie. And there is a *mystical* element in this commitment which has nothing to do with politics.” ERAP organizers did brag “Today, an ERAP community union meeting is probably the only institution in the world where a destitute alcoholic can stand up and give a lecture, occasionally brilliant but usually incoherent, on political strategy and be listened to with complete respect” (Rothstein “A Short History of ERAP”). But, if not political success, then what?

Again, Harrington returns to a theme that contemporary scholars Grace Elizabeth Hale, Doug Rossinow, and Wini Breines have helped bring to the fore: SDS’s reinterpretation of politics around authenticity. Harrington argues that ERAP organizers had a mystical conviction

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11 In a slightly different form, these quotes also appeared in Hayden’s *Dissent* article “The Politics of the Movement.”
that: “It is honest and moral and anti-hypocritical to be on the margin of society whether the community organization works or not. Indeed, there is a fear of ‘success,’ a suspicion that it would mean the integration of the oppressed into the corruption of the oppressors” (My emphasis, “Mystical Militants”). The problem of not fighting to win, of not defining success, and not theoretically building a bridge from reform projects to revolution placed a tremendous amount of frustrated stress on organizers and rank and file ERAP members. SDS did exhibit a type of radicalism that critiqued the limitation of New Deal liberalism. It just wedded that critique to an ineffective political strategy the disunited more than it united the working class. Furthermore, because their guiding documents focused more on the articulation of moral values than specific political ideology, SDS leaders often were found exhibiting contradictory political claims that vacillated between reform liberalism and radicalism.

Knowing the poor would not listen to them unless they won some tangible victories, ERAP organizers settled upon a strategy that focused on small democratically selected local reforms that eased the everyday life of ghetto residents—things like timely trash removal, rent strikes for better living conditions, pest removal, traffic lights, community recreation facilities, and mediating disputes with welfare agencies and landlords. This strategy was jokingly named GROIN—Garbage Removal Or Income Now. It was named after its short-lived predecessor strategy, JOIN—Jobs or Income Now in Chicago. After realizing that “we were not met by armies of white unemployed” waiting to be organized when they arrived at their project city, mainly due to the fact that unemployment was dropping in urban areas, ERAP went through a factional struggle between those that wanted to see organizing for a “full employment society” and those that wanted to see a local movement for better distribution of services that focused in indigenous leadership training. By late 1964, most projects ended up advocating for more
intelligently and humanely distributed welfare under the auspices of the War on Poverty (See Miller Ch 10).

However, northern organizers in ERAP were never able to find the same success, or for that matter the popularity, in negotiating the interaction between reform and revolution as their southern counterparts in the black power struggle in SNCC, who they were trying to emulate in the north after SNCC told them to go organize in the north. SNCC’s Freedom Summers were more popular by every measure: number of recruited organizers, media coverage, and circulation in the popular imagination even until today (Grace Hale Ch 5).\(^\text{12}\) Southern organizers clearly viewed voter registration as not only a reform but a revolutionary strategy that would bring into being a “New South.” (Forman). SNCC organizer Cleveland Sellers argued:

> Our ultimate goal was the destruction of the awesome power of the Dixiecrats, who controlled over 75 percent of the most important committees in Congress. With the Dixiecrats deposed, the way would have been clear for a wide-ranging redistribution of wealth, power and priorities throughout the nation. *(River of No Return 208-9)*

The same was not true for ERAP. Unlike SNCC or Freedom Summer, ERAP has never been nationally commemorated, nor does it function in the imaginations of activists today. In the long run, it was hard for northern ERAP organizers and many ghetto residents to see how improved garbage collection would bring into being a “New Newark,” for example. Rather than small actions like voter registration leading to revolutionary transformation like income redistribution, ERAP focused on virtuous acts performed in public that would shame public officials. SNCC’s

\(^{12}\) SNCC’s voter registration projects, founding members, and political actions are commemorated nationally. One needs only think about the commemoration SNCC leader Julian Bond received from President Obama at his funeral.
political strategy targeted the system of exploitation that they saw as based in systems like slavery and capitalism rather than just bad attitudes or unvirtuous individuals.

The debate about the dichotomy between SDS and SNCC described above offers a snapshot of a larger debate the happened nationwide and internal in SDS over how to define a political strategy as radical. In opposition to the ERAP strategy, Haber used the March-April 1964 SDS Bulletin to ask several probing questions that defined radicalism not as doing “gutsy” things or living a defiant lifestyle, but as a strategic political practice measured by a long-term war of position:

Is radicalism subsisting in a slum for a year or two, or is it developing your individual talents so you can function as a radical in your “professional” field and throughout your adult life? Can a teacher be a radical in his profession? or an artist? or a lawyer? or does being radical mean that the development of your individual talents must be submerged to the collective effort of mass organization and insurgency in the ghetto?

Haber sharpened his point by arguing:

The cult of the ghetto has diverted SDS from its primary and most difficult task of educating radicals. It says "come and do radical things". But when the student decides he has to make a living, SDS has given him no help in functioning as a radical in the middle class, professional world -- whence he came, and to which, most likely, he will return.

At bottom, Haber wanted to move from the morality-based arguments expressed in PHS and ANE statements to a clearly articulated long-term strategy for political success based upon recruiting people where they lived and worked. This could have been the beginning of a war of
position strategy. He argued “this is a research and intellectual job; it should accompany cadre organization, but it must precede mass organization” (24). Instead, Haber felt the ERAP program of “into the ghetto” was “linked with an anti-intellectualism, a disparagement of research and study, an urging of students to leave the university, a moral superiority for those who ‘give their bodies’, ect” (25). Haber’s debate in the pages of the SDS Bulletin represents the most sustained intervention to re-direct SDS’s organizing strategy away from romanticized visions of the ghetto as a place that exists outside of the grasp of corporate American and administrative liberalism and towards a long-term war of position strategy.

Haber’s criticism that ERAP organizers were not focusing enough on research turned out to be truer than he could have predicted. Many projects, including what was judged by most as the flagship project, Newark—where Hayden was one of the organizers—failed to conduct accurate preparatory research, and as a consequence, they ended up in a neighborhood that was mainly black residents instead of “interracial” as their strategy called for in “An Interracial Movement of the Poor.” Hayden and Wittman admitted this mistake in their “Summer Report, Newark Community Union” when they wrote, “The Newark Project came into Clinton Hill, Newark, on the inaccurate assumption that both poor Negros and whites lived there.” Furthermore, the first organization they partnered with ended up being a middle class black organization who was interested removing ghetto residents to increase property values in that section of Newark (Miller 263). They moved the project shortly after this discovery and built a moderately successful community union, but their tribulations are telling not only about their lack of research, but also the ineffectiveness of their political strategy. It reveals a romantic attitude that was seeking self-transformation rather than society transformation.
In addition, as it turned out, SDS’s predictions of an immediate economic downturn were premature—indicating that further research would have been very strategically helpful, as Haber suggested. The economic downturn did not happen with the force they were predicting or to the community they wanted to organize in until the early 70s—nearly ten years after they were predicting (Stein *Pivotal Decade*). They abandoned the ERAP strategy long before it could have been useful for people suffering from the 1973 downturn. The mid-1960s saw a steady decrease in unemployment and an increase—still insufficient—in aid to the poor through Johnson’s War on Poverty. Sale argues:

“…[the ERAP] analysis of growing unemployment turns out to be all wrong: with the system's vast ingenuity a whole new series of economic and military props (Vietnam, the moon) becomes created in the second half of the sixties to forestall economic crisis and keep people occupied, and with its vast capacity for self-deceit means are developed to ignore those who are not so kept (65).

Harrington regretted his involvement in the Triple Revolution statement. In 1973, he wrote “The Triple Revolution analysis was wrong, a fact I can hardly gloat over since I used part of it in my book . . .” He was also one of the signatories to the statement. Paul Potter, SDS president and ERAP organizer in Cleveland, also recanted the economic analysis of ERAP. In his 1971 memoir, when discussing why they abandoned the ERAP Jobs or Income Now (JOIN) strategy, he wrote, “To top it all off, when ERAP projects began, unemployment was actually decreasing in most of the cities we worked in” (*A Name for Ourselves* 145). These historical factors placed stress on ERAPs strategy.

Regretting his predictions of an immediate economic collapse, Harrington concluded in his 1973 memoir “So the central themes of the New Left in 1964 and 1965 turned out to be
illusions [illusions he admits to participating in forging]. The community organizers did not find a new proletariat; the economy did not break down under the impact of automation” (Fragments… 155). Among other factors such as increased college enrollment, Harrington argues “We had not realized that the public works program we talked of might take the form of killing Vietnamese” (Fragments… 156). Unlike the image of SDS in the popular imagination as an anti-war organization, the leadership had a limited view of the significance of Vietnam until well into 1965 (Miller Ch 5). When Harrington says “We had not realized…” he was being more honest than he knows. That SDS did not have a strongly articulated political ideology in their guiding documents meant they lacked the anti-imperialist analysis that would have helped them reach the understanding that capitalism can adjust itself to crisis, usually through wars abroad.

During the 1960s, Monthly Review and several other socialist organizations tried to incorporate this view into the New Left (Magdoff).

The National ERAP office was dissolved in 1965, and SDS largely abandoned the ERAP strategy between 1965 and 1967 (See Rothstein “ERAP: Evolution…” and Miller 212-217). While a few projects continued for some years, the overall experience produced frustration and rancor. Paul Potter, among the most successful ERAP organizers and a former SDS president, evaluated the ERAP project in the following frustrated passage in his 1971 memoir: “The people in SDS had seen a chance to go directly for the jugular vein of the system. We leapt and missed and came up, not with a new society, but with a slightly different portion of the well-chewed piece of gristle so many American radicals had gnawed and choked on before” (A Name for Ourselves 152). Harrington agreed when he wrote, “In every case, the SDS theorists identified a very real source of discontent. But in no case did they define a force, or even a coalition of forces, capable of transforming American society” (Fragments. . . 152). Amid the frustration
resulting from a poorly conceived economic and political strategy, their passion for a morally-centered civic republicanism severely dissipated among the “second generation” of SDSers when all the intractable problems of post-war liberalism intensified from 1966 onward. What was left was a boundless rage among many young people. It is not surprising that many of the leaders of what would soon become the Weathermen (especially Bill Ayers, Kathy Boudin, Cathy Wilkerson, and Diana Oughton) all started in ERAP projects—many in the Cleveland project Potter described above (Levy 32; Wilkerson 223; Gitlin 387). SDS’s inability to formulate a political strategy that could avoid being absorbed into the passive revolution of post-war liberalism contributed to their rage.

The ERAP projects that remained were largely absorbed into Johnson’s War on Poverty, and transformed into toothless neighborhood improvement associations or mildly effective lobbying organizations for better public services. Their energies were redirected into bureaucracies they hated rather than into revolutionary organization. Even according to Hayden, the Newark Community Union was among the only community organizations that helped the “area boards” of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) become democratic institutions elected by the community it served (Reunion 145). But the OEO did not address “poverty and basic economic issues in a full sense.” Hayden laments, “Instead, the office policies promoted opportunities for a new stratum of professionals increasingly removed from the vast and permanent underclass of people outside the scope of the antipoverty program” (148). While overall Hayden is proud of his ERAP organizing, he regretfully admits “this absorbed several of our best people, providing Band-Aids instead of political organizing…” (My emphasis, 149). While ERAP provided exciting opportunities for middle class activists and ghetto residents to learn more about each other, it was a failure as a long-term radical political strategy. Add to this,
the failure of the national teach-ins in 1965 to convince the Johnson administration to stop the bombing in Vietnam and the failure of the 1964 and 1965 civil rights legislation to meaningfully change the life of poor people of color and you have the perfect storm for resentment and upheaval. The multiple failures created a frustrated structure of feeling that sent “the movement” into a whirlwind of self-doubt and ultimately factionalization created by an even more desperate search for a new agent of change and a new strategy.

The failure to stop the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965 proved to be not the first “radical break” for middle class students, but the last straw in a series of breaks resulting from failed strategies. Instead of a self-critique, the frustrated rage was pointed firstly at establishment liberals who failed to be realigned by SDS’s activism and secondly at American (mainly white middle and working class) citizens who were under the spell of “the national trance” (Hayden “The Politics of the Movement”). SDSers began to believe that normal democratic participation utilizing typical liberal pluralistic channels within a representative democracy had broken down. As SDS 1965 President, Carl Oglesby, said to those who claimed he was un-American: “Don't blame me for that! Blame those who mouthed my liberal values and broke my American heart.” Oglesby’s defense of humanist liberal values represents the clear lack of strong guiding political theory of radicalism. SDSers existed for much their early years vacillating on an ambiguous spectrum between liberalism and a poor defined radicalism. They spent much of their early years hoping for a vague realignment of the New Deal towards a more progressive humanist liberalism they saw enshrined in the populists in the 19th century. However, these beliefs existed at the same time with very apocalyptic beliefs in the inability of New Deal coalition members to champion this realignment. While this all seems confusing, that underscores an important point. It was this confusion that undergirded the rapid and chaotic move to a more militant ideology.
SDS conducted the first nation-wide “teach-ins” with leading intellectuals in 1965—televised on CBS—and they received stonewalling and last minute cancelations instead of productive dialogue. They heroically questioned the mania of the Cold War, and they got called communist sympathizers. They attempted to encourage labor leaders to participate in community poverty projects and support freedom movements like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and they got called naïve, while those same labor leaders brokered backroom deals with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations on things like the UAW’s Walter Reuther acquiescing to not demand the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party be seated at the 1964 convention and AFL President George Meany agreeing to not criticize the Vietnam War all without democratic participation from the activists in the trenches. This created an intolerable situation for most young activists.

The ERAP organizer, Paul Potter, choose to be purposefully ambiguous in the first major march against the Vietnam War in 1965 when he famously said “we must name the system.” A few months later, SDS’s new president, Carl Oglesby, had no problem directly stating that the problem was “corporate liberalism.” In one of the most famous speeches delivered during the 1960s, Oglesby also focused his comments on Mills’ critique of postwar liberalism and the power elite while still upholding a lost “authentically humanist” liberalism. “We must simply observe, and quite plainly say, that this coalition [which he names the power elite], this blitzkrieg, and this demand for acquiescence are creatures, all of them, of a Government that since 1932 has considered itself to be fundamentally liberal” (“Let Us Shape the Future” sometimes as referred to as “Trapped in a System”). One year later, SDS lost even its mild belief in restoring a lost humanistic liberalism.

From the riots in Watts and Chicago in 1965 to the Bloody Sunday attack of civil rights
marchers in Selma Alabama, to the continuation of voter disenfranchisement and segregation even after the 1964 and 65 legislative Acts, with each passing month, a new series of indignities and escalations plunged a knife into the heart of their realignment dreams and their dream to build a model of participatory democracy in the northern ghettos and southern black communities. While most memoirs from early leaders are quick to point to the escalation of the Vietnam War and the breakdown of the War on Poverty as the sole cause of their frustration, they do not critique the early years and the theoretical missteps that added to the frustrations of second generation SDSers. Several months after Carl Oglesby’s famous October 1965 speech, a former Chicago ERAP organizer could write “We are now enemies of welfare-state capitalism, with little faith or desire that the liberal-labor forces which might further such a system be strengthened vis-à-vis their corporatist and reactionary allies.” The dream of ERAP crashed into a nightmare for many of the activist involved. Liberals speaking about peace or the end of poverty were “no more than a manipulative fraud perpetrated upon the dignity and humane aspirations of the American people” (Rothstein “ERAP: Evolution…”). A confrontation was brewing that pitted not only small groups of founding members against each other, but SDS factions who had a large and growing popularity. Rather than a late-decade radical break, SDS was on a crash course from at least 1963.
CHAPTER VII. ‘SUDDENLY EVERYBODY IN SDS SAID, I AM A MARXIST’

I am waiting for my case to come up and I am waiting
for a rebirth of wonder and I am waiting for someone
to really discover America and wail
and I am waiting for the discovery
of a new symbolic western frontier and I am waiting
for the American Eagle to really spread its wings
and straighten up and fly right
and I am waiting for the Age of Anxiety to drop dead
and I am waiting for the war to be fought which will make the world safe
for anarchy and I am waiting
for the final withering away of all governments and I am perpetually awaiting
a rebirth of wonder . . .

-Lawrence Ferlinghetti “I Am Waiting” 1958

... air-conditioned troops go from house to house
from room to room jailing, shooting, bayoneting the people.
we have done this to ourselves, we deserve this
we are like roses that have never bothered to bloom when we should have bloomed and it is as if
the sun has become disgusted with waiting
it is as if the sun were a mind that has given up on us.

I go out on the back porch and look across the sea of dead plants now thorns and sticks shivering in a windless sky.
somehow I'm glad we're through finished--
the works of Art the wars
the decayed loves the way we lived each day.
when the troops come up here I don't care what they do for
we already killed ourselves each day we got out of bed.
I go back into the kitchen spill some hash from a soft can, almost cooked already and I sit
eating, looking at my fingernails.
the sweat comes from behind my ears and I hear the shooting in the streets and I chew and wait without wonder.

-Charles Bukowski “Finish” 1967

1 Quote from SDSer Greg Calvert in 1967 (qtd. in Gitlin The Sixties... 368).
The gap between two of the most popular counter-cultural poets quoted in the epigraph above, Ferlinghetti in 1958 “awaiting a rebirth of wonder” and Bukowski in 1967 waiting for apocalypse “without wonder” reveals the frustrated structure of feeling consuming activists at the end of the 1960s. While the contrast seems clear—from wonder to apocalypse, it is important to emphasize the counter-intuitive connection between the two. A rebirth of wonder built upon an unstable foundation can lead to apocalyptic thinking once that foundation crumbles under the weight of a failed strategy. On top of the escalation in Vietnam and the assignation of numerous leaders, starting in 1965 with the Watts riot, a successive series of racially and economically motivated urban rebellions on top of the 1968 Democrat Convention ending in mayhem, shook the country’s faith that post-WWII liberalism’s had engineered a functional consensus grounded in a “balance of interests” and “the end of ideology” (Matusow). By 1967, journalist Andrew Kopkind, one of the friendliest mainstream reporters that covered SDS, wrote in the New York Review of Books:

To be white and a radical in America this summer is to see horror and feel impotence. It is to watch the war grow and know no way to stop it, to understand the black rebellion and find no way to join it, to realize that the politics of a generation has failed and the institutions of reform are bankrupt, and yet to have neither ideology, programs, nor the power to reconstruct them.

This feeling sent the movement reeling in a number of different and often contradictory directions looking for a new theory to replace the failed theories of the past few years.

SDS should have been well positioned to seize the revolutionary moment as the largest percentage of Americans since the Great Depression were interested in discussing radical political strategies. Historian Kirkpatrick Sale cites a study by Daniel Yankelovich, founder of
"The New York Times/Yankelovich Poll," which “…found approximately 368,000 people enrolled in colleges [in 1968] who considered themselves revolutionaries" (311). In 1964, SDS was still only a moderately influential student movement of 2500 members, but by the end of 1966 as the Vietnam War escalated, it grew to 25,000 members, and by 1968 it quadrupled—especially after police shamelessly clubbing demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic Convention was televised across the country (Sale “Appendix” v-vi). Speaking for the SDS National Office, Carl Davidson estimated 100,000 members in 1968, but since many members did not send in their 5-dollar dues payment, and many people who considered themselves supporters did not apply for a membership or attend national conferences, Sale argues Davidson’s was reporting “probably conservative figures” (327). One case study shows the dramatic increase in 1968 after the Democratic convention well: “At Princeton, 106 students out of the freshman class of 851 applied for SDS membership during their first week on campus” (327). As was stated in the introduction, the time had arrived for SDS, the largest and most organized left organization since the CPUSA in the 1930s, but instead of seizing the moment and organizing at an unprecedented scale offered by the growing radicalization of Americans, a faction of SDS’s leadership unilaterally decided to destroy the organization, throw the contact lists into the Hudson River, and start a small underground guerrilla movement.

The second generation of SDS were the “children” of first generation “parents” who failed to develop an adequate strategy to overcome the passive revolution of post-war liberalism. The “children” inherited a frustrated structure of feeling, made worse by the acceleration of worldwide historical processes intensifying racism, economic crisis, and imperialism, and turned rapidly towards third world liberation movements inspired by a questionable interpretation of Leninism and Maoism and visions of turning themselves into armed guerrilla cells. While is it
important to criticize the subsequent generation’s adventurism, it is important not to criticize them simply based in nostalgia for a “lost golden age” of early SDS purity or a recrimination of their belief in various forms of militant radicalism growing in popularity in Asia and Latin America. Factions in the later decade felt they had to develop a revolutionary political strategy to overcome the failures of the first generation in a period of rapidly accelerating history. However, each new strategy they developed, rather than providing a unifying ethos as the PHS did for a time, provided instead a new feeling of vanguardist superiority for that faction, and thus increased the fragmentation of the overall movement. As Gitlin notes: “By 1969, then, all the factions of SDS strutted about as self-appointed vanguards in search of battalions” (370). The movement became much more traditionally radical, but its radicalism increasingly took on desperate apocalyptic overtones. This decent was not a foregone conclusion, but the result of vigorous and at times rancorous debate (See Ch 6).

In regards to the labor/agency question, the debate between later-decade SDS factions can be divided into those groups who on one hand believed in “building a base” in the working class by “boring from within” working class institutions, recruiting indigenous organic leaders to a radical consciousness, and leading militant reform movements with a revolutionary agenda—particularly around issues such as racism, exploitation, and imperialism. And on the other hand, those groups who believed in building a small cadre of paramilitary urban guerrillas (popularly referred to as “focos”) to act as a vanguard force to carry out symbolic acts of “resistance” and according to Weathermen leader Bernardine Dohrn “being crazy motherfuckers and scaring the shit out of honky America” (qtd. in Gitlin 385). The word “foco” comes from popular French philosopher Renee Debray’s interpretation of Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s guerrilla war strategy. In collaboration with Che and Fidel Castro, Debray wrote “The Revolution within the Revolution”
which was translated and published as a wildly popular pamphlet by Monthly Review Press in 1968 and distributed throughout the U.S. (Hayden *Listen Yankee*...85-125). The pamphlet was re-printed in *New Left Notes* by the Weathermen faction. In this pamphlet, Debray argues that a foco is small cadre of disciplined guerrillas who lead illegal, underground activities that focus on spectacular acts of resistance like bombings and kidnappings with the goal of awakening and “focusing” the general discontent of the population who are too afraid or too asleep to act.

The conflict between base-building and focoism is a long running debate in revolutionary left circles going all the way back to at least the First International (1864-1876) and the conflict between followers of Karl Marx and followers of Louis Blanqui and Mikhail Bakunin. For SDS, the movement towards focoism did not abruptly fall from the sky as the result of a “radical break.” Investigating the decision to adopt a focoist strategy rather than a base building strategy will be the goal of this chapter. It’s guiding question will be to what degree did their focoist strategy developed out of the response to the theoretical miscalculations of the early movement leaders who shied away from developing political ideologies and chose instead an overly deterministic moralism that saw the post-WWII working class as irredeemable rather than a strategic war of position that saw history as open and social change as contingent on effective leadership committed to slow educating, agitating, and organizing among the masses? Trying to explain and recover from their successive strategic missteps, many factions in the mid-to-late

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2 When Marx and Engel’s began their collaboration in the 1840s, they tried to steer their political program between the extremes of the Utopian Socialists and French Jacobins. On one hand, Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen all believed that society would naturally move towards a socialist utopia as a rational gradual process. On the other hand, French revolutionaries like Blanqui held that revolution could only be moved forward by the will of an extremely dedicated conspiratorial group of professional revolutionists (McLellan; Lichtheim). What grounded Marx and developed his thinking away from the vulgar evolutionism of the Utopians and the cult of spontaneity of the Blanquists (and Anarchists to a degree) was his engagement with Hegelian dialectics and his research in political economy—particularly the laws of motion in capitalism. The Marxist Internet Archive maintains an informative history of the First International with links to many of the primary documents including the debates between Marx and Bakunin and Blanqui supporters. [https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/index.htm](https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/index.htm)
decade developed competing revolutionary political strategies. The debate between focoism and based-building developed momentum in 1965-1966 with the first evaluations of the ERAP projects in New Left journals such as *Studies on the Left*. It then became a much more contentious debate as the increasing popularity of several factions such as the Progressive Labor Party and the Weathermen escalated the intensity of the debate until a bitter standoff existed over the central strategic vision of SDS that ultimately shattered the organization and left the largest demonstrations in the 1969-1972 period lacking radical leadership from a large, reputable organization with national reach.

*The ‘Apocalyptic language of post-scarcity and revolution’*3

The reluctance of mid-century liberals to address the pressing issues of corporatism, racism, poverty, and war with meaningful transformative programs and legislation derailed many SDS members’ hopes for progressive realignment so severely that anyone even moderately connected with post-war liberalism (e.g. organized labor, middle class professionals, and Democratic Party leaders and members) were rejected as immoral sellouts incapable (some thought unworthy) of education and organization. In other words, there was a constitutive connection in SDS’s organizing strategy between republican morality, Mills and Marcuse’s critiques that saw America as hollowed out by affluence and corporate administrative bureaucracy, and the cascading abandonment of the white, adult (particularly male) working class who had fallen under the spell mass society and the Cold War. The farther away Americans—or particular groups of them—drifted from a vaguely-defined republican morality, this theoretical trend held, the less likely they were capable of organization and mobilization.

The Weathermen concluded that “If all Americans were compliant in the war, then everyone is a

3 Jacobs 107
target. There are no innocents” (qtd. in Burrough). There was a deep strain of apocalyptic thinking in the left that they drew from thinkers still reeling from the horrors of WWII. The Weberian-influenced power elite theory is a part of the roots of this pessimism, but theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Lippmann also maintained a deeply pessimistic view (Neveh; See Ch 5).

As described in chapters 4 and 6, their search for existential authenticity entailed both a flight from the stultifying suburbs to save themselves but also a search for agents that existed untouched or at least outside of the reach of corporate liberalism. But, rejecting a slow and steady war of position, which would have valued educating and recruiting that population, SDS (led by a faction in the Revolutionary Youth Movement, later known as the Weathermen) opted for a politics of confrontation that relied on the creation of a *foco* organizing strategy. In order to recruit a militantly violent guerilla vanguard to shake the masses awake and into revolution, their strategy was based on a misunderstanding of the Cuban Revolution—celebrating macho, hyper-aggressive charismatic leaders (Rudd “Che and Me”; Hayden *Listen Yankee…*). John Jacobs, the principal author of the Weathermen’s manifesto “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” was so influenced by Che that a portion of his ashes were buried near Guevara’s in Cuba. Jacob’s plague says, "He wanted to live like Che. Let him rest with Che."

The Weathermen misinterpreted focoism from a French theorist named Regis Debray, who working with Che Guevara in Cuba and Bolivia, published *The Revolution in the Revolution*. This book described in detail Debray’s interpretation of Guevara’s guerrilla war strategy. It was translated into English by Monthly Review Press and absorbed by the factions that made up the Weathermen, as well as other groups who chose an urban guerrilla strategy. The
Weatherman re-printed large excerpts of Debray’s book in SDS’s magazine *New Left Notes* (Oct 69) along with a glowing review of its importance for their movement. With the title “Live Like Them,” they also printed two enthusiastic articles supporting the Tupamaros strategy to apply the foco strategy to an urban setting in Montevideo, Uruguay.

It is also important to note, the Weathermen were not at all alone in supporting a focoist theory of urban guerilla war. There were dozens of small focoist groups throughout the United States and the world, including the Red Army Faction in Germany (Varon). As another example, a split off faction of the Black Panther Party (BPP) mainly from the East coast joined Eldridge Cleaver faction when he was kicked out by Huey Newton (Bloom and Martin 388). They formed the Black Liberation Army and conducted acts of guerrilla warfare including bombings, plane hijackings, robberies, and daring prison breaks throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Varon).

Much of these American foco groups misunderstood the Cuba Revolution. As historian Matt Childs contends, Debray’s book misrepresented the Cuban Revolution by eliminating the long-term base-building that took place in the urban population—a group known as the “llano” and only focusing on the guerrillas known as the “sierra,” (Childs). Ricardo Alarcon, former long-serving President of the Cuban National Assembly, additionally argues against the Weathermen’s interpretation of the foco theory in his newly published conversation with Hayden (Hayden and Alarcon *Listen Yankee*). Their movement towards focoism did not drop from the sky. It existed in the context of SDS’s rejection of the working class. In their desire to move beyond the working class as the agent of social change and in their embrace of an ideology that viewed affluent adult workers as unwinnable “cheerful robots,” they elected themselves as the only people who could organize a revolution. As the debates in the previous chapter suggest, almost at no time, did the dominant factions of SDS opt for an organizing strategy that would
have focused on educating and organizing prosperous white communities. While SDS saw itself leading the inter-racial poor, a stratum that most SDSers had almost no organic interaction with prior to their radicalization, the urban and suburban middle class, a group they had deep and abiding interaction with, were left almost completely unorganized. SDS left working class Americans—particularly white males—wide open for recruitment to the New Right. When this middle class reacted against the urban rebellions and increasing job losses in the late 1960s, SDS missed its opportunity to lead segments away from growing backlash populism. SDS’s turn towards focoism had a history and it had consequences that still radiate today.


Towards mid-decade, the search for a new agent of social change became less an in-house debate in SDS’s internal publications such as SDS Bulletin and instead became a larger more public debate across the New Left. In magazines and journals as far ranging as Dissent, Liberation, New Republic, and Studies on the Left, Old Left and New Left partisans, pacifists and militants, and liberals and radicals debated the merits of various substitutes for the proletariat. The journal Studies on the Left represents an interesting venue for this debate not only because it was a leading intellectual journal of the New Left, but because it took non-sectarian polemical debate seriously as a means of developing a unifying radical ideology for “The Movement”—an ideology they called “the new radical center.” They believed in open intellectual discussion so strongly, they invited several SDS members, including Hayden, to participate on their editorial

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4 Published between 1959-1967, Studies on the Left started its existence in Madison, Wisconsin mainly from graduate students influenced by historian William Appleman Williams and sociologist C. Wright Mills. It was the first journal that published Mills’ “Letter to a New Left” for an American audience. Furthermore, it developed and incubated many of the most important intellectual themes of the New Left including the concept of “corporate liberalism” and extended Mills Power Elite theory with historical and empirical research. See Weinstein and Eakins for an edited collection of articles that appeared in Studies. See Mattson 229-262 for an intellectual history of the journal.
board. This experiment only lasted a year (1964-65) before the SDS members resigned, but the debates it produced are very instructive to investigate the different roads available to SDS that were purposefully not taken.

One of the most important of these debates was in the immediate aftermath of the LBJ landslide election in 1964. In a dual 1965 editorial titled “Up from Irrelevance,” two different factions debated the significance of the ERAP strategy and “the direction and development of the new movements” (Hayden and Weinstein, et al 12). The editors knew very well, their debate centered on “the enviable issue of agency: which sectors of American society, alone, or in a coalition, are capable of transforming society by replacing American capitalism with a more humane set of economic, social, and political institutions” (12). On one side was an argument for “a unification of the new movements; a coalition of the old and new left; a new Socialist Party; or at least a common and guiding radical ideology.” This faction was led by James Weinstein, the founder and editor of Studies on the Left, and included Stanley Aronowitz, Lee Baxandall, Eugene D. Genovese, and Helen Kramer. What was needed in their opinion was “a ‘radical center’ that could serve as a communications and coordinating agency linking the new insurgents with the traditional left” (3). They argued, “we believe radicals have the responsibility to explore the possibilities for the development of mass radical consciousness and to attempt its organization among several other groups in the society [beyond just the poor]” (8). On the other side, Hayden and his faction argued against this position. Hayden’s faction was represented by Norm Fruchter and Alan Cheuse, but also counted New Left historian Staughton Lynd as a supporter. They defended the ERAP-Community Union strategy of organizing poor ghetto residents. Seeing working and middle class people as manipulated by mass society, Hayden and his co-authors outright rejected Weinstein and company’s war of position thesis. They argued:
To an overwhelming degree American society has controlled its internal class, radical and psychological strains. With social controls ranging from terrorism to welfare, the country has moved far in the direction of the "one-dimensional society" Herbert Marcuse describes . . . Politically, any group looking for a radical alternative to liberal-left politics seems to be either isolated and destroyed, or swallowed into an uncomfortable coalition with the leadership of labor, civil rights and religious organizations.

By organizing among the most oppressed, outside of any traditional institution (e.g. the Democratic Party or the AFL-CIO) and away from any traditionally relied upon agent of change (e.g. the proletariat), in a decentralized, non-hierarchical open democratic space “a new kind of man [sic] emerges.” “This kind of man [sic] cannot be purchased because his needs cannot be translated into cash; he cannot be manipulated because it is precisely against manipulation that he has defined his rebellion.” Accordingly, Hayden surmises that not only would middle class students transform themselves through organizing in the ghetto by stripping away the pretenses of a bourgeois life, but in turn ghetto residences are also transformed by inclusion in participatory democracy, which would not only empower them, but also act as a prophylactic against absorption into middle class consumerism and post-war liberalism. This is what the sociologist Wini Breines celebrates about SDS in the 1964-1965 period. Her study is largely a vindication of the ERAP strategy she calls “prefigurative politics.” While she views the failure of the Democratic Party to respond to student activism as important, she does not place enough emphasis on how the failure of the Education Research Action Projects and the collapse of the romantic pre-figurative politics led to an increasing radicalization of SDS—especially since many leaders in the Weathermen faction that started the SDS experiences in ERAP. As he argues
in his 2015 memoir *Listen Yankee*, Hayden’s focus on a “new man” was directly influenced by Guevara and Castro. Contrary to the idea that the romantic notions of Cuban-inspired vanguardism only captivated the later New Left, it was present from early in the movement (Hayden *Listen Yankee*...11-22). This becomes clear by reviewing several debates in the New Left in 1965.

In an editorial published just below Hayden and company’s 1965 editorial, Weinstein’s faction argued for the possibility of a more comprehensive mass radical consciousness than thought possible at the time by Hayden’s faction. Moreover, they did so while still applying the New Left theory of participatory democracy. It is important to note that Weinstein faction synthesized independent democratic socialism and New Left ideology influenced by the American radical tradition of abolitionism and Debsian socialism. That they relied on Debsian socialism instead of European and Russian socialism shows how they were searching for a radical strategy that could be more easily popularized in the American context. After arguing for a coalition between the poor, the aged, students, and workers, they emphasize: “None of these social groups have control over their own lives. Even where, as in the trade unions, the leadership of a group is included in the consensus, the rank and file are almost as powerless as the poor.” It is this rank and file who were excluded so brazenly by Hayden and others in the New Left, who become the backbone of the New Right’s New Majority strategy. This is a clear reference to the New Left ideology that one does not have to be economically poor to suffer or to be an agent of change, but instead one could simply lack decision making power and live in a state of crushing alienation (while still being economically affluent). They continue:

Although most receive more money, all are excluded from decision-making, are manipulated by elites they are unable to defeat. Hayden argues that these groups
are not potentially radical because they share in the material rewards of this society. But they do not differ substantially from the poor in the degree to which they control their own destinies.

Clearly acknowledging the role of post-war prosperity among the white working class, without allowing the mass society argument to disenchant them about the possibility of an ambitious cross-class coalition, Weinstein and company imagine a political scenario that Mills hoped for in his article “Grassroots Union with Ideas” but did not have the will to follow in the 1950s.

Hayden and his faction rarely acknowledged that the poor could be absorbed (or might want to be absorbed) into mass society. Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale concisely describes the interaction between ERAP and ghetto residents and reveals their strategic miscalculation. She writes “Insiders who wanted out and outsiders who wanted in might share an alienation from modern American life, but they did not always share a vision of the good life . . . Local people wanted into the very middle class lives that of consumption and economic security that ERAP organizers were fleeing” (Grace Hale 188). Acknowledging the dangers of mass society, Weinstein’s faction argues for a more mass-based politics that does not dismiss working people:

Hayden is right to argue that they [prosperous working people] are less alienated and are psychologically incorporated into the dominant society by a rising standard of living. But if the poor are capable of organizing politically and developing their own pressures and leadership, there is no reason to assume that they, too, cannot be granted material rewards. Certainly our society is wealthy enough to be able to make such concessions if threatened.

Lastly, they fuse an argument grounded in participatory democracy and the Gramscian idea of a war of position:
Hayden's defense against this is to organize around the concept of participatory democracy; if this works for the poor, however, there is no reason why it should not work for other social groups. Before such groups are abandoned to continued manipulation and use as producers or consumers in our welfare state, we should at least examine the possibilities for organizing them and developing a radical consciousness among them.

This is the same conclusion that past SDS president Paul Potter arrived at when reflecting on the ERAP project in his 1973 memoir. He starts by summarizing their belief going into the project “For our black and poor contemporaries, we were led to understand there was an objective impediment to selling out; they, unlike us, were in unending structural opposition to America.” He then shows how their experience disproved their theory: “A few months later, when we discovered ourselves that if you’re poor in America it takes an unending reserve of energy and courage to do anything but sell out, it was too late to make the connection” (*A Name for Ourselves* 148). This miscalculation not only cost SDS time and money that could have been used elsewhere, it factionalized the organization for the first time. Most importantly, by relying on moralistic theories influenced by republicanism that excluded working people as being unvirtuous, they did not provide the leadership necessary to unify the movement against corporate liberalism, thus adding to the fragmentation of the movement.

The Hayden faction’s rebuttal reveals not only their powerful disenchantment with most social groups in America, but it suggests that American working people are hopeless, and that they will never wake up from the spell of corporate America—what Hayden referred to in a 1965 Dissent article as “the national trance” (“The Politics of the Movement”). Hayden argues “[The ‘radical center’ strategy] is a way of sliding over the frightening possibility that American
radicalism may be baseless and doomed, that the imperial arrogance of this country will be safely
rooted until a thermonuclear war destroys it.” This apocalyptic sentiment echoes several
dramatic statements in the PHS such as “Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last
generation in the experiment with living” (Flacks and Lichtenstein, eds 240). It is matched by
Hayden’s statements in New Republic in 1966 reflecting at times a deep pessimism “Nor is there
much possibility, so damaged are we, of building a Utopian community in the here and now,
from which to gather strength, go forth and change the world.” He asserts:

Radicalism then would give itself to, and become part of, the energy that is kept
restless and active under the clamps of a paralyzed imperial society. Radicalism
then would go beyond the concepts of optimism and pessimism as guides to work,
finding itself in working despite odds. Its realism and sanity would be grounded in
nothing more than the ability to face whatever comes. (“The Ability to Face What
Comes”)

Some argue the New Left adopted a kind of post-Holocaust pessimism about progress from
scholars and theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr who emigrated from Europe (Naveh). On one
level, Hayden gives voice to the pessimism regarding the average American’s ability to become
educated and organized, but on another level, he also foreshadows the apocalyptic conclusions
certain disenchanted factions of the New Left drew that became more common in the later
decade with the Weathermen faction in SDS among others.

The Weathermen/Weather Underground—who have received an inordinate amount of the
recent SDS scholarship and treatment in popular histories and two academy nominated
documentaries\textsuperscript{5}—clearly were not the only SDS faction at the end of the decade. In fact, 1966-1969 saw the largest and most hostile factional debates in SDS’s history (Gitlin 362-395; Rudd 141-154). It is important to review the different major factions starting with the Weather faction.

The Weathermen faction grew in 1968 out of a group in SDS calling itself the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM). Mike Klonsky, Bernadine Dohrn, and Les Coleman made up the core of SDS National Office that proposed the Revolutionary Youth Movement.\textsuperscript{6} Towards the end of 1968, they united several factions in SDS with the goal of countering the Progressive Labor Party’s growth and the popularity of its Worker Student Alliance faction (see note 7). These included: Columbia University’s “Action Faction” led by Mark Rudd (who led the 1968 Columbia Strike), the Ann Arbor and Detroit-based “James Gang” led by Bill Ayers, Diana Oughton, and Terry Robbins, the “Praxis-Axis Faction” led by David Gilbert and Ted Gold, the Revolutionary Union in the Bay area led by Bob Avakian, SDS Radical Education Project theorist Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev), and a former PLP member John “JJ” Jacobs. They created several position papers published in New Left Notes in 1968 and 69. Their founding document is “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows” (Asbley, et al). Not surprisingly, like the leaders of Progressive Labor Party, several of the RYM theorists came out of the anti-revisionist defections from the CPUSA in the 1950s. Mike Klonsky’s father was a leader in the CPUSA. Along with Theodore Allen, Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) came from the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (POC). Their work on the relationship of race and class and especially their theory of white skin privilege was deeply influential to RYM, although at times misunderstood and misapplied

\textsuperscript{5} For the documentaries, see Sam Green, Bill Siegel, et al and Emile de Antoni, et al. For recent studies, see Burrough; Berger; Jacobs; Varon. For recent memoirs, see Ayers; Gilbert; Jacobs; Stern (recently republished); Wilkerson; Rudd.

\textsuperscript{6} For a history of RYM, see Elbaum; Barber; Staudenmaier.
(Barber). Like Mills, the debate over the labor question in SDS in the late 60s was really the continuation of a debate that started with the breakup of the Old Left in the mid-1950s.7

Because most of the first generation SDSers, who have written a majority of the memoirs, were no longer involved in the day-to-day operations of SDS (Oglesby “Notes…”) and because the few memoirs from second generation SDSer predominantly come from former Weathermen (Ayers; Gilbert; Jacobs; Stern; Wilkerson; Rudd), the debates between the “focoist” strategies of the Weathermen and the “base-building” strategies of Progressive Labor Party and several Revolutionary Youth Movement II organizations in the latter decade get far less scholarly attention, and the small amounts of attention these debates receive are (with a few notable exceptions, see Rudd and Wilkerson) mired in recriminations and denunciations rather than constructive criticism and self-criticism. As is clear from the previous chapter, the focoism and apocalyptic conclusions associated with the Weathermen that foreclosed any possibility of long-term organizing with working or middle class (especially older and white) people have a much earlier origin than the late decade, but it should also be equally clear that the base-building strategy—associated mainly, but not exclusively—with the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) that focused on students and workers agitating, educating, and organizing in the working class (particularly the industrial working class) had earlier origins and a much wider base of support than is generally acknowledged in much of the scholarship.

PLP’s focus on base building and a student-worker alliance in SDS was not surprising since its original formation came from industrial and student leaders who split from the CPUSA

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7 See “The Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism Online” for an excellent history of these defections with supporting primary documents http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/).
in the wave of anti-revisionist defections in late 1950s. PLP started as the Progressive Labor Movement (PLM) in 1961, and later formed as a full blown Maoist-Leninist influenced communist party in 1965 (PLP “The History of the Progressive Labor Party”). PLP was led by Milt Rosen, a Buffalo, NY-based industrial worker who was the head of the CPUSA’s industrial section in the late 1950s. When PLM formed in 1961, its points of unity included “We must boldly initiate militant mass struggles…” “We must develop a base of support among young workers and students and win them to Marxist-Leninist ideas” (PLP “The History of the Progressive Labor Party”). From the very beginning, they challenged the dominant belief in the New Left that workers were too sold out to the system to be organized. They also played an early leadership role in several issues important to the New Left. These included: protesting the House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings in the late 50s and early 60s, being the first Americans to break the travel ban to Cuba in 1961, and organizing the first anti-Vietnam War protest with their student organization the May 2nd Movement (M2M) in 1964 (Sale 78). In 1965, PLP voted to dissolve M2M and merge their organization into SDS taking a visible leadership role in the organization (Sale 129).

Because the Weathermen are much more well-known in the scholarship, it makes sense to start with an analysis of their movement towards vangaudist focoism. It also provides the clearest contrast with the organizing strategy Haber and Weinstein advocated above. Establishing this history will allow the reader to better understand the more unfamiliar debates that challenged the Weathermen with a “base-building” strategy.

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8 See “The Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism Online” for an excellent history of these defections with supporting primary documents [http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/](http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/).
Weathermen and Focoism: ‘In our despair and zeal, we threw out the essentials of building a movement’

Opposed to the long-term organizing strategy advocated by Al Haber and James Weinstein in the early to mid-decade, the Weathermen believed in “moving from protest to resistance” by building a small cadre of paramilitary guerrilla cells to act as a revolutionary vanguard force. They described their strategic purpose in the following manner “to create another front against imperialism in the white mother country itself” and “provide material support for national liberation struggles in the black colony [in the U.S.] and throughout the world” (SDS Detroit Weathermen “Break on Through”). Inspired by Third World guerrilla movements—particularly the Cuba Revolution and the Tupamaros in Uruguay—they adopted a focoist strategy through their own reading and interpretation of Regis Debray and Ho Chi Min. They also visited Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro and Vietnamese National Liberation Front leaders, and attempted to transpose Latin American and Vietnamese guerrilla war theory to the United States.

In dramatic opposition to factions who focused on “base building” in the working class, Weathermen held a number of differing assumptions about the climate for revolution in the US. Believing that “American imperialism is in its death throes” at home and abroad, they believed the time was right for revolution. They saw the white majority of the population as not trustworthy—especially white adults who were consumed by racism and nationalism and totally sold out to consumerism and “white skin privilege,” the Weathermen needed to become the small guerrilla foco Debray and Ernesto “Che” Guevara talked about in their writings (Asbley, Karin et al “You Don't Need A Weatherman…”). The Weathermen reprinted all of Debray’s

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9 Quote from former Weathermen Mark Rudd (“Che and Me”).

Debray writes:

By their very situation civilians are exposed to repression and the constant presence and pressure of the enemy, who will attempt to buy them, corrupt them, or to extort from them by violence what cannot be bought. Not having undergone a process of selection or technical training, as have the guerrilla fighters, the civilians of a given zone of operations are more vulnerable to infiltration or moral corruption by the enemy. (Debray 43)

From 1968 until they went completely underground at the end of 1969, the Weathermen still believed that small percentages of the alienated counter-culture (“freaks,” “greasers,” “bikers”), poor street youth (”street tuffs”), and people of color (who live in the “black colony”) were ready to rebel if they only could be shaken out of their fear. According to Weathermen’s beliefs, simply by living under oppressive or alienating conditions, they have received an adequate ideological education. They needed no further training; they just needed to lose their fear and fight. By engaging in overt acts of aggressive militancy and “propaganda of the deed,” they would remake themselves as “agents of necessity” (Varon 31-36). The Weathermen argued, “We have to create chaos and bring about the disintegration of pig order” (qtd. in Gitlin 385).

Underscoring the value of symbolic terrorism, Debray argues “The destruction of a troop transport truck or the public execution of a police torturer is more effective propaganda for the local population than a hundred speeches.” This is what the action factions believed: less education, more action. Mark Rudd was fond of saying “Organizing is just another word for going slow” (“Organizing vs. Activism”).
The Weathermen consolidated themselves in 1968-1969 from the “action factions” of the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) primarily concentrated in Chicago at the National Office (Dohrn), Ann Arbor/Detroit (Ayers, Oughton, Robbins), and Columbia University (Rudd, Jacobs, Gold). RYM’s primary point of unity was countering the rising influence of PLP’s “Worker Student Alliance” faction in SDS. The “action factions” opposed the focus on radical education through teach-ins, work-ins, and other base building tactics. As the name suggests, they wanted to organize militant confrontational action designed to “bring the war home.” In the University of Michigan’s SDS chapter, Bill Ayers formed an action faction in 1968 calling itself the “James Gang” (Sale 334-335). The Nov 11, 1968 issue of New Left Notes, reported on their recruitment pitch: “If you think the only thing to do with war research is to burn it up, and the only thing to do with bad classes is take them over, and the only thing to do about bullshit candidates is to run them out with your own lives, then let's talk.” The action factions followed the growing trend in SDS chapters across the country that SDSer Carl Davidson called the “move from protest to resistance” in a widely distributed paper titled “Toward a Student Syndicalist Movement” he gave at the 1966 Clear Lake Iowa SDS conference. At the same time, it was at the Clear Lake conference that the Progressive Labor Party began to openly recruit in opposition to the resistance strategy (Sale 190-191).

**PLP: Build a Base in the Working Class**

But, while “resistance” was a strong trend in SDS, it was certainly not the only trend at the time. PLP was the major faction struggling for a different vision grounded in base building. However, while it is true that PLP did lead the most sizeable project in SDS who followed a base-building strategy—the Student Worker Alliance (SDS “SDS Work-In 1968: Towards a Worker Student Alliance”), several other groups also followed this strategy: former SDS
president Paul Booth’s Peace Research and Education Project (Miller 120-126; Levy), several factions within the Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM II)\(^{10}\) described below, the International Socialists (IS),\(^{11}\) the Labor Committee (Sale 353), and several Black Power organizations including The League Of Revolutionary Black Workers the Black Panther Party.\(^{12}\) But, due to the fact that PLP became a lightning rod that helped RYM briefly consolidate opposition in SDS, their history is important to investigate.

PLP members adopted non-threatening manners and a style of dress that they thought the straight-laced working people could identify with—they wore shirts and ties and did not use drugs. They cultivated this a clean-cut appearance to set them apart from the counter cultural fashion and values of the time. They also cultivated a reputation for being hard working and sharp minded with Marxist analysis, but also excessively ridged, dogmatic, and formal. Even a critic of PLP at Harvard, a PLP stronghold, interviewed by Sale admitted:

The traditional SDSers did not work so hard, did not organize a disciplined caucus or bloc vote. Between September and December [1968] PL picked up practically a majority of the SDS membership, largely by talking, persuasion, and working harder …. If there were any need for volunteers to work, PL members would volunteer first. (336)

\(^{10}\) These factions included: October League led by Kolosky (later becoming the Communist Party Maoist-Leninist in 1977), the Revolutionary Union led by Bob Avakian (later becoming the Revolutionary Communist Party 1973), the Sojourner Truth Organization led by Ignatiev, and Venceremos (a Chicano organization which split from the Revolutionary Union). For a history of RYM I and II, see Elbaum; Barber; Staudenmaier.

\(^{11}\) IS was a third Camp Trotskyist movement that developed out of the Independent Socialist Clubs organized by Hal Draper. ISC merged with several other socialist organizations in 1969 to form the IS. Kim Moody, an ERAP organizer from Baltimore, was among its most well-known SDS leaders. In the 1970s, IS was successful in helping to organize a number of rank and file radical caucuses to fight for union democracy in several large industrial unions. The most famous example was Teamsters for a Democratic Union. See LaBotz Rank and File Rebellion as well as Rebel Rank and File.... They merged again in the 1980s to form the organization Solidarity. Solidarity founded Labor Notes, under the leadership of Kim Moody, a founding SDS member. It is among the most widely circulated radical periodicals in the labor movement today.

\(^{12}\) Contrary to popular accounts, the Black Panther Party was interested in organizing in the working class as well as the lumpenproletariat. For Panthers, see Bloom and Martin. For the League, see Georgakas.
PLP quickly became a force in the leadership of SDS using these tactics. Using a disciplined cadre system, PLP sought to win recruits for its vision of “base-building” in the working class. They participated in the 1965 Kewadin, MI SDS conference, but it was the 1966 Clear Lake, Iowa SDS conference where PLP participated as an organized cadre for the first time, and it was the April 1967 Cambridge National Council meeting where they first proposed a Worker Student Alliance (Sale 143, 190, 223). During the 1968 Lansing SDS Conference, PLP’s faction won passage of their Worker-Student Alliance resolution by 485 to 355 (Sale 315). PLP moved from being a small dissident movement to a sizable (although still relatively small) communist party. This was the accelerating radical climate PLP found itself in during the mid-to-late decade. The massive 1968 student-worker strike in France gave a powerful validation to this strategy, and PLP enjoyed an increasing influence (Sale 315).

Their Worker Student Alliance was designed to combat the growing “actionist” strategy of “resistance.” PLP’s leader Milt Rosen asserted "We reject tactics like 'resistance' because these tactics will not only isolate radicals from workers, but from other students and intellectuals that could be won." As Sale reports, “‘Base-building’ became the central watchword of Progressive Labor throughout 1967 and 1968” (267). To activate this strategy, PLP organized “Vietnam Work-In” summer projects from 1967-1972 recruiting students to take factory jobs to learn more about the working class, class struggle, and organize solidarity (SDS “SDS Work-In 1968”). In the May 29th 1967 issue of *New Left Notes*, a PLP member explained the Work-In concept:

… conscious and directed working-class opposition to the war is the most powerful anti-war movement imaginable. To be with, to move and move with American workers, we've got to work with them. To bring anti-war, antiracism,
and radical ideas to the workers we've got to know what moves them, what their attitudes really are; we've got to know where they live. This can best be done by sharing their work, their on the job problems.”

The idea of revolutionaries entering factory work alarmed the national trade associations. “The National Association of Chain Drug Stores, the New York Commerce and Industry Association, and the National Association of Manufacturers [NAM] all issued alarms to their members, and the NAM distributed four thousand copies of a special ‘Checklist for Plant Security’ specifically to protect them against SDSers” according to Sale’s research (415). While the work-in’s did not recruit huge numbers of people, they did provide valuable experience for hundreds if not thousands of students interested in moving beyond flashy militant action.

To be sure, PLP’s “work-ins” were not all carried off with disciplined organization. Like other factions of SDS, there were overly exuberant acts of militancy from PLP as well. In the pamphlet, “SDS Work-In 1968: Towards a Worker-Student Alliance,” an article appears “N.Y. Work-In: Student Tells Workers ‘I’m a Communist,’” that details the experience of a young overzealous student radical who decided to make a speech about communism before he built a relationship with any worker or had proven his trustworthiness. Rather than exalt the militancy of the young student to the level of strategy, the pamphlet warns about “storming the plant like a preacher and abstract college know-it-all.” As historian Kieran Walsh Taylor argues “Believing that the revolution was just around the corner, radicals in the factories could be overzealous in their pronouncements, ‘ultra-left’ in their practice, and condescending and dismissive toward moderate workers” (126). But, instead of building this over exuberance and militancy into a strategy as the Weathermen did, PLP focused on slow and careful base-building as a strategy. Their newspaper Challenge argued:
The main emphasis of the work-in is not to organize or preach to the working class, but to get a deeper understanding of the problems workers face, their ideas, and their power in struggle. While doing this, students will also talk to workers about racism, the student movement, the war, etc. The work-in is not a self-cultivating missionary experience. It is a key part of the strategy of building a worker-student alliance. This strategy flows from seeing that the exploitation of workers is the basis of this imperialist society. (Aug 1969).

This strategy statement helps draw a clear distinction between the romantic missionary zeal that informed much of ERAP “to the ghetto” strategy in the early decade and continued to inform much of Weathermen’s “Third World Revolution” strategy in the late decade. It also helps draw a clear distinction between what Gramsci calls a Renaissance vs a Reformation style of organizing (see chapter 6).

Because of their successes at recruitment and leadership with a strategy that stood in direct opposition to Weathermen strategy, PLP was a target of the Weathermen’s campaign to expel them from SDS. Following a series of botched attempts at the June 1969 SDS Convention, Weathermen—led by Dorhn from the National Office—were finally successful at fracturing SDS (Sale 388-418; Gitlin 370-375). Even though PLP had support from a sizeable percentage (although unknowable, reports range from one third to half) of the delegates, they allowed the organization to be split so they could lead their WSA faction unopposed (Kopkind “The Real SDS Stands Up”; PLP “Who are the Bombers…”).
The Dissolution of SDS: ‘I Hate SDS, I Hate this Weird Liberal Mass of Nothingness’

After leading the breakup of SDS in June of 1969, the Weathermen threw themselves into consolidating their leadership of the Revolutionary Youth Movement. From the beginning, there was tension and conflict. Instead of a long-term base-building strategy, Weathermen believed they just needed to “kick ass.” The phrase “kick ass” appeared so frequently in Weathermen-authored *New Left Notes* articles in 1968-69 that it bordered on a catechism. In a recent critical memoir of his Weathermen days, Mark Rudd argues “In our despair and zeal, we threw out the essentials of building a movement, replacing them with one single tactic, militancy, which had become our strategy” (“1968: Organizing vs. Activism”). When Mike Klonsky—from the National Office—resigned from RYM in 1969 to form RYM II, he complained in an open letter that “The working class must be won over with patience and not arrogance . . . The anti-imperialist youth movement must serve the people. That means it must enter into the struggles of the people and help them win” (“Why I Quit”). Weathermen Rudd and Robbins replied in *New Left Notes* “If winning people’s confidence means fighting with them in struggles that do not forward the revolution, then that ‘confidence’ is worthless and the time spent on it wasted” (“Goodbye Mike”). Reflecting years later, John “JJ” Jacobs, the Weathermen’s principle theoretician, summed up the Weathermen strategy for the National Action. They needed to . . . shove the war down their dumb, fascist throats and show them, while we were at it, how much better we were than them, both tactically and strategically, as a people. In an all-out civil war over Vietnam and other fascist U.S. imperialism, we were going to bring the war home. 'Turn the imperialists' war into a civil war', in Lenin's words. And we were going to kick ass.

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13 Rudd qtd. in *Esquire* August 1970
Fighting, just in itself, would lead to recruitment according to the Weathermen’s strategy.

Responding to Mike Klonsky’s resignation in 1969, Rudd and Robbins claimed “The aggressiveness, seriousness, and toughness of militant struggle will attract vast numbers of working class youth…” (“Goodbye Mike”). Klonsky countered “Our approach should be one of transforming the mass discontent with the war into action, not just on the part of the elite revolutionaries, but mass action.” The Weathermen were not interested in mass action. Nor were they interested in a mass organization.

In his recent memoir, Mark Rudd, reflects on his involvement in the destruction of SDS. He states “I often read references in historical literature and commentary to SDS ‘self-destructing.’” He claims “But I don’t agree.” Arguing against “some renditions of the death of SDS story there is the consoling air of historical inevitability,” he takes responsibility for leading a “faction of no more than ten people” to purposely destroy SDS’s communication and outreach system. He admits:

I remember driving a VW van with Teddy Gold from the NY Regional Office in the basement of 131 Prince St. to the Sanitation Dept. pier at the end of W. 14th St., just a few blocks from here, and dumping the addressograph mailing stencils and other records from the Regional Office onto a barge. (“Talk Given To First National MDS Meeting”)

Rudd emphasizes a point my dissertation has been trying to make throughout: “These were insane decisions which I and my comrades made unilaterally, to the exclusion of other, much better, choices.” He details a betrayal of the anti-war movement that bears an alarming resemblance to the betrayal of the SNCC discussed in chapter 6.
We could have, for example, fought to keep SDS in existence so as to unite as many people as possible against the war (which is what the Vietnamese had asked us to do) while at the same time educating around imperialism. I often wonder, had we done so, where we would have been a few months later, in May, 1970, when the biggest student protests in American history jumped off? Or today, when imperialist war rages yet again, would we have had to reinvent the anti-imperialist movement almost from scratch?

Instead of organizing, the Weathermen wanted to “declare war on the pig nation.” So, if base building was a waste of time, how would they use their “kick ass” strategy to recruit youth for their national action? The organizing efforts for their national action “Days of Rage” in October of 1969, set on the two year anniversary of Che’s murder, offers a good view of their focoist organizing strategy and its ineffectiveness.

“This is an Awful Small Group to Start a Revolution”\textsuperscript{14}

In the summer of 1969, the Weathermen moved into working class cities and designed several ERAP-style “action projects.” Sale reports they were “about thirty people going to Seattle and fifteen to Denver in the West, some forty to Detroit, thirty to Cleveland, and twenty-five each to Athens and Columbus in the Midwest, and thirty to New York City (the Bronx and Queens) and half a dozen to Newark in the East—more than two hundred in all” (402). Like ERAP, they “decided to concentrate their efforts on the poorer and tougher neighborhoods” (\textit{New Left Notes} August 1 and 23). They focused on building themselves as a focoist collective willing to do anything to increase their level of militancy (Rudd “Che and Me” and “Organizing and

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\textsuperscript{14} A participator’s nervous observation at the start of the Weathermen’s Days of Rage protest in Oct 1969 (Sale 421).
Activism”). They agreed on a series of confrontational actions to recruit for the National Action in October of 69 they called “Days of Rage.”

In an August 1969 article for New Left Notes titled, “Break On Through to the Other Side” Weathermen reported on organizing recruiting activities in Detroit throughout the summer leading up to the October Days of Rage. It details the “Metro Beach Riot” and the “Motor City 9” college “Jail Break” as “exemplary actions.” The Metro beach action involved marching on to a “working class white” beach in Detroit, raising a Vietnamese red flag, and proceeding to pass out leaflets and give speeches, provoking a crowd of 200 into “loud arguments” and an attempt to take the flag down. The Weathermen participants reported that they “stuck together as a group” and “fought the attackers to a standstill and left the beach chanting.” They evaluated the action as “tremendous” because “we confronted the kids with the fact that it’s a political world and that they have to deal with that.” Most importantly, it “initiated the city-wide fighting presence of the Motor City SDS.” The key to organization for them was confrontation, but not a confrontation in order to agitate, educate, and organize, but rather confrontation in order to organize themselves into a “kick ass” militant fighting force.

The “Jail Break” action, which received national news coverage, involved nine Weatherwomen who marched into a sociology class and barricaded the door at McComb Community College in a suburb of Detroit. The students were taking a final exam. Storming the classroom chanting “jailbreak,” the women distributed leaflets and “rapped about how American imperialism fucks over the people of the world.” When “some men got uptight” and tried to leave, the women used the karate they learned in the summer project to subdue the “pig agents.” The action was exemplary because “it was women who made the situation happen.” They built themselves into a “white fighting movement.” All nine were arrested. Klonsky’s critique of the
Motor City 9 in the same issue of New Left Notes reveals the Weathermen’s rejection of a long-term base building strategy. He argues they, “…went into a classroom at working-class McComb Junior College, having done no previous work there.” The students had really no idea of what was happening. The Weathermen repeated these “jailbreak” demonstrations throughout the summer in Akron, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, Flint, New York, and Pittsburgh, with the two most dramatic actions in Warren, Michigan, and Pittsburgh. Sale reports, “They seemed to have inspired more hostility than warmth, more puzzlement than respect” (409). But such was the state of self-centeredness and self-intoxication of the Weathermen that the action became more important than the reception.

In journalist Bryan Burrough’s recent book, he interviews several former Weathermen leaders and offers a picture into their strategy. He argues “Their concern was less the death of bystanders than the insufficient spectacle that too little violence would produce.” He quotes one of the Weathermen’s leading bomb makers, Howard Machtinger, as saying the real fear was America’s youth thought the left was “wimpy.” “The sense was, if we could do something dramatic, people would follow us.” They wanted to transform themselves into a “kick ass fighting force.” But, their strategy yielded very few results.

‘It’s Custeristic’

After spending the summer conducting recruitment actions like the one described above, Weathermen arrived in Chicago expecting 25,000 plus people to join them for the Days of Rage national action. Estimates conclude not more than 400 people arrived. Some estimates suggest that if the people who arrived just to watch are not included, than perhaps only 300 or less people participated (Sale 421). Before the riot started, John “JJ” Jacobs gave a speech "We don't really
have to win here ... just the fact that we are willing to fight the police is a political victory."

Violent militancy was an end in itself.

The Weathermen lost much of its support from the other RYM factions after the failed Days of Rage (Sale 411). Even the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party, who had recently tried to work with the Weathermen in their “United Front Against Fascism,” criticized their poor strategy. Chicago leader Fred Hampton said to a news reporter:

We believe the Weathermen action [Days of Rage] is anarchistic, opportunistic, individualistic, it’s chauvinistic, it’s Custeristic, and that’s the bad part about it.

It’s Custeristic in that its leaders take people into situations where the people can be mascaraded, and they call it revolution. It’s nothing but child’s play. (Varon 81)

Instead of listening to the Panther’s criticism, the Weathermen took it as a badge of honor, that they were even able “to scare the Panthers,” meaning in their mind, they were more militant “than the badest brothers on the block.” However, Weathermen’s militant adventurism failed to deliver on their stated goal of offering “material support” to black and Vietnamese communities in struggle against colonialism. Fred Hampton reported that the Chicago police used the mayhem of the National Action to harass poor black people even more than before (Nelscott 100). Sale offers a picture of the bitter reality SDS faced at the end of the decade:

…precisely the time of the greatest explosion of the American left in all of the decade, SDS … was gradually but unmistakably isolating and diminishing itself, losing its student constituency, its women, its alumni, failing to connect with the high schools, the soldiers, the workers. The SDS revolutionaries were on the barricades, but they had forgotten to look behind: their troops were no longer following. (362)
Between the October 1969 “Days of Rage” and the “Flint War Council” meeting in December 1969 (the Weathermen’s last public meeting before disbanding SDS and going “underground”), they drew several apocalyptic conclusions from their inability to recruit people to their national action. 1) They could not count on even alienated white American youth any longer. At the Flint War Council, they chanted, “All white babies are pigs” and celebrated the Manson family’s brutal murder of Sharon Tate and her unborn child. All white workers were “corrupted bought-off tyrants” in their analysis (Sale 438). As Rudd reflects in his recent memoir: “Insanely, we gave up on actually organizing other white people to supporting anti-imperialism: only we Weathermen would be the good whites” (“Che and Me”). This furthered the Left-oriented organizing vacuum in white working and middle class communities. Only Weathermen had the discipline to foment the revolution. But it also gave the media the perfect villains: a group of immoral, anti-working class militants who hated America, despite the fact that other factions of SDS not only opposed the Weathermen, but were trying to orientate their program toward the working class. In other words, the Weathermen was SDS in the media’s eyes. Nothing else existed. 2) They must disband SDS because it was not “revolutionary.” As one member said to Hayden, they “offed the pig,” meaning they disbanded SDS (Hayden *Listen Yankee*… 3) They had to step up their efforts to “Bring the war home” by organizing a series of targeted bombings that “would provide material support” to the blacks and Vietnamese. The Weathermen went “underground” to conduct a series of high profile domestic terrorist plots, changed their name to the Weather Underground Organization, and “declared war on Amerikkka.” According to Hayden’s count conducted during a grad seminar he taught at Occidental University recently, the tiny Weather Underground and its many emulators, there were over 100 bombings and arson attacks on college and high school campuses in 1969…
Bombs, which were first used by the white left in 1968, were set off at least 255 times in the next 18 months, mainly against ROTC inductions centers, and corporate headquarters. *(Inspiring… 20)*

Another count conducted by *Scanlan’s Magazine* reported on the Senate Investigation Subcommittee hearing in July of 1970, noted they discussed “862 bombing or attempted bombings between 1969 and 1970” (January 1971).

In a series of “Weather Communiqués,” the Weathermen’s increasing rhetoric of being “behind enemy lines” combined with their increasing isolation in the movement and their failure to recruit the revolutionary forces of young people they thought they should be recruiting, led directly to them becoming a much more violent focoist organization. Instead of trying different recruitment methods, they became bomb makers. As Rudd said in a speech in 2009, “We thought that people would see our seriousness, our militancy, and because of that, join us. We had no need anymore for careful base-building, education, engagement” *(Organizing and Activism”).*

Through different legal and illegal means, they accumulated six cases of dynamite and planned to use it on more than just symbolic targets like statues; they planned to bomb a military officer’s dance at Fort Dix, New Jersey. This bomb accidentally went off in a townhouse in Greenwich Village, and three Weathermen (Ted Gold, Diana Oughton, and Terry Robbins), who were planning the attack, died instantly. Some have argued, this bomb blew up the dream of the 1960s (Gitlin 387). But, as Rudd hypothesizes, could the Weathermen’s hyper-macho militancy have been out organized from other left factions that disagreed with focoism?

*A Fusionist Strategy around Base-Building?*

Was all of this factionalism a foregone conclusion? As SDSer Carl Davidson reported in the widely distributed leftist Newspaper *Guardian*, "Nearly all delegates [to the June 1969
convention] accepted, as a political given, the necessity of building an alliance between students and workers" (Sale 331). The potential existed (however limited) for the factions who argued for base building to forge a common platform and work together to seize the revolutionary moment with a war of position strategy.

As is shown in Mike Klonsky’s critical resignation letter quoted above, deep conflicts among the leaders of the various factions that made up RYM started to become unbridgeable—particularly regarding how to organize the working class (Ignatin “Without a Science…”; Gordon “SDS: An Analysis”). Their interest in combating PLP’s influence in SDS was about the only thing that united the various factions of RYM. After expelling PLP from SDS during the June 1969 convention, several of these factions felt they could no longer work together. The remaining factions of RYM formed the Revolutionary Youth Movement II led by Mike Klonsky. As the Weather Underground descended into domestic terrorism, RYM II descended into factionalism. Shortly after forming, RYM II split into numerous competing factions: the October League led by Kolosky (later becoming the Communist Party Maoist-Leninist in 1977), the Revolutionary Union led by Bob Avakian (later becoming the Revolutionary Communist Party 1973), the Sojourner Truth Organization led by Noel Ignatiev, and Venceremos led by H. Bruce Franklin and Aaron Manganiello, a Chicano organization which split from the Revolutionary Union, along with other small groups.\textsuperscript{15} Despite all of this factionalism, there were actually a number of points of unity.

Factions that agreed on base-building in the working class did share several common assumptions (while admittedly drawing very different conclusions from them). 1) Contrary to the Weathermen’s optimistic view that revolution was around the corner, “base-building” factions

\textsuperscript{15} For a chart of the various formations and splits within this time period, see https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/chart.pdf
argued that radical forces were not winning in the United States because most of the country did not share their radicalism. Imperialism, racism, and impending fascism was not going to end soon. 2) Consequently, they needed a long-term strategy that included organizing coalitions which included students, workers, and the lumpinproletariat. 3) The struggle against racism and imperialism should be placed at the forefront, and white workers needed to be won to see how their long-term interests would be served by uniting with Black and Latino/a workers to dismantle capitalism. 4) This necessitated uniting with various reform movements in a united front from below and providing radical anti-capitalist leadership. These points of unity can also be located in their public statements about their respective strategies (PLP “Who are the Bombers”; Klonsky, et al “Revolutionary Youth Movement II”; Ignatin “Without a Science of Navigation…”).

For example, Klonsky led a sizeable constituency of the SDS factions interested in working class organizing. Sale claims “By the time of the [June 69] convention he represented one of the largest of the new, proto-Marxist tendencies in SDS, non-PL people who nonetheless supported the working class and emphasized community and factory organizing (Sale 319). When Klonsky wrote in his article “Towards a Revolutionary Youth Movement”:

This means that our struggles must be integrated into the struggles of working people … These young workers will (a) strengthen the anti-capitalist movement among the workforce, (b) provide an organic link between the student movement and the movement of working people, and (c) add to the effect that we will have as a critical force on older working people today.

it was not worlds away from a position paper edited from a popular speech given by PLP’s Milt Rosen “Build a Base in the Working Class” when he argued:
Don't forget, we are not building a narrow minority movement. We are opposed to an elitist concept of historical change. Eventually we hope to involve tens of millions in sharp struggle . . . we participate in all the seemingly endless struggles the people go through until their consciousness is more fully developed.

In fact, one of Klonsky’s main reasons for resigning in August of 1969 from SDS was the National Office and RYM I did not take working class anti-war agitation and anti-racist recruitment seriously. He wrote “I believe that our primary strategic task is to win the masses of working people to a united front movement against imperialism…” (“Why I Quit”). These examples suggest there was the unrealized potential for a fusionist program.

That being said, while there was collective agreement on a strategy of base building, there was a disagreement, especially between RYM II and PLP, over who should be organized in the working class. As the name suggests, RYM II thought it was primarily working class youth that could be organized into an anti-capitalist force. They argued mainly at first for organizing in working class schools and junior colleges. PLP, in contrast, argued for a broader working class movement that focused both on students and older industrial workers. In their defense of the Worker Student Alliance at the 1968 Austin SDS conference, a PLP member argued that young people or students by themselves could not hope to change society “alone—no matter how radical or militant they may be”:

If [students] expect to change things or even win some good reforms for themselves then they must ally themselves with other oppressed groups that have a common enemy, a common interest, and the potential power to change things. The only group which really fits all these conditions is the working class (and this includes black and white workers), and especially the industrial working class.
In contrast, the National Office, led in part by Klonsky at the time, argued, “Only the youth of America and the Vietnamese will stop the war in Vietnam; and only the youth and the black people of America will create the new life.” The conflict was clear, but what was clearer was the lack of leadership to resolve what could have been a bridgeable debate.

While there were several differences, the biggest difference between RYM II and PLP was over the question of nationalism. By 1968, PLP came to believe that all nationalism was reactionary and ultimately led back to capitalism (PLP “Revolutionaries Must Fight Nationalism”). They openly criticized Cuba, the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, and the Black Panthers for being nationalists. In strong opposition, RYM II differentiated revolutionary nationalism and reactionary nationalism. From today’s perspective, this difference seems minor, but at the time, it caused bitter sectarian fighting.

Ultimately, the potential of a fusionist strategy was never realized because of the lack of the leadership. The leadership of all the factions in the radical left, whether grounded in a focoist or base-building strategy, were so consumed in a hyper-masculine, “more-revolutionary-than-thou” machismo that any hope of building a united platform that fused the different factions together would have been very difficult. On top of machismo, dogmatic rigidity also contributed to sectarian fighting. PLP, who led the largest faction of SDSers interested in base-building, had a messianic belief in their ideological superiority that blocked them from harnessing the strength of their strategy, their hard working discipline, and their success at recruiting a sizable number of people to an anti-capitalist political strategy. They ultimately lacked the moral strength to help build a popular new common sense that united the various factions. Everything had to be their way or no way. Sale reports on a common critique of PLP:
...it got very frustrating because you could never argue with the PL people, you could never convince them of anything—especially if you didn't have the rhetoric or any of that stuff—so you were always at their mercy, especially if you were a young guy, facing a guy who came on like a teacher with a line that you couldn't really understand. People got very frustrated in their conversations, they couldn't take these discussion groups as far as they wanted them, and they got very uptight about it and there was a lot of seething against PL (314).

Lastly, the overwhelming feeling they could not slow down, that history was accelerating so they had to accelerate their ideology as well, created a feeling of vertigo for “a large number of the younger collegians only recently weaned from liberalism” (Sale 338). Several SDS chapters existed somewhere in-between PLP and the Weathermen. What they needed, as the Fayetteville, Arkansas chapter argued, was a period of “cooling off” and “evening out” (Sale 615). But, they were criticized for being counter-revolutionaries.

For all of these reasons, a fusionist strategy to unite all the factions that wanted to build a base in the working class never materialized. In fact, with very few exceptions, in very-typical sectarian fashion, they all hated each other. Their inability to create a unifying program that fused the various radical factions foretold not only their ultimate demise at the hands of repressive government forces, the demise of the largest left organization since the Great Depression, but most tragically, their inability to forge a new popular anti-capitalist common sense among the masses. As Sale argues these factions “failed to provide a radical politics for a subgeneration of militant students who were then forced to look elsewhere or, more often, chose not look at all” (Sale 338). In 1970, former SDS president Carl Oglesby bitterly reflected that the sectarian in-fighting “produced a layer of bewilderment and demoralization which no cop with
his club and no senator with his committee could ever have induced” (“Notes on a Decade Ready for the Dustbin”). For a majority of SDSers who did not drop out altogether, they retreated from revolutionary politics to electoral politics, finding shelter in the New Politics movement aimed at electing George McGovern in 1972 (Davis “The Lesser Evil?...”). However, many brought their anti-working class attitudes incubated in SDS with them.

New Politics, Old Abandonment

In one of the costliest strategic blunders of 20th century presidential campaigning, McGovern, a Senator with a 93.5% percent favorable voting record according to the AFL-CIO political arm Committee on Political Education, COPE (Cowie 106), and a man who wrote his doctoral dissertation on striking coal miners and the Ludlow Massacre, allowed himself to be convinced to abandon a working class strategy in favor of focusing on a coalition of New Politics former SDSers and other social movements and educated professionals, nearly totally “abandoning the labor metaphysic” that had proven the corner stone of the New Deal Coalition for nearly 40 years (Cowie Stayin’...85-124; Hart; Stein). Richard Nixon, a politician with a 16 percent favorable voting record according to COPE, won the largest landslide victory in the 20th century. He won 62 percent of the popular vote and every state except for Massachusetts. But, what was most surprising is that among “manual laborers,” he won 57 percent, and among “union voters,” he won 54 percent—a 25 point increase over 1968. Not only that, but he won the professional middle class at even higher rate: 69 percent (Cowie 121-122). Lastly, only 37 percent of college educated people voted for McGovern. While McGovern largely focused his attention on the youth vote, Nixon turned his attention to “the problem of the blue collar worker” with a tenacity of a CP organizer during the Depression. What did Nixon see that McGovern and his advisors did not?
Reflecting on his loss in 1972, McGovern wrote:

The first warnings of a possible [Nixon] landslide in 1972 were sounded in the series of surprising victories by Governor Wallace in the Democratic primary election early in the year…In every state where Wallace made a serious bid, I was startled by the strength of his appeal. In factory after factory, I found Democrats giving open commitments to Wallace. In traditionally Democratic power bases such as Michigan, Wallace walked off with first place. (qtd. in Cowie 102)

In 1968, running on an independent ticket, Wallace received 10 million votes. Nixon saw the working class votes for Wallace as a “way station” on their way to the Republican Party. In 1972, before his campaign ended early because of an assassination attempt, Wallace had the most popular votes in the Democratic primary: Wallace 3,354,360; Humphrey 2,647,676, and McGovern 2,202,840 (Cowie 103). While, McGovern did not see the potential for a massive realignment at the time, Nixon did. In fact, it was backroom deals and Nixon’s famous pension for “dirty tricks” that assured Wallace ran in the Democratic primary instead of as an independent again (Mason 71).

Building upon his insights of Wallace’s appeal, Nixon decided to wipe away decades of the Republican “attack organized labor” strategy. He placed all of his efforts on realigning New Deal blue-collar workers as his central re-election strategy. He knew that as the country’s politicians, college professors, and activists withdrew their support of working class whites—calling them the “murderous rabble: fat, well-fed, bigoted, ignorant, an army of beer-soaked Irishmen, violence-loving Italians, hate-filled Poles” (Hamill)—he could take full advantage of Roosevelt’s major appeal to working people—the fact that they felt like “forgotten men.”
In April of 1969 as SDS was imploding, Nixon was forming his secret “middle America committee” to research working class resentment. He distributed Pete Hamill’s *New York Magazine* article “The Revolt of the Lower Middle Class” to his advisors for close study. According to Hamill, the very people SDS ignored as non-revolutionary, were indeed very revolutionary. Hamill wrote:

> The working-class white man is actually in revolt against taxes, joyless work, the double standards and short memories of professional politicians, hypocrisy and what he considers the debasement of the American dream. But George Wallace received 10 million votes last year, not all of them from rednecked racists. That should have been a warning, strong and clear.

This was intriguing to Nixon (Mason 45-46). He had been envisioning what he called the “New Majority strategy” since 1968. The same white working class that SDS thought were too bought off to organize a social movement became the center of the New Right’s realignment strategy that changed the face of American politics to such a degree, we are still living in its aftermath. How much money did Nixon have to promise labor leaders and working people to buy their confidence? Nothing. In fact, Nixon froze wages, cutback jobs, and generally did not materially advantage the average working person in any way, especially compared to the immediate post-war period. What did he do? Unlike most left social movements in the late 1960s, he listened to their fears and anxieties and placed their concerns at the center of his organizing.

To a far greater degree than Nixon knew, they were just waiting to be organized with an effective strategy. Reflecting back on SDS’s failure to build a mass movement, the dichotomy between the New Left and the New Right was not lost on SDS/Weatherman organizer Mark Rudd. He argues that SDS gave up on mass organizing, but:
Meanwhile, the Republicans didn’t give up on mass organizing—far from it…they learned from their early defeats [Nixon 1960, Goldwater 1964] and went on to master the arts of engagement, communication and coalition building. They were the ones who eventually seized state power, in case you hadn’t noticed, not the old SDS’ers. ("Organizing and Activism")

These are haunting words that speak to the ineffectiveness of SDS’s political strategy.

Nixon’s distribution of Hamill’s article to key staff members led to the creation of a sensitive and empirically grounded report by the Under Secretary of Labor titled “The Problem of the Blue Collar Worker.” After much debating in his own Republican Party over its sensibility, on September 26, 1970 Nixon issued a memorandum mandating that all “Republican candidates address themselves to the subject of the ‘working man’ and the ‘build America’ theme on a regular basis.” While the McGovern campaign spent 12 thousand dollars reaching out to working people, Nixon spent an unprecedented 2 million (Cowie 116). How he spent that money to build a fusionist campaign to successfully realign the New Deal coalition is the subject of the last chapter.
CHAPTER VIII. MARXISM ‘TURNED UPSIDE DOWN’: THE NEW RIGHT’S WAR OF POSITION¹

“You maniacs! You blew it up! Ah, damn you! God damn you all to hell!”
-Charlton Heston Planet of the Apes

After winning 7 of the 9 presidential elections between 1932 and 1968,² the New Deal coalition that held the post-war liberal consensus together began to break down—attacked by new forces from both the left and the right and plagued by the political, economic, and cultural upheavals of the late 1960s. In 1964, President Johnson won the largest majority of voters in the post war period. However, 8 years later, the re-election of Richard Nixon in 1972 was the biggest landslide in the twentieth century clearly revealing the fracturing of the New Deal coalition and the power of his New Majority realignment strategy (Davis; Brinkley The End of Reform; Stein; Cowie Stayin’…). The New Deal coalition collapsed at the end of the 1960s as several factions became increasingly frustrated with the failure of post-WWII liberalism to deliver on the promises it made for positive social reform, overcome the problems of economic crisis presented by stagflation, and articulate a vision of the future that inspired a majority of citizens. Not only did poor and working people of color find most of the landmark legal and judicial civil rights protections passed in the 1950s and 1960 insufficient to address the continuing problems of racism and poverty (Matusow; Branch; Honey), but a large percentage of white poor and working class people saw the promises of post-war affluence built by the labor-business compact of the 1950s begin to erode around them while the national Democratic Party and the New Left increasingly ignored their complaints (Hamill; Davis Prisoners…).

Richard Nixon did not develop the New Majority strategy to court these voters by himself. As I

¹ This is the way Chicago newspaper columnist Mike Royko described the Nixon’s campaign in 1972 (Cowie 162). He won the Pulitzer Prize for his columns that year.
² Some scholars claim that the Eisenhower administration was simply a continuation of the New Deal. In fact, this was Barry Goldwater’s argument. In his 1964 Republican nomination acceptance speech, he called Eisenhower’s - program “dime store New Deal.” More recently, some scholars have remarked that Nixon’s first administration even led within the framework of the New Deal. See Hoff; Stein.
have argued throughout this dissertation, the intellectual-activists in the New Left and the New Right who critiqued the New Deal did not develop their ideas in a vacuum. They build upon a history of anti-New Deal thinking bubbling under the surface since the 1940s (Nash; Jones). However, whom they selected as their mentors and whom they excluded or ignored had profound implications for their success at organizing the masses. I argue that Mills and Buckley, Jr, represent two of the most important activist-intellectuals for the crystallization of the anti-New Deal common sense. In fact, it is surprising to see how their critiques of post-WWII liberalism were very similar. Their fear of an administered society that mires the individual in a bureaucratic morass and robs him/her of their self-determination animated a wide cross-section of post-war anti-New Deal social movements. However, while their frustrations were similar, whom they targeted as the agents of social change and how they mobilized the masses were significantly different. Using Gramscian analytic categories to explore this difference, I argue that the New Right developed a “reformation” style of organizing as opposed to “renaissance” style of organizing developed by the New Left. In conjunction, I further argue that these different styles of organizing led them to mobilize two different republican vocabularies. The New Right mobilized a producerist\(^3\) vocabulary that included working class people (particularly the white working class) as the paragons of virtue who “build America” and boldly resisted the pull of “lazy,” “jobless” “parasites” at the bottom of society and the liberal intellectuals who enable them into subservience. In contrast, as I showed in chapters 4-7, the New Left mobilized a vocabulary that excluded working class people as hopelessly sold out and therefore morally bankrupt. To understand this dichotomy, it is important to investigate Nixon’s New Majority strategy and how it worked together with Buckley’s fusionist strategy to build a war of position that included a groundbreaking cultural strategy at the heart of it to recruit disaffected former New Deal constituents.

\(^3\) For a history of producerist republicanism, see Arnesen. For a discussion of how the current Republican Party uses producerist republicanism in its rhetoric, see Cassano and Rondinone.
The forging of a national popular consciousness that supported the New Right’s assent to power did not flow solely from the strategies of activist intellectuals like Buckley. Both the New Left and the New Right had activist intellectuals who formulated anti-New Deal strategies. However, one of the most important differences that helped the New Right gain hegemony was how it created a program to popularize their strategy into a common sense among the masses. The key to this chapter will be an investigation of the New Right’s effective use of popular culture to naturalize their class project. How they were able to successfully absorb one of Gramsci’s central ideas about the struggle for hegemony and the New Left did not will be the underlining question animating this chapter.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, under the leadership of intellectual activists William Buckley, Jr., Frank Meyer, Kevin Philips and Chuck Colson, the New Right carefully crafted a cultural and political strategy. The goal was to bind together and solidify a newly formed cross-class coalition containing various (and at times) bitterly divided factions; many in the conservative social field regarded blue collar workers and unions as natural constituents of the Democratic Party that should attacked rather than courted. At the same time, they faced an equally challenging burden of shifting the general public’s perception of the Republican Party from the party of businessmen and wealthy bankers (like Rockefeller) to the party of the “common man.” It was no easy feat. These intellectual activists called their strategy “fusionism.” Once they established the intellectual foundations of their coalition, they then marshaled the symbolic capital—both at the level of Cold War common sense and at the level of hyper-masculine performativity—of certain extremely popular white male celebrities in the late 1960s and 1970s in order to recruit and realign masses of people to their class project.

While many scholars have focused on the New Right’s use of the actor Ronald Reagan (Perlstein; Ross), my research chooses to focus on their use of Charlton Heston instead. This is not to take away from the importance of the so-called Reagan Revolution in terms of cementing the
realignment I am investigating (Wilentz *The Age of Reagan*), but for several reasons, Heston is a more revealing case study for understanding the early war of position that established the Reagan Revolution’s later rise to hegemonic status. While being a protégée of Reagan in the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Heston was nonetheless a much more famous actor than Reagan as judged by awards, critical reviews, and popular acclaim (Raymond). Heston’s involvement in New Deal politics was deeper and his conversion to the New Right was more gradual. Studying his changing political involvement is therefore more illuminating than Reagan’s very sudden break with the New Deal after Reagan’s marriage to a wealthy Republican heiress in the 1940s. Lastly, Heston aided the construction of the “Reagan” persona that led to the Reagan Revolution nearly a decade before Reagan’s presidential run. Therefore, in many senses, Heston pre-dated and pre-figured “Reagan.”

Charlton Heston’s abandonment of civil rights coalition and the Democratic Party is representative of a larger trend of disaffected members of the white working and middle classes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for which Heston was a hero and a symbolic everyman. Studying Heston’s political trajectory—from union and civil rights activism⁴ within the auspices of the Democratic Party to conservative libertarianism⁵ within the Republican Party—is revealing. Many people know Heston’s conservative libertarian politics towards the end of his life—specifically his presidency of the National Rifle Association (NRA), his campaigning for Nixon, Reagan, and both Bush senior and junior. However, few also know Heston actively campaigned for Stevenson, Kennedy, and Johnson, and Humphrey; he was the longest standing president of his union, the SAG, and he not only lead the “Arts Group” in the March on Washington in 1963, he gave a speech prepared by James Baldwin to the crowd.

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⁴ Heston actively campaigned for Stevenson, Kennedy, and Johnson, and Humphrey; he was the longest standing president of his union, the Screen Actors Guild, and he not only lead the “Arts Group” in the March on Washington in 1963, he gave a speech prepared by James Baldwin to the crowd.

⁵ Heston’s conservative libertarian politics are more well-known—specifically his presidency of the National Rifle Association, his campaigning for Nixon, Reagan, and both Bush senior and junior.
crowd. Studying his political trajectory requires the analysis of two related but independent issues. First is Heston’s personal choice to move away from the Democratic Party, and second is how the New Right conservative movement used Heston’s celebrity status as a symbol to help unite the (at times) bitterly divided factions of their emerging movement, amplify their message, and recruit a significant percentage of people (particularly working class white males ignored by the New Left) from the New Deal/Great Society and Civil Rights coalitions to what President Nixon called the “New Majority” coalition (Cowie Stayin’...; Mason). This stunning realignment demands the question: how did the New Left lose someone who could have been one of their most powerful organic intellectuals with a great potential to recruit members of the white working and middle classes to a progressive political future along the lines of something like Martin Luther King, Jr’s Poor People’s Campaign? Political conversions of former left intellectuals like Max Eastman, Whitaker Chambers, Irving Kristol, or Norman Podhoretz have been noted (Abrams; Kristol; Wald). The conversion of former center-left movie stars has received much less attention, with the exception of Reagan, and his center-left credentials are notably fewer than Heston’s (cf Ross; Raymond). By studying Heston’s political trajectory as a case study of the larger phenomenon of white working class political realignment in the 1960s, in relation to Civil Rights and the Democratic Party, we learn important lessons about the formation and rise to hegemony of the New Right.

**Realignment as Class Project, Not Destiny**

The undeniable longevity of the New Right’s realignment of a significant percentage of people once solidly in the New Deal-Great Society Democratic coalition is one of the most significant phenomena in the post-WWII period, yet current scholarship fails to understand it in several ways. Rather than investigating what Gramsci called the construction of hegemony as a class project through the cultural and political “war of position,” many scholars rely on an essentialist view of the working class (cf. Davis Prisoners of the American Dream; Hall Hard Road to Renewal and Policing the
Crisis)—especially the white working class (cf. Scammon and Wattenberg; Davis; Teixeira and Rogers) as either endlessly distracted by racist and irrational impulses or hopelessly deluded and voting against their interests (Frank). Because many current scholars (and New Leftists) see the realignment of large percentages of the white working class as the result of their essential conservative nature rather than a successfully organized class project, they fail to investigate rightwing social movements thoroughly as social movements (Kazin “The Grass-Roots Right”). Instead, many current scholars view the rise of the New Right as a top down coup or a conspiracy (cf. Davis) to the point that the specific political and cultural mobilizations of the New Right too often go unexplored in legitimate social movement terms. This stymies understanding of the historical period and its implications for the present. Historian Alan Brinkley states the problem succinctly, “while historians have displayed impressive powers of imagination in creating empathetic accounts of many once-obscure areas of the past, they have seldom done so in considering the character of conservative lives and ideas.” While studying what he calls the “end of reform” liberalism in the 20th century, he admits “I have been struck increasingly . . . by the chronic weakness of the progressive state, by the enormous difficulty liberals have had securing and retaining popular loyalties, and by the persistent strength of other forces . . . we generally call conservative” (“The Problem of American Conservatism” 410). Scholars’ unwillingness to investigate the New Right as a social movement have hindered our understanding of the post-WWII era.

Brinkley question is a very similar to the question Gramsci asked about fascist Italy in the Prison Notebooks and Stuart Hall asked about Thatcherism in Great Britain in the articles which made up The Hard Road to Renewal and his earlier work Policing the Crisis. Rather than an essentialist or defeatist answer, it is important to investigate the ways in which rightwing forces constituted a forged coalition. The New Right organized disillusioned constituencies into a mass social movement while reshaping their common sense notions and imaginations of the past and future. They worked both at the level of
cultural and political struggles, and put tremendous efforts into re-directing and containing the working class’s more revolutionary energies into a passive revolution that did not change the capitalist political economy.

Several scholars are starting to respond to Brinkley’s often-cited, stern critique (McGirr; Cowie; Corey). However, the image of the rightwing worker (especially working class white male) as, “a rural ‘remnant’ of the displaced and manipulated” still dominates most scholarship (McGirr 8), rather than trying to understand the New Right as a social movement with its own set of historical contingencies that brought it into being its own internal values. Their movement forged its group identity and recruited many working class people to participate in the formation of a particular (certainly racialize) class project. Historian Jefferson Cowie argues that once Nixon won in 1972:

The new, more populist right proved effective in offering cultural refuge for blue collar whites . . . At a time when the traditional working-class ally, the Democratic Party, offered precious little material comfort to working people, Ronald Regan’s New Right offered a restoration of glory days by bolstering morale on the basis of patriotism, God, race, patriarchy, and nostalgia for community” (Stayin’… 16).

What follows builds on Brinkley’s stern critique and the groundbreaking scholars who followed his advice. The aim of this chapter is to place the popularity of the New Right in the context of a social movement whose strategies included both political and cultural dimensions—in other words a war of position for hegemony.

Rather than an essentialized perspective that sees working class people as stupidly voting against their interests (recall the popularity of the headline during Bush’s 2004 re-election “How can 59,054,087 people be so DUMB?”), my research uncovers the ways in which the New Right attempted to organize particular disaffected constituencies of the New Deal coalition. They used the familiar language of
hypermansculinity and nationalism to appeal to widespread cultural and economic values. They reached out in familiar locations such as civic organizations, churches, and unions. Rather than abandoning the “labor metaphysic,” as the New Left did, the New Right sought to target workers as the corner stone of their realignment and re-election campaign (Cowie). Rather than appearing out of nowhere, the New Right developed their strategy over several decades from the anti-New Deal coalitions, to the establishment of New Right organizations and journals, to ultimately the election of Nixon in 1968 and then the Reagan Revolution in the 1980s.

Anti-New Deal Leadership—from the Right

While FDR enjoyed wide support—winning large electoral majorities more times than any president in American history, it would be an overstatement to argue he presided over an uncontested liberal consensus. While he was a popular activist-leader, he was not the only leader. Several people rose in the 1940s and 1950s to challenge the post-war common sense and destabilize the New Deal coalition. An exploration of rightwing leaders that reveals the deeper roots of the New Right is long overdue.

Senator Robert Taft (OH) and corporate interests organized into the Liberty League along with Father Coughlin were the New Deal’s most vociferous opponents from the right (Brinkley *Voices of protest...*; Farber; Wolfskill). Surprisingly, from our perspective today, that sees Republicans as far from liberals, in 1936, the Republican candidates all thought of themselves as “liberals” trying to save “American liberalism” from its contemporary bureaucratic transformation after Roosevelt’s second election. They spoke in classic laissez faire liberal rhetoric. Senator Taft said, “... more and more, the Administration has become enamored with a policy of planned economy. ... They have scant regard for individual rights to life, liberty and property established by the constitution” (qtd. in Farber 16). He talked about the “methods” of the New Deal “destroying all opportunity” for the common man. He
continued his critique of New Deal liberalism until his death, running for president several times.

Criticizing Truman’s “Fair Deal,” Taft claimed:

He believes in a Government of men. He says nothing of individual incentive or self-reliance. His whole emphasis is on a higher material average of living to be conferred upon all by a paternal state, and he says nothing of the necessity for hard work and sacrifice to reach that better standard. (Farber 36)

This predates Thatcher and Reagan’s criticisms of the “nanny state” by nearly 40 years.

In unison with Taft, but operating at a mass scale, the Liberty League peaked at a membership of 125,000 in 1936—nearly the same as the CPUSA during the same year and SDS in 1968. They distributed pamphlets, held meetings, made radio addresses, and lobbied Congress in strong opposition to the New Deal. In a 1936 nationwide radio address (later published as the pamphlet “The New Deal vs. Democracy”) Jouett Shouse, president of the Liberty League, argued, “The New Deal has built up a huge bureaucracy which has shown no regard for the Constitutional rights and liberties of our citizens.” Borrowing laissez faire liberal sensibility and combining it with a republican vocabulary he continues, “The New Deal represents the attempt in American to set up a totalitarian government, one which recognizes no sphere of individual or business life as immune from governmental authority and which submerges the welfare of the individual to that of the government.” Shouse makes their main objective of recovering a lost pre-New Deal liberalism clear by saying:

Sooner or later, a political promise will again be regarded as a sacred obligation. Sooner or later, the present madness will pass . . . And when that time comes the Democrats who are Democrats from conviction and not from mere expediency will regain control of the Democratic Party and will make it once more the Party of Jefferson and Jackson and Cleveland and Wilson....The processes of recovery have begun despite the tinkering of
He argues, “those who are left without a party . . . owe no duty of loyalty to the New Deal (Shouse 2-3). This rightwing anti-New Deal anger built up over the 1930s and 40s, but in the 1950s, it started to become more organized in a way to popularize its message to a mass audience.

While there was a great deal of frustration among Republicans, what they needed was an activist-intellectual who was able to reconcile the differences between the various disparate factions of the conservative movement into a unified new historic bloc powerful enough to realign the New Deal coalition. Taft was unable to do so. The New Right found their champion in William F. Buckley, Jr. In the 1950s, he rose to become one of the most important intellectuals of the rightwing anti-New Deal social movement.

William F. Buckley, Jr: Up from Liberalism

Many scholars have commented upon Buckley’s intellectual prowess. When he died, even the head of the ACLU commented on his superlative intellect in an editorial (Glasser), but few have commented on him as an organizer of a social movement (cf. Klatch). Unlike many of the firebrand conservative public intellectuals today that do nothing but shout rage-filled diatribes on the airwaves, Buckley focused diligently on building consensus among conservatives and appearing at least reasonable to people who were other than conservative. He was also willing to engage in debates with leftists to a greater degree than almost any conservative in the last 40 years—often inviting radical authors like Allen Ginsberg, SDS leaders like Tom Hayden, and Black Power movement figures like Huey Newton on his show Firing Line throughout the 1960s.

An obituary for Buckley by historian George Nash summarizes his public intellectual status:

[he] published 55 books (both fiction and nonfiction); dozens of book reviews; at least 56 introductions, prefaces, and forewords to other peoples’ books; more than 225 obituary
essays; more than 800 editorials, articles, and remarks in *National Review*; several hundred articles in periodicals other than *National Review*; and approximately 5,600 newspaper columns. He gave hundreds of lectures around the world, hosted 1,429 separate *Firing Line* shows, and may well have composed more letters than any American who has ever lived. (“Words for Buckley”)

Few people in American politics—left or right—have worked harder to insert their ideas into the public sphere.

Buckley, Jr. looked out at the post-war United States and saw that “Liberalism” had “won over the intellectual class, simply walked in and started to run things. Run just about everything. There never was an age of conformity quite like this one, or a camaraderie quite like the Liberals.” Using his considerable inherited wealth, Buckley helped finance and lead three of the leading anti-New Deal institutions in the post-WWII period. The Buckley family wealth came from oil. His family’s anti-reform liberalism credentials did not originate in the United States but rather in Mexico. The liberal reformer Lázaro Cárdenas del Río nationalized the oil fields in Mexico and expropriated all foreigners land when he became president—including Buckley Sr.’s. This had an enormous impact upon Buckley Jr. from a young age (Bogus).

By the time he went to Yale as a young man, he had already made a name for himself in conservative circles. Building on the popularity of his first book, *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley, Jr. was tapped to lead the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI) and its think tank the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, which, among other things, provided an American venue for economists from the Mont Pelerin Society like: Fredrick Hayak, Karl Popper, and Ludwig von Mises. President Reagan commented, “By the time the Reagan Revolution marched into Washington, I had the troops I needed—thanks in no small measure to the work with American youth ISI had been doing since 1953. I am proud
to count many ISI products among the workhorses of my two terms as President” (Edwards). ISI and the Mont Pelerin Society established the intellectual groundwork for the rise of the New Right in the 1970s (Harvey; Jones).

It is arguable that under the influence of Hayek, Buckley and the New Right had one of the most systematic understandings of the power of intellectuals that came close to Gramsci’s views. In his highly influential 1949 article “Intellectuals and Socialism,” Hayek urged the conservative movement, who he still labeled as liberals (see Hayek “Why I am Not a Conservative”), to study how the socialist movement in the western world popularized itself through the use of intellectuals. He advocated the study of socialist movements so conservatives could use the same tactics to gain better popularity for their own New Right movement. While never mentioning Gramsci, Hayek focuses on many of the same themes: a broad definition of intellectuals, leadership and unity over a cross class coalition, and the formation of a moral community through the efforts of intellectuals. Here is a sample of his argument:

This is neither that of the original thinker nor that of the scholar or expert in a particular field of thought. The typical intellectual need be neither: he need not possess special knowledge of anything in particular, nor need he even be particularly intelligent, to perform his role as intermediary in the spreading of ideas. … The class does not consist of only journalists, teachers, ministers, lecturers, publicists, radio commentators, writers of fiction, cartoonists, and artists all of whom may be masters of the technique of conveying ideas but are usually amateurs so far as the substance of what they convey is concerned. The class also includes many professional men and technicians, such as scientists and doctors, who through their habitual intercourse with the printed word become carriers of new ideas outside their own fields and who, because of their expert

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6 Both Cory Robin and Thomas Franks make separate arguments that conservative forces learn their organizing lessons from previously successful left movements.
knowledge of their own subjects, are listened with respect on most others.

Few explanations can better describe how Buckley, Jr., used the printed (and spoken) word to organize the dissemination and popularization of New Right ideas. In 1955, he founded the semi-monthly magazine *National Review*, which became the flagship publication and central organizing hub of the New Right movement.

In his 1959 book *Up from Liberalism* (a clear play on Booker T. Washington’s book *Up from Slavery*), Buckley, Jr., argues he always capitalizes Liberal and Liberalism when referring to the New Deal, “by which I intend a pious gesture of historical deference to words (liberal, liberalism) that once meant something very different from what they have come to mean in contemporary American politics” (16). Buckley saw Progressive-era and New Deal-era reforms such as “the progressive income tax [which he viewed as socialist redistribution], the ban on religious teaching in public school, the union shop, the FEPC’s [Fair Employment Practices Commission], the farm laws, ect” as “restrictions on freedom.” He says, “The tendencies of Liberalism are every day more visibly coercive, as the social planners seek more and more brazenly to impose their preferences upon us” (*Up From…* 202). He argued that conservatives should focus on what Liberalism takes away from the individual. He boils this down to the statement, “What conservatives in this country fear, is the loss of freedom by attrition” (*Up From…* 201). If conservatives concede to the popular arguments that created Social Security, he claims, those arguments will be carried over to “public housing” and worse of all in Buckley’s view in 1958 “socialized medicine.” None of these programs alone amount a total loss of freedom, but each one “entails the surrender, bit by bit, of minor freedoms which, added together, can alter the very shape of our existence” (202). The Cold War social environment tried to instill in every citizen that America was exceptional as the freest land in the world. At the same time, the Civil Rights movement and the New Left tried to problematize American exceptionalism and galvanize citizens to express their moral
outrage at the gap between myth and reality. These two views of freedom collided and graded against each other producing a cultural crisis on top of an already mounting economic crisis (Stein; Brenner). In 1960, Buckley, Jr., hosted the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) at his family’s estate in Sharon, Connecticut where they drafted their manifesto, “The Sharon Statement” (Klatch). With ISI and YAF as their organizational home and National Review and the TV show Cross Fire as their media hub to disseminate ideas, Buckley, Jr., saw the cultural and economic crisis of the late 1960s as an opportunity to recapture the definition of liberalism and return it to its laissez faire origins.

Buckley, Jr., believed because of the restrictions placed upon individuals in the New Deal “our society is marching towards totalitarianism” (Up From Liberalism 201). Buckley, Jr., defines the loss of freedom in classical laissez faire terms:

Direct politically the economic activity of a nation, and the economy will lose its capacity for the infinite responsiveness to individual tastes that gives concrete expression to the individual will in material matters . . . Stifle the economic sovereignty of the individual by spending his dollars for him, and you stifle his freedom. Socialize the individual’s surplus and you socialize his spirit and creativeness; you cannot paint the Mona Lisa by assigning one dab to a thousand painters. (218)

But, above all, to Buckley, Jr., conservatives must openly struggle with Liberalism. Only then, “can we proceed to present a realistic political alternative around which we hope the American right, at present so terribly disintegrated, can close ranks” (qtd. in Farber 65). Rather than the weak opposition and slight modifications he believed the, “old guard Republicans” were mounting against reform liberalism, which only amounted to what Barry Goldwater called, “a dime store New Deal.” Buckley, Jr., wanted an open fight against the New Deal that had the power to unify a conservative social movement. Through the theory of fusionism, they were able
to construct a coalition between Cold War hawks, conservative libertarians, and religious traditionalists building a collective will that appeared moderate and reasonable against many aspects of the New Deal.

In order to galvanize a social movement around his critiques of liberalism, Buckley, Jr., thought the first step was for the conservative movement, “to put its theoretical house in order.” For Buckley, Jr., this meant that conservatives must learn to “demonstrate” the superiority of their ideas over liberalism by crafting their rhetoric more carefully around the promise of freedom or what he calls a negative definition of freedom (freedom from). They must allow the liberals to be cast by what they will regulate in order to ensure their definition of freedom, or what he calls a positive definition (freedom to) (Berlin “Two Concepts of Liberty”). He claims “old guard” Republicans fail in their demonstration of the conservative cause because they have an “exaggerated pessimism” and are seen as “crassly materialistic.” “Modern Republicans” [Eisenhower Republicans] permit, “so many accretions, modification, emendations, maculations, and qualifications” to the New Deal that they have failed, “to take advantage of their strategic opportunities” (179, 181). This was also Goldwater’s popular assertion that galvanized the New Right’s movement with his publication of, “Conscience of a Conservative.” Buckley, Jr., wanted to turn the New Right social movement into a mass-based underdog fight for the soul and future direction of America.

While Buckley was able to articulate several views critical of New Deal liberalism in an engaging and popular format, that is not ultimately what made him successful. It was his ability to recruit organic intellectuals which aided his successful fusionist strategy to sew together the various factions of the new conservative movement that made him successful.
Fusionism: Reformation-Style Politics

The New Right was the most successful at uniting a cross-class coalition of peoples against New Deal liberalism. One of Buckley, Jr.’s particular talents was recruiting disenchanted leftists (particularly ex-Communists and Trotskyists frustrated with the direction of the Soviet Union and the CPUSA) into the leadership of the post-war conservative movement. Not only did they understand the communist movement from an insider’s position, they eagerly displayed the passion and moral self-righteousness that new adherents to any underdog social movement generally display. They poured that passion into publications like Freeman, American Mercury, Modern Age, and above all National Review. They made these publications one of the centers of a mid-twentieth century political realignment campaign that targeted the New Deal and communism with single-minded determination.

Frank Meyer proved to be one of Buckley, Jr.’s most important recruits. Meyer was a mid-level leader in the CPUSA until his rather public break with the Party in 1945 (Smant 12-18). Like several ex-communist leaders (such as Whittaker Chambers, James Burnham, and John Dos Passos), he shifted dramatically to the right in the early 50s (Crossman), befriending Buckley Jr., and finding a home at the National Review after bouncing around several conservative publications. In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo, What is Conservatism, as well as countless editorials and articles published from the late 1950s through the 70s, Meyer gave voice and direction to a new conservative, anti-New Deal social movement that Buckley had been hoping to spark since he wrote God and Man at Yale in 1951. This was an intellectual project that sought to unite the various traditional/religious, libertarian, and anti-communist factions of the conservative movement by aligning their principles around a unified critique of post-war liberalism.
Meyer developed an effective good vs. evil rhetoric that painted America (its values and traditions) under revolutionary assault, and it painted conservatives as her righteous defenders constantly fighting off modern Liberals. Meyer says:

The claim of the contemporary American conservative movement to the title conservatism . . . is based upon it commitment to the recovery of a tradition, the tradition of Western Civilization and the American republic, which has been subject to a revolutionary attack in the years since 1932.

Derived from his recent conversion to anti-communism and his reading of F.A. Hayek’s Road to Serfdom, he combined a devotion to tradition, a reverence for individual liberty, with a commitment to free markets and property rights. By embodying the traditionalist/religious, libertarian, and hawkish anti-communist conservative factions, Meyer became a central leading figure in the emergence of the New Right and the building of what he called “the common consensus of the American conservative movement” (In Defense of Freedom). He became the biggest promoter of fusionism.

Fusionism’s greatest victory was to allow the New Right conservative movement to appear more reasonable—especially to working people who made a substantial faction within the New Deal coalition. Through his extensive publication work and public speaking, Buckley was able to isolate at least three extreme wings of the post-war conservative coalition: 1) the extreme conspiracy theorists of the John Birch Society (who thought Eisenhower was a “crypto-communist,” 2) the Objectivists like Ayn Rand organized around the Nathaniel Branden Institute (who castigated religious believers) 3) the extreme racists and anti-Semites around the Klan, the White Citizen Councils, and the more racist followers of George Wallace. This is not to say that Buckley, Jr. was against the Southern Strategy or other racist policies. He just argued for a more
subtle racism cloaked in the softer “state’s rights” rhetoric. He thought all conservatives must find a popular way of speaking that avoids seeming like aristocrats, racists, or cold-hearted bankers. As an example, he stated, “Until the objection to involuntary participation in social security reifies in the public mind as something more than a ritualistic exercise in libertarian crankiness, we are not going to set the nation marching to our rescue” (Up from Liberalism 200-201). Buckley, Jr. displayed an uncanny awareness of the importance of strategic language.

Scholars often focus on analyzing conservatives as either normative traditionalist or libertarians (McGirr). But, Buckley, Jr. constantly sought the perfect symbols to unify these separate groups. This was the project Buckley, Jr. and Frank Myers started as editors of The National Review. Myers called their project Fusionism because it sought to unite the various factions of the burgeoning conservative movement later called the New Right. During Ronald Reagan’s speech to a dinner gathering of conservative allies, after his first presidential election, he focused in on Myer’s importance to his election: “He'd made the awful journey that so many others had: He pulled himself from the clutches of The God That Failed [communism], and then in his writing fashioned a vigorous new synthesis of traditional and libertarian thought—a synthesis that is today recognized by many as modern conservatism.” George Nash, the eminent intellectual historian of conservative American thought, argues that after a bitter set of debates and factional fighting by the mid-1960s, “as the dust settled, many conservatives began to make a common discovery: that Meyer's fusionism had won.” Fusionism became the dominant framework from which conservative intellectuals helped reshape the Republican Party away from the racism, extremism, the orthodoxy of John Birchers and Goldwater, away from the

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7 This is especially true after Goldwater’s defeat in 1964. On John Birch Society see Buckley “Goldwater, the John Birch Society, and Me.” On state’s rights see Buckley “Why the South Must Prevail” and his retraction of that statement later in his life see Sam Tanenhaus “Q&A on William F. Buckley.” On trying to purge the conservative movement of racists and anti-Semites see George Nash’s Reappraising the Right (Part II 133-162) and his famous study The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945.
Ivy League towers of conservative Burkian traditionalism, and away from the country club image (Nash Ch 6).

But, to gain the kind of cross-over popularity that was needed to catapult the movement to a new common sense, they need more than just conservative publications that reached a dedicated but small audience. They needed more popular symbolic capital. More than many other symbols, Heston helped the *National Review* and the New Right build the fusionist strategy to unite traditionalist, libertarians, and working class people. Myers definition of conservatism fits nicely with several points of Heston’s political conversion:

> American conservatives are united in opposition to the growth of government power… they are opposed to the characteristic…egalitarianism of the time…; they reject…the national policy of appeasement and retreat before communism…[and for] the survival of the American Republic and of our institutions generally. (qtd. in Nash 180)

The New Right provided clarity to people who were beginning to see the first signs of economic crisis (both socially and economically), and they did so in reformation-style language that appealed to many strands of common sense derived from laissez faire and republican vocabularies. It made this strategy popular by building a war or position inside of civil society, and the New Right and the *National Review* focused special attention on recruiting popular, hyper-masculine celebrities. This helps explain why Heston was asked to be the master of ceremonies at several of *The National Review*’s anniversary celebrations, and was also asked to write an occasional column—including Reagan’s obituary (Raymond 217, 241). By focusing on the inter-play between intellectual leadership inside of social movement institutions like *National Review* and the collaboration they sought from actors like Heston, a more complete picture appears of the New Right’s successful political strategy.
The New Right and Civil Society: The Passive Revolution within the Passive Revolution

While some theorists and historians chart the New Right’s war of position by analyzing their capture of the state apparatus, few discuss the New Right’s war of position at the level of civil society in the 1960s. Yet, my research goes further than simply analyzing the New Right’s use of culture war tactics. The recent revival of Gramscian scholarship (Brennan; Thomas; Martin; Frosini) provides a way of understanding the rise of the New Right, not solely as a capture of the state apparatus, nor solely as a culture war, but as a complex social movement that shrewdly integrated both civil society and political society in such a way as to build a new common sense and take control of the passive revolution and the integral state.

The New Right’s understanding of the dialectical interaction between both civil and political society enabled them to take over the New Deal’s passive revolution. Once the Civil Rights/New Left movements and the severe economic crisis of the 1970s initiated a prolonged crisis of authority during the 1968-1972 period, the New Right used the crisis to take over the leadership of the passive revolution. Below we shall see the connection between this and Buckley’s striking capacity to mobilize organic intellectuals to recruit masses of former New Deal coalition members and popularize their project using a united front strategy they called “fusionism.” The New Left was unable to bring the United States to a revolutionary situation where there was a fundamental change in the hegemonic structure. Neither was the New Right. However, like Roosevelt’s New Deal, the New Right was able to wage a successful “passive revolution within the passive revolution” (Thomas 145-157). This was the development of what came to be known as neo-liberalism (Harvey; Stein; Jones).

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8 See Harvey and Jones’s focus on institutions like think tanks, elite business associations, and high-powered legislative, and executive advisers in his book the Brief History of Neoliberalism.
9 Scholars generally focus on the 1980s and 1990s for discussion of the “culture wars.” An exception to this might be the rise of evangelical Christianity, which has received a fair amount of scholarly attention. See Colson, Born Again.
The operational goal was the same for both the New Deal and New Right passive revolutions—to overcome the crisis of authority and restore the conditions of capital accumulation and social control favorable to an emerging fraction of the capitalist class in the late-twentieth century (Harvey; Brenner). The New Right’s “revolution-restoration” strategy did not operate from a Keynesian foundation of mild regulation and redistributive macro-economics. Their strategy operated from a neo-liberal foundation that—with the help of traditional intellectuals like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman—resuscitated and made popular the tenets of the laissez faire liberalism of the 19th century American robber barons within a micro-economic monetarist framework (Jones). Rather than promoting a culture of solidarity and shared sacrifice like the New Deal did (however incomplete and contradictory it was in application) the New Right promoted a culture of individualism and resentment of shared sacrifice within a context of a racial conflict and a growing economic crisis (Nash; Cowie Stayin’...; Stein). Like so many previous social struggles in America’s past, the New Right used the language of republicanism to vie for hegemony.

Like Roosevelt’s takeover of the 19th century passive revolution with his New Deal, Nixon and Reagan’s New Majority focused on the defense of the “common man.” If Roosevelt talked about the “economic royalists” pressing the working person into “royal service” in order to build a collective will for reform, Nixon’s administration talked about “effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.” They were building on the success of George Wallace’s republican vocabulary that won him 10 million votes in 1968. He was fond of talking about "pointy-headed intellectuals," and “pussy-footing” government “bureaucrats” who supported "sissy-britches welfare people" against the interests of the “little people” (“The Moderation of Gov. Wallace”). In typical republican framing, the unvirtuous people at the top were using the people at the bottom to ruin the virtuous, hardworking people in the middle. Wallace’s 1968 campaign stump speech included:
What are the Real issues that exist today in these United States? It is the trend of the pseudo-intellectual government, where a select, elite group have written guidelines in bureaus and court decisions, have spoken from some pulpits, some college campuses, some newspaper offices, looking down their noses at the average man on the street.

During his 1972 campaign, Nixon instructed his vice president to defend the average man along the lines established by Wallace. Agnew argued, “Yippies, Hippies, Yahoos, Black Panthers, lions and tigers alike -- I would swap the whole damn zoo for the kind of young Americans I saw in Vietnam” (qtd. in Cowie 129). This is similar to when Buckley famously said in 1963, “I would rather be governed by the first 2000 names in the Boston phone book than by the 2000 members of the faculty of Harvard University.” All of these prefigure Reagan’s assault on government bureaucrats and “welfare queens” in the 1980s. While these intellectuals were highly influential, they knew they could not popularize their class project alone.

By investigating the New Right’s use of organic intellectuals in their cultural and political struggle a framework emerges that allows for an understanding of the rise of the New Right as a class project with an effective recruitment strategy rather than a destiny. In order to step into the leadership of the passive revolution, they had to delegitimize the New Deal and re-popularize laissez faire liberalism, 

*Charlton Heston as an Organic Intellectual*

Organic intellectuals have tremendous power to help bring new coalitions together and popularize a common sense understanding of the world that unifies diverse people into a new coalition. This is not because they are eloquent or traditionally intellectual, but as Gramsci says, “. . .the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator” (SPN 10). Gramsci understood that it was important to reach down to the
level of feeling, not just simply dazzle people with beautiful words, but recruit them to become proselytizers for a cause. Moreover, rather than focusing on traditional organic intellectuals like religious leaders or union leaders, more attention needs to focus on organic intellectuals within popular culture. It is at the level of popular cultural production and consumption that famous actors can disseminate ideas much further to people that exist well beyond the direct influence of academia and Washington DC. The messages and symbols that popular movie stars produce have often times a greater power (although not a total power) to not only recruit coalitional members but also to smooth over contradictions and contradictory ideas within the formation of a hegemonic project. Heston, both wittingly and unwittingly, served as an influential organic intellectual for the rise of the New Right (Raymond; Ross).

For people that came into political consciousness in the 1990s, Heston often only represents the president of the National Rifle Association (NRA) that tirelessly campaigned for neo-conservative politicians like Ronald Regan and both Bush presidents. He is probably most well-known for defiantly shouting the popular NRA bumper sticker “I’ll give you my gun when you pry it from my cold, dead hands,” which became a rallying cry for conservative populism in the late 1990s. It was not uncommon to see “Charlton Heston is my President” bumper stickers on the back of pickup trucks in the late 1990s during Clinton’s presidency. For baby boomers, Heston often only represents a stunningly handsome actor with one of the most commanding stage presences in the “Golden Era” of Hollywood. However, most people do not know anything about the beginnings of Heston’s political activism. He was a Democratic Party stalwart—campaigning vigorously for Stevenson, JFK, LBJ, and Humphrey. He was a staunch trade unionist—serving as President of SAG 1965-1971 as well as being very involved through at least the 1990s. And, he was an active supporter of the Civil Rights movement—not only personally protesting the segregation of public facilities in the South in 1962 but also speaking at the March on
Washington in 1963 (“Hollywood Round Table”; Branch Parting…). In his autobiography, Heston called Dr. King a “twentieth-century Moses” (In the Arena 314). While he was clearly a centrist voice in the above-mentioned campaigns, it was his centrism that made Heston, without a doubt, a classic cold war liberal (Raymond Ch 2). However at the same time, it was also his centrism combined with his anti-communism and libertarian ideology that provide the seeds of his later conversion to conservative populism along with a number of former leftists like William Crystal, Norman Podhoretz, and David Horowitz.

Much scholarly attention is focused on the “big six” social justice, labor, and religious leaders who made up the coalition organizing the March on Washington. However, many famous people from popular culture, who the crowds and the TV-viewing audience probably had the most familiarity with, also marched enthusiastically. From the perspective of people who only know Heston from his NRA presidency in the 1990s, a deeply surprising fact is that he led a contingent of artists and celebrities, who attended the march. In fact, Heston gave a speech written by James Baldwin on behalf of the “Arts Group” to the unprecedented crowd of demonstrators that day (Heston The Actor’s Life…). He counted the experience as one of the most meaningful of his entire life. In the autobiography he wrote in 1995 (before he was the NRA president), Heston argues that marching with Dr King in 1963 and leading a protest against Time Warner distributing Ice T’s song “Cop Killer” were the two proudest moments of activism in his life (In the Arena 566). The juxtaposition of these two events provides an informative picture of Heston’s political trajectory.

Few other actors in the 1960s and 1970s held more popular appeal with the white working and middle classes both on and off stage than Charlton Heston. Pauline Kael, one of America’s most

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10 A Philip Randolph, AFL-CIO and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Roy Wilkins, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Whitney Young, Jr., the National Urban League; Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); James Farmer, the Conference of Racial Equality (CORE); and John Lewis, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
renowned film critics in the 60s and 70s, argued that “Heston is a godlike hero; built for strength, he's an archetype of what makes Americans win . . .” (Kael 586). Heston had a commanding presence with a deep baritone voice that captivated significant attention from everyday people and political leaders. That is why in early 1963, Dr. King specifically recruited him (in Heston’s role as SAG President) for his ultimately successful campaign to integrate the skilled trades of the movie and TV industry. Dr. King’s goal was to make union jobs available to people of color and women. Skilled Trade Unions were historically the bastions of racial exclusion and familial nepotism (Fletcher). Heston admits in his autobiography that he told Dr. King the morning before the negotiations, “I’m glad to speak for SAG at the inter-guild conference you’ve called with the studios, but I don’t believe you have much of a chance with IATSE [International Association of Theater and Stage Employees]” (314). Heston was amazed by Dr. King’s results confessing in his journal, “I was dead wrong. . . They agreed to eliminate the family rule and accept black apprentices” (314). It was this meeting that moved Heston to help fundraise 75,000 dollars for the March on Washington and to participate with Dr. King in the march later that year by leading a coalition of famous actors and artists they called the “Art Group” in the march. Reflecting on his participation in the March, “Our job was to get as much ink and TV time as possible” (In the Arena 316). Heston understood celebrity’s symbolic role.

Mirroring some of the tensions in the larger Civil Rights movement (Branch; Carson; Joseph), the Arts Group was also internally divided. In his journal, Heston pitted himself against the more left-leaning members of the group—representing himself as the voice of moderation and reason. Marlon Brando and Paul Newman wanted the group to engage in the types of civil disobedience that made Birmingham and the sit-in movement such dramatic symbols. They suggested the group should chain themselves to the Jefferson Monument. Heston forcefully disagreed and threatened to quit. He recounted his response to Brando and the others in his Journal: “‘No we won’t . . . Not if I go. We live in
a country where we have the right to do this, and we’re going to do it the way it says in the book’” (178). Heston’s centrist position won out. He led the “Arts Group” in a peaceful march and press conference. In an uncoordinated similarity, the NAACP’s centrist position also won out at the March—mandating that they censor the more radical Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee’s speech and that James Baldwin be allow to write a speech but not give it in public. Instead, Heston was selected to give Baldwin’s speech the day of the march (Branch; Heston Journals). These centrist positions led Malcolm X, in his speech “Message to the Grassroots,” to call the March “a farce.”

After the March, several of the Arts Group sat in a panel discussion for a TV interview where tension began to be revealed (“Hollywood Roundtable”). Heston and the panel facilitator squared off with Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier over the facilitator’s statement: “this is the only country in the world where a march like this would even be allowed.” Heston was provoked by the response that we must focus more closely not on how this march could only happen in America, but on how this march is necessary in America. Heston disagreed and returned the conversation to the greatness and promise of America, particularly its founding documents. Belafonte shot back that the bulk of the success of the Civil Rights movements will not be in the founding documents, but it will be with consciousness raising and militant action. He said, the success:

lays very heavily with the white community, very heavily with the profiteers, very heavily with the vested interests, it lays very heavily with a great middle stream in this country of people who have refused to commit themselves or even have the slightest knowledge that these things have been going on…[because] there will be no return for the negro people.

However, Belafonte and others gave no concrete steps that the middle stream could take, short of total upheaval of the status quo. This clearly made Heston visibly upset, but Heston’s fears based in
uncertainty and defensiveness of American exceptionalism were not clearly based in race hatred typical of the White Citizen Councilor or the KKK. At the same time, Belafonte’s anger was based upon an ongoing frustration in the Black Power movement: namely, the white New Left’s refusal to help organize the predominantly white “middle stream” of America despite being frequently asked (see Ch. 6).

Heston’s fears and disagreements were representative of a significant percentage of the white working and lower middle classes who supported Civil Rights but were not ready to give up their feelings of exceptionalism (based in large part upon decades of WWII and Cold War propaganda). Furthermore, they were anxious of strategies that included them giving up rights or economic privileges bitterly won over the course of the 20th century. It is important to remember that Civil Rights legislation was being implemented at a time when unskilled workers and the lower middle class were feeling the first pangs of the coming economic recession. From 1965-1968, real wages for manufacturing workers fell for the first time during the post-WWII boom (Stein 12). The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 1970, 60 percent of working class families, “were either poor or hovering between poverty and the very modest level of the intermediate budget [of 10,664 per year]” (Stein 14). It was this fearful “middle stream” that Nixon focused on recruiting by listening to their concerns (Cowie). The New Left’s abandonment of this section of the American population left them fragmented, believing in a mishmash of collective common senses accumulated over several hegemonic projects, and waiting for a leader and a movement to give them a sense of cohesive identity in a patriotic, masculine language they understood.

In his journal the night after the March on Washington, Heston focused again on American exceptionalism—relying on his hero Thomas Jefferson:

Whatever else it meant for Americans, black and white, it shows the strength of this
country when our constitutional right to peaceable assembly can be exercised in such thousands, with such dignity and happy determination. Jefferson, whose monument was the last thing I saw tonight on my way to the airport, would have approved. Indeed, he would’ve said ‘I told you so’ (179).

Much like John Dewey attempted to do for the Old Left (see Ch. 4), Heston translated Jefferson’s republican values into a modern popular vocabulary. Rather than claiming racism as an endemic problem that required fundamental changes—to the system of capitalism and the culture of white supremacy—he claimed it was the result of a few bad apples like Sheriff Clark and Bull Connor, who were known for using police dogs on young children and turning firehouses on unarmed civil rights protesters. Virtuous actions in public, by moral men such as himself, could isolate and condemn these rogue individuals, restoring the exceptionalism at the heart of the American democracy. The language was appealing especially to the generations of Americans who lived through WWII.

The conflict between Belafonte and Heston represented a microcosm of the larger conflict between centrists like himself and Black Power advocates. As the bridges of understanding that held the various factions of the unstable civil rights coalition began to crumble, white allies like Heston felt increasingly isolated and cagey. Because he was caught between factions (although certainly not everyone) of the Black Power movement who increasingly did not seek white allies because of the feeling of continually being betrayed and factions of the New Left like the Weathermen who saw centrists like Heston as irredeemable sellouts Nixon’s New Majority became more attractive to him.

Rather than seeing Heston abruptly switching sides in an irrational white flight away from the Democratic Party, it is more useful to see him as an organic intellectual who was actively recruited by the New Right social movement interested in his symbolic power to communicate a message to a large population of frustrated Americans that factions of the New Left and McGovern’s campaign were no
longer interested in organizing. Seeing Heston’s conversion as the product of a social movement, rather than a willful individual act, sheds a sobering light on the rise of the New Right. It helps disabuse New Leftists from their belief that the white working class was essentially conservative and therefore a natural majority for the New Right. The white working class was recruited and organized as part of a social movement.

*Charton Heston as a “Suburban Warrior”*

The historiography on conservative social movements has come a long way in the almost 20 years since Alan Brinkley and Michael Kazin issued their often-cited stern critique in the pages of *The Journal of American History*, that historians have suffered from a failure of imagination. Because most historians hold an “overwhelmingly cosmopolitan” worldview that often ranges between liberal and radical, Kazin argues historians too often avoid studying people “whose political opinions they detest” (136). He states “… scholars of modern America have largely eschewed research projects about past movements that seem to them either bastions of a crumbling status quo or the domain of puritanical, pathological yahoos” (136). Kazin and Brinkley are not the only scholars who argue that the historiography of the people who joined conservative social movements in the 20th century has suffered from a tendency to pathologize its adherents. Mid-century Consensus School historians are often blamed for starting this trend—especially Richard Hoffsteader and his 1964 book, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Brinkley “The Problem of American Conservatism”; Kazin “Grassroots Right…”; McGirr; Gross).

Reviewing the recent literature that critiques and goes beyond the Consensus school’s limited view of conservative social movements, historian Darren Dochuk argues scholars in the 1990s and early 21st century sought to respond to Brinkley and Kazin’s criticism by building what he problematizes as the “backlash narrative.” Dochuk summarizes the core of the common backlash narrative as follows:
. . . tired of bold concessions made to other members of the Democratic coalition (black especially) on behalf of civil rights, which seemed only to promote social upheaval and economic instability, white working class Democrats in northern cities and southern towns looked elsewhere for political expression and found it, first in George Wallace’s populist Right and then in Richard Nixon’s and Ronald Regan’s Republican Right. (980)

Responding largely to the migration of millions of white southern workers—who brought their provincial views with them to industrial centers—in the North and West after WWII, Dochik summarizes (following Kevin Philips analysis for Nixon in the 1972 campaign), that the “Republican strategists ‘southernized’ their platform . . .” and “Jim Crow racism became the center plank in their platform” (982). Certainly, this is an important part of understanding the realignment, but is it enough to explain all of Nixon’s landslide victory and the rise of the so-called “Reagan Democrat”? More specifically for the purposes of this chapter, can it explain Heston’s vote for Nixon in 1972? 11

While Dochik’s summary of the backlash socio-cultural scholarship follows a political trajectory similar to Heston’s (in terms of changing white working and middle class voting patterns), Heston’s conversation does not share the same ideological causality. The time has come to at least ask the question using Heston as a representative example: can the growing discomfort with the direction of New Deal/Great Society liberalism be explained by factors beyond the common (and often times correct) answer of ignorance and racism among the white working class? Several scholars today answer yes. By moving beyond a strictly racism-based backlash framework, they argue for a more nuanced view of the formation of a New Right historical bloc that includes educated people who thought that the New Right offered the best path towards economic freedom, which in their mind equated with personal

11 While there is no evidence that I have found that Heston maintained racist views during the period this article examines, several people have pointed to Heston’s later speeches as examples of at least intolerance and at worst racism, homophobia, and anti-feminism. In particular, they point to Charlton Heston’s 1997 Speech to the Free Congress Foundation.
freedom and the republican dream of freedom from subservience. The Right mobilized huge sections of the white working class within the larger cultural framework of the preservation of American exceptionalism, bourgeois values, Christian faith, and traditional family/community (Hamill). Historian Jonathan Rieder sums up the inadequacy of the backlash narrative; for him, it:

... fails to grasp the complexity of racial resentment. Backlash was a disorderly affair that contained democratic, populist, genteel, conspiratorial, racist, humanistic, pragmatic, and meritocratic impulses. Simply put the middle was too diverse, the grievance it suffered to varied, to be captured in a single category. (254)

Rieder’s point connects well with Pete Hamill’s observations in his 1969 New York Magazine article, which Cowie argues was a “Rosetta stone” for Nixon during his 1972 campaign (Stayin’... 129). Rather than simply writing off the people he grew up with and served in the Army with, Hamill tried to understand their frustrations instead of dismissing them as just racist backlash stupidity. It was this article that convinced Nixon to invest in the cultural appeal to white working class values. Using an argument that is supported by Kazin’s observation of historians seeing conservatives as pathological (“Grassroots Right…”), Hamill argues that left-leaning intellectuals have more than

a century of intellectual sneering at bourgeois values, etc. But the result has been the inability of many intellectuals to imagine themselves in the plight of the American white working man. They don’t understand his virtues (loyalty, endurance, courage, among others) and see him only through his faults (narrowness, bigotry, the worship of machismo, among others). The result is the stereotype.

Historian Emile Raymond argues Nixon and the New Right:

animated Heston and others like him, everyday men and women who opposed liberalism from an emotional, or visceral, standpoint and who felt that the Democrats no longer
championed their middle- and working-class values. Because of his celebrity status, Heston was not considered an “average American”; however, he remained consistently tied to bourgeois beliefs and was increasingly willing to defend those values in a public forum. (4)

While he was a wealthy actor, much like most of the “cowboy actors” like John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, and Jimmy Stewart, Heston’s symbolic appeal was as a working class everyman. This is similar to Bill Moyer’s father, a poor Texas cotton farmer (chapter 3), telling his son FDR, a very wealthy man, was “his friend” despite the fact that he never met him. Symbolic identification is powerful often encouraging people to believe things that are contradictory.

Lisa McGirr’s study, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, is a superlative example of the new trend in scholarship that seeks a more complex investigation of realignment in the 1970s than the “backlash” narrative provides. She focuses on the social forces (specifically demographic analysis and ideological patterns nurtured by community) particular to Southern California that can be usefully applied to understanding Heston’s trajectory. McGirr does not dismiss the charges of racism and extremism within the post-WWII Right entirely. Instead, she acknowledges it while also seeking to understand modern conservatives as not only “a rural ‘remnant’ of the displaced and manipulated,” but also a group of “highly educated and thoroughly modern group of men and women . . . [who] enjoyed the fruits of worldly success, often worked in high tech industries, shared in the burgeoning consumer culture, and participated in the bureaucratized world of post WWII America” (8). If the liberal Consensus scholars were correct, then an increasingly more modern and educated American public would necessarily lead to an increasingly more tolerant and pluralistic society, but in fact, for a sizable contingent of Americans, normative traditionalism and anti-state libertarianism have remained deeply important to their worldview. They construct a powerful collective
common sense that does not always result from poor education and racist beliefs. McGirr’s study tries to investigate how conservative activists resolved the seeming contradiction between traditionalism and modernism in order to construct a group identity that was hostile to the New Deal. Republican politicians were well positioned to mobilize this segment of population once the promises of New Deal and Civil Rights liberalism began to breakdown—particularly after the increasing urban rebellions and increasing unemployment due to stagflation at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s (Matusow; Cowie; Stein).

Put simply, McGirr wishes to “explore the Right as a social movement” from the bottom up. To accomplish this, she investigated the lives of ordinary “‘kitchen table activists’ that have shaped the course of American politics, and yet, until now have lived in obscurity.” These are people who rejected the 1960s New Deal/Great Society vision in order to replace it with a normative social conservatism that was fused with anti-state libertarianism promising individual freedom through laissez faire free market capitalism. However, this fusion was never without contradiction and therefore often existed in an unstable equilibrium. According to McGirr, the process of identity formation on the conservative right became solidified when its members avoided “examining the internal contradictions within their own ideology” (163). She focuses on the obvious contradiction between traditional family values and free market capitalism that often disrupts and/or destroys families. In order to smooth over those contradictions, powerful symbols were used to help bridge the different ideologies and solidify a more unified group identity that formed the heart of an anti-liberal oppositional consciousness.

Most scholars focus on how ideas like Cold War anti-communism (American exceptionalism linked to an aggressively hawkish foreign policy) and traditionalism (protection of religion, nuclear family, and suburban or ethnic community) served to bind together dispersed sections of the right. Equally important is the role hyper-masculine popular cultural symbols, like Heston, played in this
process to smooth over the inherent contradictions in these different factions.

Ideas must be given shape often by personifying them in leaders who can articulate familiar and comforting narratives. Heston’s hyper-masculine bravado, rugged cowboy-individualism, combined with his mid-western plain speaking made him a favorite among many of the “kitchen table activists” McGirr researches. In fact, in a survey *Army Times* conducted in 1965, Heston was voted one of the six movie stars soldiers wished they could meet (Ross 289). Reviewing *Planet of the Apes* in 1968, Kael wrote, “he represents American power—and he has the profile of an eagle.” Historian Steven Ross argues, “The left had a much larger array of glamorous stars . . . Yet, few of them exude the same gravitas as Charlton Heston, especially with evangelicals who dominated the Christian Right” (298). This is what Nixon was banking on in recruiting Heston.

Writing in his journal on August 3, 1972, Heston said, “I made a significant change today. After a life time of voting for Democratic candidates for president . . . I felt impelled to vote for Richard Milhous Nixon for this fall” (392-393). Along with Sammy Davis Jr, Heston was recruited to lead the California chapter of Democrats for Nixon (Mason 171; Ross 292). During his endorsement press conference, he closed with a dramatic flourish declaring, “I know America is not spelled with a K” (393) underscoring the distinction he saw between himself and the New Politics faction of former SDSers who supported McGovern. In the late 1960s, factions on the radical left described in chapter 7 began distributing literature that spelled America with a k instead of a c—Amerika. This was meant to symbolically associate America with Nazi Germany (by substituting k, it Germanizes the spelling). It also at the same time associates it with the white supremacist terror of the Ku Klux Klan. In this case, it was often spelled “Amerikkka.”

Heston commanded such a following among the segments of the population Nixon wished to convert in his 1972 campaign that Nixon and his aids showered him with special privileges rarely given
to a non-politician at that time in an effort to recruit him. Ross provocatively claims:

In the former Soviet Union, a person’s status within the Communist Party could be measured by their placement on the May Day podium. The same held true with Republicans. Nixon accorded the recent convert [Heston] a place of honor at his inauguration by seating him between Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Casper Weinberger and the Reverend Billy Graham and having him read the Declaration of Independence at the ceremony. (293)

Heston also noted in his journal that he was invited to read a prayer for POWs at the Republican Convention earlier in the year. He was clearly impressed by the whole event, writing that it was an honor for him. He also revealed how the Republicans appealed to his ego, “I made a spectacular water transfer with Lydia [his wife] to a yacht full of governors on parade. A water-borne parade is superior to the kind I’ve done so often in the back of convertibles” (394). He was given privileges like this from New Right politicians all of his life. Like Reagan, Nixon, also being from California, knew how to appeal to movie star’s sense of ego. Heston was even given special “Q Clearance, the highest level of top secret clearance in the military” for the work he did for military recruitment advertisements during the 1980s (Raymond 217).

In a recent issue of *The Annual Review of Sociology*, a team of researchers wishing to apply insights from the New Political History to the field of sociology argue, “close study of the conservative case might lead to better understanding of the role of intellectuals in political movements—especially with respect to the construction of group identities” (333). They are particularly interested in the role of “popular” intellectuals because they are among the, “most skilled identity workers . . .” (333). Their framework is deeply resonant with Gramsci’s notion of organic intellectuals, specifically when they claim intellectuals help construct “a relatively circumscribed yet culturally flexible and emotionally
evocative collective identity” (333). It is this “emotionally evocative collective identity” that Heston was always good at helping develop. Heston was good at humanizing the Republican Party and humanizing the NRA later in his political career.

The concept of identity worker helps reveal how Heston aided conservatives most crucially by assisting them in reshaping their image among working people. After the 1960s, the Republican image went from being a bastion of arrogant disconnected rich elites, and lazy aristocrats to being a symbol of the natural representative of the “forgotten man” and traditional “Middle America.” Jonathon Rieder argues the rise of Nixon’s silent majority was aided by the rhetorical creation of “Middle America.” He claims, “Middle American did not really exist as a popular term before the 1960s” (244). Other phrases like “limousine liberal” were also created to help reshape conservatism image. Rieder says, “The language took because it jibed with the resentments of so many ordinary Americans” (244). This is partly because it was a language grounded in a republican vocabulary—specifically a producerist republican vocabulary.12

Heston’s personal biography matched well with the confluence of both a rhetorical appeal to Middle America as well as the frontier libertarianism held dear by “sunbelt warriors.” Heston grew up in rural, northern Michigan and later in suburban, northern Illinois, the son of a lumber mill worker and the step-son of a steel worker. According to Philips’ often-cited book, The Emerging Republican Majority, the “sunbelt” and the “suburban warriors” were a key constituencies in the conservative realignment. Dochuk argues, it was in the sunbelt suburb that the Right rallied its new consistencies, “Around a ‘color-blind’ discourse of suburban innocence that depicted residential segregation as the class-based outcome of meritocratic individualism rather than the unconstitutional product of structural racism” (983). It is here where the New Right, “mutated into an ideology of progress, where it shook free from

12 See footnote 3.
its elitist tendencies and transformed itself into a movement of the masses” (984). The rhetorical move of shifting the blame from structure to unvirtuous parasites which make virtuous people subservient is classic producerist republican framing.

The New Right was able to make a number of successful transformations that aided their success. First, they were able to transform their movement and the Republican Party away from an “economic-corporate consciousness” (narrow self-centered interest), to embrace a new strategy. This new strategy saw the importance of moving from being a party of anti-labor business executives to becoming a party that “embraced” working people and organized labor. They were able to reach a mass audience through the effective deployment of a popular Reformation-style political strategy that sought to organize working class people by listening to their concerns about the economic and cultural crisis of the late 1960s. They then framed that strategy with a rhetorical appeal to producerist republicanism, a residual common sense with deep roots going all the way back to the American Revolution. This allowed them to adopt a moralistic language as powerful as the New Left’s. One that valorized the working class people as virtuous producers, creators, and small business leaders instead of as “sellouts” as the New Left labeled them. This framing still exists today with the dichotomy of “makers” or “job creators” vs. “takers” popular among conservative politicians like Paul Ryan. Conservatives in today’s Republican Party are direct decedents of a populist class project from in the 1950s and 60s that was as powerful as FDR’s New Deal, with its vision capable of absorbing the whole society. They employed a republican vocabulary focused on how the little guy was being squeezed by a dictatorial state bureaucracy at the top and unvirtuous parasitical forces at the bottom. This social arrangement, according to Buckley, Jr., and the New Right, was being justified by “egghead intellectuals,” who did not share the American values from the Revolution of self-determination and freedom from subservience. This vocabulary allowed New Right conservatives to appear like they cared about the
stability of American culture, the prosperity of its working people, and America’s honor within the fight against communism.

*The New Majority: Nixon and Heston as Class Warriors*

Despite strong criticism from leaders within his own party like the Under Secretary of the Treasury, Charls Walker, and conservative media outlets like the *Wall Street Journal*, Nixon forged ahead with his New Majority strategy, pouring an unprecedented amount of money and resources into courting working class voters. Nixon grew up closer to the lower middle class and working class than any U.S. President in the 20th century (up until that time). Cowie argues that he had a deep respect for “the two fisted types” and he understood their values at a deep and visceral level, and he knew their sense of pride and dignity. But, it was Hamill’s article and the empirical research conducted by his Assistant Secretary of Labor, Jerome Rosow, issued in a groundbreaking report, “The Problem of the Blue Collar Worker,” which responded to and reflected on the consequences of Hamill’s argument. Rosow’s report confirmed Nixon’s intuition and gave him confidence to push his strategy with recalcitrant Republican Party officials and wealthy corporate supporters.

Nixon tasked advisor Chuck Colson to build their realignment strategy among blue-collar workers. In September of 1970, Colson wrote to Nixon’s Chief of Staff, H.R. Haldeman, accepting the responsibility. He wrote, “…regarding my taking responsibility for our political battle plan of winning over the union leadership and the rank and file, I will take this one on with

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13 This is the correct spelling of his name.
14 For a discussion of resistance to Nixon’s plan to court union leaders and working class voters, see Cowie 128-135. For a representative summary of Republican critiques of Nixon New Majority plan and a counter-argument advocating the traditional Republican “attack labor” plan, see “Charls Walker Memorandum for The President” November 30th 1970. For a representative criticism from conservative media, see *Wall Street Journal* June 30th 1970 and July 17th.
real delight.” Colson focused closely on the “forgotten man” theme that was more and more being ignored by a Democratic Party that was shifting away from New Dealers focused on labor and welfare reform (Stein; Cowie). First George Wallace, then Nixon, then Reagan took over the rhetoric of Roosevelt’s “forgotten man.” The appeal to working class populism—thought passé by New Politics Democrats—helped Nixon win one of the largest majorities in post-war politics, just eight years after Johnson was thought to have ushered in a permanent democratic majority. The massive turn out of so-called working class, “Reagan Democrats” in the 1980 election confirmed what Nixon’s brightest advisors saw as “the emerging republican majority” (Philips). The Rosow report created the moral framework spelling out the urgency of the culture of resentment bubbling among white workers. Kevin Philips’s research provided empirical data to support their strategy, and Colson and other Nixon advisors like Pat Buchanan provided the day-to-day leadership in the trenches painstakingly building support in trade unions, fraternal and civic organizations (Colson; Buchanan).

Studying Rosow’s report, “The Problem of the Blue Collar Worker” provides a view into the framing of Nixon’s realignment strategy. Indicating that a man in their 30s and 40s reaches “a plateau” where “he begins to be squeezed” by “raising costs” while facing “static purchasing power.” Rosow argues:

People in the blue-collar class are less mobile, less organized, and less capable of using legitimate means to either protect the status quo or secure changes in their favor. To a considerable extent, they feel like ‘forgotten people’—those for who

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15 See “Memo for Colson” September 8th 1970 for a review of Nixon tasking Colson with the blue collar strategy. See “Memo for H. R. Haldeman” September 14, 1970 for Colson’s acceptance.
the government and society have limited, if any, direct concern and little visible action. (7-8)

He argues in language resembling Hamill’s analysis, “These men are on a treadmill, chasing the illusion of higher living standards… They are overripe for a political response to the pressing needs they feel so keenly” (4). The plain fact is Nixon saw how the working class was “overripe for a political response” when the majority of the leaders in SDS did not.

What were the causes of blue collar frustration? Rosow details several:

- Blue collar workers are “…first to feel the effects of an increase in unemployment, feel most threatened by automation…” (7).
- “Often their wages are only a notch or so above the liberal state’s welfare payments. Yet they are excluded from social programs targeted at the disadvantaged—medical aid, housing, job training, Headstart programs, legal aid, and the like. As taxpayers, they support these programs with now visible relief—no visible share” (8)
- “Economic immobility blocks flight” from “crime in the inner city” (8).
- “Low status of blue-collar work…” [due to the growth of education]. “Their jobs have become a last resort, instead of decent, respected careers…This attack has been so strong, so emotional and so unfounded that the workers have suffered a loss of self-respect…” (9).
- Surprisingly, Rosow also includes minority workers. “…there are some two-million minority-group males…who share many of these same problems as whites in their income class. This non-white group also shares the same concerns as white workers for law and order, and other middle class values. Many have moved from
subemployment to low-income entry-level jobs, but they now feel blocked from further opportunity.”

Reflecting on the 1968 election, Chuck Colson reveals his understanding that Nixon’s victory did not rely on a “natural majority” but instead on a fragile coalition that needs constant organizing. His September 14th 1970 memo to Halderman argued: “We have succeeded in splitting large parts of the labor movement away from the Democratic Party. We have not won them to the Republican Party… the ground is plowed to bring them into the fold, but there is much which has to be done.” Colson defended the President against attacks from members of his own party who were doubtful of a realignment strategy which included organized labor, their traditional enemy. He repeatedly argued, “There is very little to support the view that we need to attack labor; on the contrary, labor’s rank and file may represent our most promising political opportunity” (Colson “Charls Walker’s memo of November 30th regarding labor”).

As I have argued throughout this chapter, part of the New Right’s success was in recruiting popular cultural figures to popularize their movement. Heston was not only a popular actor with masculine bravado who spoke in a familiar republican vocabulary, he was also a union leader. Therefore, he fit in nicely with Colson’s plans to “build labor’s support for us [Nixon ‘72 campaign] on critical national security issues” (“Charls Walker’s memo…”). In other words, Heston combined all of the elements Nixon was aiming to portray in his New Majority Strategy: hyper-masculinity, anti-communism, pro-Cold War, and pro-labor. Academics studying the culture wars in the 80s and 90s have focused too much on non-material cultural values with a conservative Christian focus (what is sometimes listed as abortion, guns, gays, and god). There is no doubt that the evangelical movement is an important aspect to the realignment story, and Heston had sway among this population because of his portrayal of Moses in the blockbuster
movie *The Ten Commandments*. However, the right has been even more successful at convincing large sections of the working class (especially white working class) that the culturally-based but ultimately economic value of social mobility and economic independence is more available to them if they vote Republican than if they vote Democrat. In other words, you have a greater chance of independence through wealth creation with the Republican Party.

Despite Cowie’s otherwise extremely persuasive argument that the New Right focused on culture rather than economy to win the white working class, by using republicanism as a lens by which to view the hegemonic struggle, it becomes clear that not only was the New Right successful at winning the cultural war of position (as Cowie argues), but their cultural argument was connected to the promise of economic security. Thus, they fused the cultural and the economic in a compelling way to forge a national-popular collective will. It is evident after 40 years that the New Right’s promise of independence was an illusion that only transferred wealth to the upper one percent (Harvey); nevertheless, it was a powerful illusion that promised the struggling, frustrated workers a better world at a time when large sections of the New Left were only talking about shame and apocalypse. The answer to the question how did the left lose Charlton Heston, one of its most valuable organic intellectuals, might also be the answer to how they lost the war of position in the large social revolution of the 1960s. The Right ended up absorbing the lessons from the Old Left and articulating a more powerful common sense that appealed to a greater number of people than the left did.

While it is clear the New Right targeted working class people with a culturally sensitive strategy by listening to their fears and concerns, Democrats in the 1970s had almost nothing to offer the working class in the way of cultural sensitivity or economic recovery, except for warmed over promises of a weak-kneed Keynesian redistribution plan that failed to address the
economic crisis of the 1970s. The Democrats did not respond to economic issues of self-respect, and the working class’s fear of subservience (Harvey; Stein; Cowie). Even worse, unlike many New Right Republicans, they did not offer promises of neighborhood security, prosperity, and a national defense that spoke to the fear-ridden desires of the working class (here I would include the multi-racial working class) facing a swelling crime rate in the urban areas of America. Particularly, throughout the 1970s, instead of an industrial policy that would lift the working class out of it’s de-industrial morass, Democrats capitulated to free trade and globalization (Stein). Additionally, there was no adequate defense of full employment, instead they gave into anti-inflation monetarists (Cowie Stayin’...). Lastly, they offered no protection of unorganized workers’ right to unionize, and only indifference at the stunning attack on organized labor and the decline of union membership often perpetuated by organized labor officials themselves (Fletcher). Lastly, they offered limited understanding of the working poor and under-employed who labored at service and contingent jobs; they only offered illusionary promises of a burgeoning “information economy” (Piven and Cloward). If, as historian Alan Brinkley argued (Ch 3), post-war New Deal liberalism transformed itself after 1937 by focusing on “providing a healthy environment in which the corporate world could flourish and in which the economy could sustain ‘full employment,’” after 1972 Democrats dropped even their mild commitment to full employment (Cowie; Stein).

I am not suggesting that if the New Left turned its attention to organizing the working class in the 1960s and 70s, that all the blue-collar workers who voted for Nixon would have been automatically recruited to SDS. I am arguing, however, that a strategy that considers working people hopeless and irredeemable will never recruit them to any organization or vision of a better world. The massive strike wave that happened in the early 1970s—from the enormous 1970 Postal worker strike to the 1972
Lordstown UAW strike, to the successive teachers’ strikes throughout major metropolitan areas to public employees winning the right to unionize—could have used the energy and the help of New Leftists. What if instead of the small factions who entered the struggle, tens of thousands entered? (Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow). If a long-term base building strategy took hold in SDS in the early 1960s, a critical mass of leaders would have been well placed with enough seniority and connections with organic leaders within the rank and file labor movement to provide needed leadership to the largest strike wave since the immediate aftermath of WWII. Instead of actualizing this possibility, a sizeable percentage of SDSers either dropped out of politics altogether, or were recruited instead to the New Politics movement that backed McGovern, Gary Hart, and Jimmy Carter. Each of these politicians represented a new Democratic Party unconnected and unconcerned with labor, who happily oversaw, as Gary Hart put it in his 1974 campaign stump speech, “The End of the New Deal” (Perlstein 317; Stein; Fletcher).

First-generation SDS memoirists talk about the Weathermen as losing faith in organizing and turning towards terrorism. Few people acknowledge that the SDSers who ran back to the Democratic Party in the 1970s, forming the New Politics coalition inside of the party, also suffered from a similar deterministic moralism the foreclosed the possibility of recruiting white working people. I argue the SDSers who embedded their activism in the post-New Deal Democratic Party were as lost as the Weathermen committed to apocalyptic urban terrorism. I am not trying to make a moral equivalence between the two groups because that is indefensible, but while the tactics are markedly different in important ways, the same lack of faith in independent, mass organizing animates both strategies. Instead of believing that masses of people can be recruited to a radical politics, some SDSers descended into shock and awe terrorism and spectacle, while others descended into becoming junior partners in a re-engineered, less reform-minded, more centrist Democratic Party. A large percentage (perhaps the
majority) dropped out of politics altogether.

In this way, New Politics was a continuation of a pattern of failure leftists have been repeating since at least the aftermath of the Civil War: continually failing to mobilize the potentiality of organic crises with a popular mass-based organizing strategy. It was true of the Knights of Labor in the 1870s; it was true of the CPUSA in the 1930s, and it was true of SDS in the 1960s. As historian Mike Davis, argues about significant portions of SDS folding themselves into the New Politics movement in the 1972-1984 time period, “Not since the meridian of the Popular Front during World War Two, when the Browderite Communist Party attempted to dissolve itself into the leftwing of the New Deal, had the majority of the American left been so fully submerged in the Democratic Party (“The Lesser Evil…”). The swell of this capitulation by leaders in the New Left in the 1970s turned into a tidal wave that still drowns working and poor people today. The same New Leftists continue to support the Democratic Party (albeit from a more critical perspective than the average Democrat) as it helps unravel the already tenuous safety net and promotes legislation that protects and profits the corporate elite. When President Carter failed to support full employment legislation in the mid-1970s (Cowie), when Jesse Jackson forfeited his grassroots campaign in the mid-1980s and re-entered the centrist fold (Davis), when President Clinton “ended welfare as we know it” and deregulated the banks, or when President Obama failed to prosecute a single banker or war criminal, none of these actions brought the full force and weight of the organized left like the outpouring of protest world-wide when President Bush invaded Iraq. History has shown, Democrats will eventually pass many of the most egregious corporate-backed policies not passed by Republicans, with only mild interference from leftists. Reagan could never have passed NAFTA the way Clinton did, nor could Bush have passed the Trans-Pacific Partnership the way Obama will almost certainly do.
While in-hindsight this pattern is clearly visible, one union leader saw the writing on the wall in the 1970s. In 1978, Douglas Frasier, the President of the United Auto Workers, wrote a letter resigning from President Carter’s Labor-Management Advisory Group. The letter proved both shocking and prophetic. In the face of the 1978 defeat of even watered down labor law reform legislation, an outraged Frasier wrote:

I believe leaders of the business community, with few exceptions, have chosen to wage a one-sided class war today in this country—a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society.

In a resurrection of the 1930s class-war rhetoric that was purged from most unions during the McCarthy era and the long cold war, he concluded by declaring:

There is no point to continue sitting down at Labor-Management Group meetings . . . when we on the labor side have so little in common with those across the table. I cannot sit there seeking unity with the leaders of American industry, while they try to destroy us and ruin the lives of the people I represent.

His closing paragraph was a poetic call for renewed grassroots organizing reminiscent of proletarian literature:

I would rather sit with the rural poor, the desperate children of urban blight, the victims of racism, and working people seeking a better life than with those whose religion is the status quo, whose goal is profit, and whose hearts are cold.

Many labor historians mark this speech as the end point of the, golden age of the post-war business-labor compact (Cowie). By the time Frasier mustered the courage to pen these words, the writing was already on the wall.
I am referencing Frasier’s speech because I think it is an astonishing example of a liberal leader who was deeply invested in the New Deal post-war consensus, steeping back and painfully admitting how the unending compromises made to insure this consensus left organized labor “flat on its back” to quote a famous labor lawyer (Geoghegan). I also quote Frasier at length because his phrase “a one-sided class war” is the clearest summary of our current era of the corporate-led assault on working and poor Americans.

Today, when the calls for compromise and bipartisanship are issued from almost all of our liberal leaders—especially president Obama—along with calls to reestablish a version of neo-Keynesianism or another New Deal, it helps us to recall the frustrated conclusions of a veteran labor organizer whose activism stretched all the way back to the Depression. Frasier’s resignation letter reminds us of the short-lived and ultimately fictitious nature of the post-war business-labor compact, the so called “Treaty of Detroit.” The economic crisis of the 1970s gave the New Right and their corporate backers the crisis they needed to aggressively shred the social compact with their “shock doctrine” of neo-liberal economic reforms that hollowed out the New Deal and transferred massive amounts of wealth from working people to the very rich, leaving us in a situation today where there is vast poverty for the many, a shrinking middle for some, and unimaginable wealth for the very few (Klein; Harvey). Organized labor had lost the respect of its rank and file that the New Left had long ago abandoned as irredeemable. The New Right became the inheritors of a sizeable percentage of the New Deal coalition.

All of this leaves us with the question, have we learned the necessary lessons from the 1960s to re-build a better radical movement in the 21st century? I hope my dissertation serves as a vital intervention in how we think about the 1960s so that we can learn how to fight against the “one-sided class war?”
CHAPTER IX. CONCLUSION

…In my time streets led to the quicksand.
Speech betrayed me to the slaughterer.
There was little I could do. But without me
The rulers would have been more secure. This was my hope.
So the time passed away
Which on earth was given me.
For we knew only too well:
Even the hatred of squalor
Makes the brow grow stern.
Even anger against injustice
Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.
But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly.

-Bertolt Brecht, "To Posterity"1

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long possessed that he is set free - he has set himself free - for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

— James Baldwin, from Nobody Knows My Name

The 1960s, particularly when one thinks about the civil rights legislation, is usually remembered as the realization of freedom and liberty for all members of American society enshrined in the founding documents—the high tide of a reform-minded liberalism (Milkis and Mileur). Martin Luther King, Jr. who founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1955 with its motto “To Save the Soul of America,” famously declared in 1963 “I have a dream” and became one of the brightest symbols of America’s promise of freedom. This is the story that Americas like to hear about themselves—bold, confident, and forward-looking. However, in 1967, he said in an interview “I must confess, the dream I had that day has in many points turned

1 A poem posted on the wall of the Newark Community Union, one of the many northern urban Education and Research Projects (ERAP) of SDS between 1963 and 1966 (Sale 98). Tom Hayden also prominently featured this poem in his most recent 2015 memoir (Listen Yankee…). Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a revolutionary German poet, playwright, and theater director.
into a nightmare” (King “NBC News Interview”). In fact, King’s last sermon, penned shortly before his assignation in April of 1968, was titled “Why America May Go to Hell” (West The Radical King). The gap evident between the hope of 1955 and the frustration of 1968 is all the more powerful coming from Dr. King. Americans receive powerful reminders every year retelling select aspects of King’s dream on his federal holiday, but we know almost nothing about his belief that American had descended into a nightmare. The same way a vast majority of Americans have an incomplete understanding of Dr. King, we have an incomplete understanding of the 1960s in general that hinders our ability to learn from the failures of radical movements in order to build more effective movements for the 21st century.

By embracing a sunny image of Dr. King and his dream, historian Nikhil Pal Singh says we are locking ourselves in a “civil mythology.” This mythology portrays a top-down, teleological story of the eventual triumph of “liberal progress,” where a one-sided picture of Martin Luther King, Jr is viewed as a god-like figure who in collaboration with other “great” liberal men like President Lyndon Johnson willed the civil rights legislation into being by the force of their individual personalities and the power of the “American liberal creed.” Singh calls this type of narrative “central to a civic mythology of racial progress” that sees the civil rights legislation passed in 1964 and 1965 as the “completion of a destiny” rather than the product of painstaking grassroots organizing and social movement building. A narrative of destiny perpetuates an illusion by focusing more on self-congratulation for becoming who we always were rather than on self-confrontation to overcome who we were in order to become something better.

I mention Martin Luther King, Jr. because he is the most widely-known social movement leader today from the 1960s. Our inability to break through the dangerous civil mythology built
around his persona to see the more radical King and the strategic politics he supported towards
the end of his life is emblematic of the state of radical movements today (West; Honey). In a
counter-intuitive sense, the more “famous” King becomes in the mainstream—now with his own
statute (and gift shop) in the Washington Mall—the more we are stripped of his strategic
understanding of politics and his awareness of the failure of the Civil Rights movement that
would help contemporary social movements. The same can be said about SDS. Despite the
numerous recent 50th anniversary celebrations of various foundational events like the completion
of the Port Huron Statement, we are still trapped in a civil mythology that harms young activists
trying to find their way.

I introduced this dissertation with former Weatherman Mark Rudd reflecting on why SDS
failed in the 1960s not because they were too radical, but because they choose the wrong
radicalism and the wrong strategy to popularize their revolutionary dreams of a post-liberal
America. Unlike so many memoirs discussed in this dissertation, he was not nostalgically
harking back to a pre-revolutionary moment in SDS history that we need to return to as soon
as possible. The man who was famous for saying in 1968 “Organizing is just another word for
going slow,” has become one of the most important voices in the 21st century critiquing SDS for
their failure to organize the masses with a slow-going, effective strategy. But, it is when Rudd
applies his critique of SDS to the present moment that we begin to understand the damaging
consequences to current activists as a result of not being taught the lessons of failed radical
movements in the 1960s. Reflecting during the anti-war movement in 2003, Rudd argued:

But there’s been at least a thirty year gap between the last successful mass social
movements and young people now. A generation, maybe two, has come of age
without knowing what organizing is, or even knowing what questions to ask.
Most young activists think organizing means making the physical arrangements for a rally or benefit concert. And the words base-building and coalition are not even in the lexicon. (“Organizing vs. Activism”)

Rudd’s critique of the present state of left organizing is in some ways even more haunting than his criticisms of SDS. It is more haunting because with nearly 50 years since the collapse of SDS, one would assume that we have learned valuable lessons, and that we would not be repeating their same mistakes. Sadly, when viewing the most popular movements today, this assumption is false.

It is important to review several problems contemporary social movements struggle with that are directly descendent from or are exacerbated by a poor understanding of the failures in the 1960s. After briefly listing each problem, I will elaborate further below. First, instead of trying to understand the 1960s, most contemporary activists have a poor historical understanding of radical American history and an attitude that everything has to be new, so “why should we learn from past movements?” A friend once told me at an anti-war study group, why should we study losers.” Second, instead of building independent mass-based movements, we still allow our organizations to be absorbed by the Democratic Party and many New Leftists who took the New Politics path are still beholden to what many call “lesser evilism.” Third, instead of understanding the New Right as a social movement that actively recruits the white working class, every election (including the 2014 election) we are barraged by narratives that attribute the causality of the Democrats losing the white working class vote by 30 or more points to the assumption that they are naturally conservative, easily manipulated, and therefore will hopelessly vote against their interests. Will we just keep repeating the headline during the Bush 2004 re-election “How can 59,054,087 people be so DUMB?” Four, instead of learning from the failure
of focoism in the late 1960s, many young anarchist-influenced activists seem to still be captivated by the Weathermen. This was the conclusion Mark Rudd drew from attending several screenings of the Weathermen documentary in 2003 (“Che and Me”). Five, instead of learning how the New Left could have benefited from a base-building strategy, many movements have doubled down on a pre-figurative politics that is still afraid of leadership and institution-building and seeks anti-leadership and spontaneity. From the anti-globalization movements to Occupy Wall Street to local community gardens, the cry for leaderless movements just gets louder as the speed at which movements in the 21st century collapse becomes quicker. Lastly, instead of seeking to combine the lessons of pre-figurative and strategic politics into an effective synthesis, we still do not know how to operationalize participatory democracy in an institutional form that empowers people rather than annoying them, as the remarkable success then spectacular failure of Occupy revealed. A review of these problems will allow the reader to understand how the lessons found in this dissertation could be applied to our present moment.

The trajectory of post-New Left social movements in the United States does not indicate that we have learned the lessons we needed to learn from the breakdown of the New Left. Just like SDSers in the late 1950s and early 1960s knew very little about the CPUSA—even if they were “red diaper babies,” activists today from the anti-globalization movements to the anti-war movements, from the environmental justice movements to the Occupy Wall Street movement to the immigrant rights, police accountability, and prison reform movements know very little about the 1960s or other radical American movements. Furthermore, due to a number of factors, many young activists do not care to talk to movement veterans.

I admit for most of my teenage years and early twenties, I fell into this trap. If you were to ask me then what an older SDSer could contribute to an organizing meeting, I would have said
“they could shut up and go away.” More specifically, I would have said, “they could stop telling young people how much better it was in the 1960s, and how inferior our movements are today.” As even ex-Weatherwoman Bernardine Dohrn admits “It is clear that the Sixties, which was never really ‘The Sixties,’ is being wielded as a bludgeon against today's young risktakers; a barrier, a legendary era which can never be equaled today” (“Letter to Young Activists: Beware Sixties Nostalgia”). Bad experiences like these made me and most young activists not interested in listening to my parent’s generation of leftists.

But, I admit, I was wrong. By exaggerating successes of the 1960s in ham-fisted nostalgic ways, many 1960s activists were just trying to jump start the radical imagination of younger activists that had been crushed by the “collective sadness” of the 1980s. What I learned is that young activists need to give older activists permission to be critical about the 1960s (and steer them back on course if they get bitter or fall into recrimination. No easy task, trust me). Because so many people dropped out of politics in the 1970s and 1980s and became deeply dejected (including my parents), and because the New Right’s stunning ascendency in the 1980s disrupted any functioning continuity between the 1960s and the present, when young activists began to build large movements at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s (most specifically the anti-globalization and anti-war movements among others), the assumption was that we were on our own.

Little did we know, this was exactly the same situation that SDSers found themselves in after the 1950s, and the same situation that LID members found themselves in after the first Red Scare in the 19 teens and 20s. SDS had to overcome an age of McCarthyism and Cold War paranoia; today’s activists have to overcome Cold War triumphalism from the fall of the Soviet Union and a free market fundamentalism where it was repeatedly said “there is no alternative.”
SDS had to contend with Daniel Bell and his “end of ideology” thesis, and we had to contend with Francis Fukuyama and his “end of history” thesis. They had to deal with the collapse of the old CP-led left suffering from what C. Wright Mills called a “failure of nerve.” We had to deal with a humiliated and dejected left where Zizek says “Though it is easy to make fun of Fukuyama’s notion of the End of History, the majority today is Fukuyamaist. Liberal-democratic capitalism is accepted as the finally found formula of the best possible society; all one can do is to render it more just, tolerant and so on” (“How to Begin from the Beginning”). Young activist today could have so clearly benefited from veteran 60s activist’s advice and guidance to help us steer clear of the pitfalls they fell into repeatedly.

But, the advice we received from veteran SDSers (several who woke back up during the late 90s and early 2000s like Rip Van Winkle), when it was not simply recrimination and nostalgia, was, with a few notable exceptions, finger waving and chiding reminiscent of what SDSers endured from the leadership of the League for Industrial Democracy in the late 50s and early 60s. For example, Todd Gitlin wrote an advice book during the enormous anti-Iraq war movement in 2003 titled Letters to a Young Activist. It is filled with the kind of paternalism that closes down productive inter-generational activist dialog. He writes “You agree to indulge my lecturing on matters I didn't quite understand until I was older than you, and I make every effort to connect to your passions and objections, to take your arguments seriously, even though you're too young to have had the experience I draw on.” As Naomi Klein, representing a new generation of left leaders, admits in her review of his book “…we activists, the young and not so, certainly do need advice, both practical and philosophical, not just about how to stop future attacks like the one we just witnessed in Iraq but about how to build genuinely broad-based, effective movements.” She continues lending further support for an argument I have tried to
make throughout this dissertation: “Gitlin, sadly, has little interest in tackling the big questions facing activists today. His letters amount to little more than mushy 1960s, 101 nostalgia and nasty, one-sided attacks on everyone who has ever disagreed with him.” Even worse, his book is filled with a self-righteous anti-radicalism—throwing cold water on young people’s utopian visions and begging them to “work within the system”—namely the Democratic Party. Rather than listen to their dreams of freedom, many former New Leftists are telling young people to limit their dreams. One of the largest ways they are doing this is by embracing the very thing they built their movement critiquing: the New Deal.

Despite the fact that the center-left in the United States is in desperate need of a new common sense to galvanize the anti-austerity/anti-neoliberal movements much like leftists in Venezuela, Bolivia, Spain, Greece, and Great Britain are in the process of building, that does not stop many former New Leftists and current social democrats in the US from pining away for what they call “the golden age of American liberalism.” Instead of investing time and energy into inventing a new theory to mobilize the population, many of our brightest intellectuals on the left spend their time trying to re-animate a moribund New Deal. It is not surprising that stalwart Democratic Party intellectuals like Robert Reich and Paul Krugman have written books wishing for a return to mid-century New Deal liberalism (Reich Supercapitalism…; Krugman The Great Unraveling…). However, it is surprising that many of our young, bright left intellectuals as well as some of the most stalwart New Leftists are also participating in this project. In several of his recent books (Liberalism for a New Century, When America Was Great, and The Cause) Kevin Mattson, a young intellectual historian who has explored the failure of the New Left perceptively (Intellectuals in Action…), has attempted to revitalize New Deal liberalism for a new generation. For this effort, intellectual historian Andrew Hartman and others have designated him the “new
Author Schlesinger” and reviewers have talked about *The Cause* co-written with Eric Alterman, Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress and columnist for the *Nation*, as “the new *Vital Center.*” Mattson openly admits that his projects aims at reviving “mid-century liberalism.” He says “Schlesinger’s challenge to liberals in the *Vital Center* in 1949 is the challenge facing liberals in 2006.” “The midcentury liberalism we recover here [in his edited volume] draws upon the accomplishments of the New Deal; though it believes in free markets, it does not believe free markets are the sole guarantors of freedom” (6). Mattson is engaged in defending the rightward drift of the Democratic Party after Reagan’s election and the ascendancy of the neoliberal Democratic Leadership Council coming to a fruition in Clinton’s two-term presidency and later Obama’s election.

Mattson is in good company. According to cultural historian Eric Lott in his recent book *The Disappearing Liberal Intellectual*, he argues that after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992 a formidable “new liberal cadre of writers and academics” wrote hundreds of articles for venerable liberal publications and dozens of academic books arguing for a “tame version of social democracy” (25). While the philosopher Richard Rory is the most famous of this cadre, Lott names Todd Gitlin, Martha Nussbawn, Paul Berman, Sean Wilentz, Henry Louis Gates Jr among many others that advocate a “reinvention of what Author Schlesinger Jr. in 1949 called “the vital center” in the form of what Michael Lind has dubbed the “radical center” (2). Arguing from a “radical democratic” position, Lott sees these new liberal intellectual formations “as little more than political complacency . . . A kind of ‘progressive osteoarthritis’ of the mind—a boneheaded degeneration of the radical spirit and one of the chief obstacles to a regeneration of social and political life in the twenty-first century United States” (2). Journalist Chris Hedges comes to a similar conclusion as Lott in his book *The Death of the Liberal Class.*
But, it is not only social democratic liberals that take this line. Tom Hayden himself has recently argued for a “new” New Deal. After spending most of his SDS years arguing the “New Deal reforms were stagnating and insufficient,” he concluded his 2012 keynote speech celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Port Huron Statement by finally claiming “It is time for a participatory New Deal to bring the banks and corporations under the regulations and reforms they have escaped through runaway globalization (Inspiring… 27). Todd Gitlin takes a similar line in his most recent book *Occupy Nation*.

But while many left intellectuals are trying to resuscitate the New Deal, it should be clear they are not trying to resuscitate all of the New Deal coalition. In their vision of a “new” New Deal, certain traditional constituents are clearly not deemed worthy of organizing. A look at the Obama’s 2012 re-election strategy provides an unambiguous view on how the 1970s New Politics strategy of abandoning the white working class in favor of the highly educated and/or suburban middle class in coalition with Latino/as and African Americans is still the operating principle of much of the center-left in the United States. After interviewing several key Democratic strategists/pollsters and reviewing their strategy papers,² New York Times columnist Thomas Edsall concluded:

> For decades, Democrats have suffered continuous and increasingly severe losses among white voters. But preparations by Democratic operatives for the 2012 election make it clear for the first time that the party will explicitly abandon the white working class. All pretense of trying to win a majority of the white working

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² Edsall interviewed or quoted Stanley Greenberg, James Carville, Ruy Teixeira, and John Halpin. See Teixeira and Halpin’s “The Path to 270: Demographics versus Economics in the 2012 Presidential Election,” Greenberg and Carville’s “Seizing the New Progressive Common Ground” for a review of Obama’s re-election strategy that excluded the white working class.
class has been effectively jettisoned in favor of cementing a center-left coalition made up, on the one hand, of voters who have gotten ahead on the basis of educational attainment — professors, artists, designers, editors, human resources managers, lawyers, librarians, social workers, teachers and therapists — and a second, substantial constituency of lower-income voters who are disproportionately African-American and Hispanic. (My Emphasis, “The Future of the Obama Coalition”)

They hold this opinion despite the fact that white working class voters still comprise a slight majority of the overall electorate—51 percent, down from 71 percent in 1980 (Griffin, Frey, Teixeira).

During the 2012 presidential campaign, one would expect New Right activist and long-time conservative columnist George Will to write “White voters without college education — economically anxious and culturally conservative — were called ‘Reagan Democrats’ when they were considered only seasonal Republicans because of Ronald Reagan. Today they are called the Republican base” (“Suddenly, a Fun Candidate”). However, it is shocking when left scholars and activists—that agree with Will on almost nothing—agree with him that the white working class is the natural constituency of the Republican Party, rather than thinking about the historical formation of the New Majority coalition and more importantly thinking about ways it could be disarticulated through effective organizing. Even Democratic demographer and election strategist, Ruy Teixeira, who in 2001 wrote America’s Forgotten Majority: Why The White Working Class Still Matters, and pushed back against the Democratic Party abandoning white workers, has recently had doubts about this strategy citing the growth of young educated voters, single moms, Latino/as that increasingly make of the bases of the Democratic Party (“Democrats'
Problem: White, Working-Class Voters”). But, his analysis rests on the false assumption, proven wrong by the last chapter’s analysis of Nixon’s New Majority Strategy, that white working class voters are only interested in economic issues that the Democratic Party has failed to deliver for that group of downwardly mobile citizens.

Even worse, many of the most vibrant youth-led social movements today from anti-globalization to environmentalism to Occupy to immigrant rights still have a deep suspicion of organized labor in general and the white working class specifically. For example, at the same time that Occupy Wall Street was shifting the nation’s discussion on income inequality, many mid-western states (namely Wisconsin and Ohio) went through difficult battles over “right to work” legislation. In Ohio, protest against Issue 2 brought together teachers, police officers, nurses, and firefighters in a first-ever coalition around protecting the right to unionize and collectively bargain. The Occupy movement had little to nothing to do with this movement, and labor’s efforts to reach out to Occupy were in many ways admirable, but did not have enough follow through or enough fertile ground to grow. Organized labor has ignored unemployed and under-employed young people for so long that their efforts were held in deep suspicion by Occupy activists rather than viewed as a vital act of solidarity. Even worse, when organized labor decisively fought back and won a landslide election against right to work in Ohio, they did not use that outpouring of goodwill to organize the unorganized with the aid of the Occupy movement. The same can be said about Wisconsin. This is among the reasons why Scott Walker and John Kasich won their re-elections as governors.

In fact, the Occupy Wall Street movement represents a good subject of analysis to think about where the left is today compared to SDS 50 years ago. Without a clear understanding of the failures of SDS, we still seek, like SDS in the 1960s, leaderless movements. When Wini
Breines wrote her important study of the New Left in the early 1980s, *Community and Organization in the New Left 1962-1968*, her thesis was mainly correct: that activists in the 1970s to 1980s did not fully appreciate the pre-figurative and anti-authoritarian forms of organizing at the heart of SDS projects like ERAP. However, today, with over 30-years of anarchist-influenced organizing, it would be hard to maintain her assertion today. If the 1980s and 1990 represented the rise of the New Right to hegemony and the decline of the New Left into dejection and depression along with the final disintegration of the Old Left with the fall of the Soviet Union, it also represented the time when small but dedicated groups of anarchists, anti-authoritarian activists, and other autonomous groups held a space open for the radical left.\(^3\) Internationally, organizations like the Zapatistas, theorists like Michael Hardt and Tony Negri and John Holloway, and movements like the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil or smaller movements in the shanty-towns in South Africa and Argentina introduced a horizontal form of organizing that did not seek state power, but rather sought to unleash the power of the multitude in the “cracks” or “interstices” of capitalism (Sitrin; Hardt and Negri; Holloway). These movements and theorists had and continue to have a profound impact on current activists. Their impact was felt especially deeply in the anti-globalization and Occupy movements.

While there is still a wide base of support for leaderless, horizontal movements that seek non-state solutions to the problems presented by neo-liberalism and austerity, and while some very inspiring organizing has been done along these lines, several long-time anarchist and anarchist-influenced activists are beginning to question whether this form of organizing is sufficient to defeat neo-liberalism, especially in the aftermath of the failure of the anti-

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\(^3\) See *Z Magazine* for a detailed history of this trend.
globalization, anti-war, and Occupy Wall Street movements. They are beginning to question a movement more interested in spectacle and spontaneity than on strategic organizing.

For example, after over ten years of involvement in anti-globalization and anarchist activism, Ryan Harvey had a deep soul-searching moment in the 2003 Miami G8 demonstrations when he witnessed several of his fellow anarchist activists severely beaten and carted away by a hyper-militarized police force. In a 2009 confessional article “Are We Addicted to Rioting” that became wildly circulated and debated in left-movement circles, he confessed “…It also became clear that our actions in the streets were not usually connected to any real strategy to achieve change, no goals that we could attain, no real meaning for being there at that time.” Like the Weathermen, he claimed rather than building a mass movement “…We convinced ourselves that we, the anarchists, were the movement. We were the ones who were important.” The obsession with spectacle, with hyper-militant actions, of spontaneity, connects well with Zizek’s criticisms of Occupy Wall Street. He argues:

…one of the great dangers the [Occupy] protesters are facing: the danger that they will fall in love with themselves, with the nice time they are having in the ‘occupied’ places. Carnivals come cheap – the true test of their worth is what remains the day after, how our normal daily life will be changed. (“Occupy Wall Street: what is to be done next?”)

Ryan Harvey came to the conclusion that many anarchists criticized him for:

…I am no longer lending my support to these acts [militant acts of property destruction and violence] if they are not solidly rooted in an organizational and movement-wide foundation, supported by large numbers of people who understand their purpose and the steps to take afterwards. If we are ‘stepping it
up’ or ‘escalating’ without the massive numbers of people that we were
previously standing with, we are losing people, and are thus destined to fail.
Likewise, Zizek writes “... The protesters should fall in love with hard and patient work – they
are the beginning, not the end. (Zizek “Occupy Wall Street: what is to be done next?”). It is the
same as when Ryan Harvey writes:

...we have a lot of work to do, and most of it is not going to get done in the
streets. It’s going to get done on the doorsteps, the libraries, the churches, the
labor halls, the schools, the military bases, the parks, the prisons, the abortion
clinics, the neighborhood associations, the PTAs.

In a radical left that has been riven by sectarianism for over 150 years, it is very interesting to
note when avowed anarchists and avowed Marxists agree.

This movement towards a fusionist radical politics is alive in many different projects.
Most notably in several recent scholarly collaborations that have drawn a much larger audience
than anyone expected. Andrej Grubacic, among the most well-known international anarchist
intellectual activists joined forces with Staughton Lynd, among the most famous New Left
historians and activists to write their collaborative book *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations
on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History* it packed in audiences from the Left Forum to the
World Social Forum. The same could be said about The Communist Hypothesis, a series of
wildly successful conferences that brought together Anarchists, Marxists, and Autonomists in a
compelling collaboration around what a 21st century communism would look like. Something is
happening.

The time might be right for a grand synthesis built around a fusionist strategy that links
the various different anti-corporate movements to the environmental movements to the racial and
gender justice movements to the anti-austerity movements. The vague outlines of that strategy
are forming, but as was the case with the Occupy Wall Street movement, it needs to go beyond a
loudly articulated populism that borrows heavily from an outmoded republican vocabulary that
has never proven to bring success to the left. Cornel West’s powerful denunciations of
plutocracy and moral bankruptcy and Bernie Sander’s condemnations of corporate greed and
income inequality (to note just two popular examples), are wonderful, but they will only bring us
so far. In order for it to be possible to build an popular movement that thinks beyond reform
liberalism, that grounds itself in a critique of racism and sexism and homophobia, that movement
must think beyond the narrow confines of republican morality and inequality to the larger
structural critique of capitalism and exploitation. Just the same as the “black lives matter”
movement boldly asserts that police violence against unarmed people of color is not the product
of “rogue” “bad apples,” but rather the product of a bad system, greedy Wall Street executives do
not have a personality flaw, but instead are agents within a system that is driven to maximize
profit.

If we continue to shout at the Wall Street executives and throw bricks at the windows of
banks, we are participating in a moralistic catharsis that feels good and might bring some
meaningful temporary reforms, but by spending all of our energy on these spontaneous actions,
we miss the larger opportunity the agitate, educate, and organize masses of people to imagine a
post-liberal, anti-capitalist modernity that thinks beyond stock markets and bankers and
exploitation. This is the only real path to achieve liberty and justice for all.
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APPENDIX A. METHODS

While I spent a great deal of time in my dissertation explaining and defending my Gramscian theoretical framework, I did not discuss my methodological framework for collecting and evaluating historical information. This section will discuss my methodology. I will explain the typical methods of intellectual history and cultural history as well as why and how I decided to combine them for this study. But, further, I will defend my method as superior to the methods used by a majority of the participant-observer histories that make up the vast majority of the scholarship on SDS and also some of the contemporary studies. And, additionally, I will explain why this eventually led me to Gramsci for methodological guidance. The purpose of this section is to provide a guide to young scholars like myself who would like to conduct research on social movements in the mid-20th century.

At first thought, it would seem an easy task to collect information on the largest left movement in the 1960s. Intuitively, a young scholar would think to themselves, “just ask people who were there. Many are still alive.” This is true. In fact, many are easily accessible public intellectuals. Fellow graduate students who are obligated to comb through the dusty and hard to reach archives to research long-dead participants in social movements in the early 20th century or earlier look at me with a unamused jealousy when I tell them that I have shared several meals and several drinks with many of the founders of the social movement I am researching. One would think that my research would be so stress-free because of the easy access to these leaders. However, they would be wrong. It is critically important for young scholars to develop a keen awareness of how social movement members can aid the development of new research but also how their work has blocked the development of new research (see Introduction and Chpt VI). With that in mind, I developed relationships with those who could help me, and I developed a
method I call cultural-intellectual history, which I explain at length below, in order to overcome
the limitations of participant-observer memoirs and interviews.

Problems with the Dominant Historiography and their Methods

A series of related problems block the full development of a clear understanding of the
New Left’s failure. Many of these issues have already been discussed in the Introduction, but it is
good to briefly review them before discussing my method. First, a self-selected group of
participants—mainly white male, academic or other professionals who defend a radical break
thesis that I define in the Introduction—write most of the histories via participant observer
memoirs. These memoirs tell a tendentious rise-and-fall “declension narrative” that has remained
consistent in their books and speeches for over 50 years.1 Historian John McMillian has gone so
far in his book chapter “‘You Didn’t Have to Be There’: Revisiting the New Left Consensus” as
to argue because the memoirs makeup the vast majority of the historiography they have created
what he calls “the New Left consensus” that holds new scholarship back (McMillian in
McMillian and Buhle (eds) The New Left Revisited 3). In terms of methods, McMillian states
plainly “Although the 1960s are often associated with a scholarly view which holds that our
understanding of the world can be enriched from a ‘bottom-up’ perspective, most chroniclers of
the New Left have been disappointedly ‘top-down’ in their approach” (4). He critiques the
emphasis on institutional histories and singularly powerful individual leaders, rather than social
and cultural histories that show SDS as a sprawling movement that contained many leaders and
vigorous intellectual and cultural debate. Even worse, historian David Faber claims “too many

1 For a good critique of the class and gender makeup of most of the participant-observer memoirs, see Breines
“Whose New Left.” For a critique of the common declension narrative of the 1960s, see my Introduction. See also
McMillian in McMillian and Buhle (eds) The New Left Revisited; Smith “Present at the Creation”; Gosse Where the
Boys Are…. For a view of the persistence of the declension narrative in New Left memoirs, compare the memoirs
written between the 20-25 year anniversary of SDS (Hayden Reunion; Gitlin The Sixties…; Miller; Isserman If I
Had a Hammer) and the speeches and memoirs written for the 50th anniversary of the founding of SDS (Hayden
Inspiring Participatory Democracy… and; Kazin and Isserman American Divided…; Gitlin Occupy Nation…).
professional gatekeepers…have resisted letting young scholars challenge their memories, criticize their generation, or simply explain their experiences in unfamiliar contexts” (“The 60s: Myth and Reality”). In reaction to this, McMillian argues a younger generation of scholars have gone back to the archive to seek “a greater degree of critical detachment and a more nuanced and comprehensive perspective” (3). Because young scholars such as myself are too young to have participated in SDS, we can research the failure without the need to protect ourselves from blame or protect the reputations of our friends or our movement. Furthermore, because we have no friends or enemies within the movement, we can evaluate the archival evidence with less bias. Therefore, we also have a bit more critical distance, but that distance does not drift into the dangers of dispassionate inquiry. Importantly, being a young activist who lived through the consequences of the failure of the New Left and the rise of the New Right, the question of SDS’s failure is of urgent importance because of the necessity to learn from the past so as to not repeat the same mistakes as we build movements for the 21st century.

If the first problem is the top-down nature of the memoirs, the second and related problem is one of political perspective. The majority of the histories (published over 50 years) are consistently weighed down by recriminatory sectarian narratives of the good vs bad 1960s—what I refer to in the Introduction as the “radical break thesis.” While most white middle class professional memoirs try to maintain a position that they were above the fray of the “sectarian” squabbles of the late decade—where SDS factions like PLP and RYM fought battles over opposing revolutionary theories—the memoirists maintain an equally dogmatic social democratic perspective that seeks to cherry pick the data also in sectarian ways making their positions seem rationally superior to the “crazy radicals.” The archival data they present in their studies and the websites they maintain (such as http://www.sds-1960s.org/) that serve as a
primary source for young scholars and young activists to learn about the history of SDS, exclude or under-represent 1) the early factional debates 2) revolutionary factions like Progressive Labor Party and International Socialist (among others, see Chapter VII) who believed in a base-building strategy. I will discuss additional the problems with archival research below.

If the second problem is one of political perspective, the last problem is one of theoretical perspective. Many memoirs—particularly those written in the 1980s—often collapse into dejected narratives about the hopelessness of left movements in conservative America. Among other issues, they essentialize the white working class as naturally conservative and see the New Right as providential beneficiaries of a racist backlash mentality rather than activist organizers who saw the vulnerability of both New Deal liberalism and the New Left’s strategy. The memoirist’s analysis stands in place of a view of the New Right as a social movement that out organized SDS—especially regarding the labor question—because they (among other things) made a series of theoretically-informed miscalculations about the winability of the white working class.

*The Need for a New Methodology*

The three problems discussed above necessitated that I develop an alternative method that did not rely on participant interviews to answer my research question: why was SDS not able to recruit a sizeable percentage of the New Deal coalition to its post-liberal vision of America, became increasingly clear to me. I needed a method that allowed me to examine how the New Left failed to take advantage of the organic crisis in the 1960s. Significant percentages of the American population were increasingly frustrated with New Deal liberalism during the 1950s and 1960s and no longer saw themselves absorbed in the universalistic project of post-WWII prosperity, welfare state bureaucracy, and Cold War superiority. The New Right took advantage
of this crisis effectively and the New Left did not. How could an intellectual-cultural history help explain why the New Left failed to take advantage of the crisis?

To study this failure effectively, I explored three areas of investigation: first, I needed to understand what New Deal liberalism was. It was the most successful realignment and voting coalition in American history, but where did it come from? What was its animating political ideology? Which intellectuals developed that ideology? Once I understood New Deal liberalism, secondly, I needed to understand how social movements—namely SDS and the Nixon’s 1972 campaign—developed a critique of the New Deal based upon their reading of dissident thinkers in the 1950s, but equally important, why certain critiques became popular and certain critiques did not become popular. I define popularity through a Gramscian lens of a social movement’s ability to organize a collective will around a new common sense that reaches all the way down to the level of everyday experience in civil society. At the same time, within their larger realignment social movement strategy, I needed to focus on an issue that would allow me to think about the success of the New Right’s social movement strategy. The labor question became a fascinating and under-researched angle of analysis that allowed me to evaluate the success and non-success of the New Right and New Left around the question of voter realignment. What intellectual and cultural forces influenced the New Left’s decision to reject working people, and conversely, what promoted New Right leaders to make different decisions? How were those decisions implemented at the level of strategy? I will discuss the method I developed for each of the three areas of investigation in the order I presented them above.

What is New Deal Liberalism?

As I stated in Chapter I, American liberalism is a very difficult political ideology to pin down. Because there was never a mass movement to restore the monarchy in America, nor was
there a successful mass socialist movement that took power, practically all of mainstream American politics—from the “left” to the “right”—can be defined as liberal. Using a typology inspired by leading historians James Young, I broke American liberalism into three currents: laissez faire, reform, and corporate liberalism. Because SDS focused on a critique of New Deal liberalism, I took reform liberalism as my primary focus in Chapters 1-3. While many historians see the New Deal as one of the most successful political reform movements in American history (Key; Milkis and Mileur), they take the hegemony of reform liberalism as a fact rather than interrogating it as a successful social movement that built hegemony through a cultural and political campaign. This is where my theoretical foundation in Gramsci helped. He challenges scholars to question the facticity of hegemony. What made reform liberalism—and the concessions it made to working and poor people through welfare state programs—a necessity?

I located the necessity of reform liberalism in the organic crisis during Reconstruction. In fact, my dissertation is the only study that applies the lessons Gramsci learned from the failure of the Risorgimento in Italy to the failure of Reconstruction in the United States (See Chapter II). Gramsci bases his analysis in a study of the way left movements did not take advantage of the fact that Italian unification did not build itself upon a thoroughly popular centralized movement like the French Revolution. Likewise, unification after the Civil War did not produce a popularly united vision of America where north and south, black and white, urban and rural workers could see themselves linked in a universalized moral community. As I describe in Chapter II, the late 19th century was a time of great social upheaval producing a sharp crisis of authority. Reform liberalism built itself on the necessity to restore social control and restore the conditions for capital accumulation. To research this upheaval and the associated class project of reform liberalism Gramsci described as a passive revolution, I collected historical evidence from leading
scholars in the field of cultural Marxism and New Left history and New Labor history. Historians including Nancy Cohen, Doug Rossinow, Eric Foner, Steven Fraser, David Roediger, and Leon Fink, Joseph Gerteis, Timothy Messer-Kruse all provided me excellent secondary sources to examine both radical social movement and the political and cultural campaign reform liberals launched to contain the anti-capitalist aspirations of those social movements. The method I used while collecting data for chapter 1-3 was to synthesize the findings of scholars within the field of 19th century American history using Gramsci’s theories of passive revolution and war of position as a lens by which I looked for historical evidence. Synthesis is a frequently used method in interdisciplinary studies programs such as American Culture Studies. For example, it was Gramsci’s understanding of the importance of cultural struggle as a war of position that allowed me to understand the significance of Nancy Cohen’s study of how lassie faire liberals were able to assert control of the reform liberal movement through controlling the editorships of important magazines like Nation and Atlantic and limiting what was acceptable discussion in the discourse community, but it was Leon Fink and Joseph Gerteis detailed study of the Knights of Labor and their anti-capitalist organizing in the late 19th century that allowed me to understand why the containment of reform liberalism was desperately important to the survival of liberalism. Foner and Frasier present instructive archival evidence from newspapers, magazine, and industrial associations that sound an increasingly frightened alarm at the growing militancy of social movements. Fink and Gerteis conduct close analytical readings of the Knights’ newspaper and pamphlets, studying their rhetorical appeals and investigating the way they used popular culture like songs and poems to spread their message to illiterate audiences.

Why did I choose the historians mentioned above over more traditional political or institutional histories? All of the contemporary scholars mentioned above were influenced—to
varying degrees—by the cultural materialist methodology that was developed by Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson for British Cultural Studies and later by Alan Trachtenburg for American Cultural Studies. Each of these scholars relied on their engagement with Gramsci in the 1970s to build their method. This made their work a natural choice for my study, but more importantly, it made their work stand above other traditional political or institutional histories because it grounded itself in cultural history. As Williams argues, the periodization of culture requires the periodization of capitalism (1977). Rather than the common vulgar Marxist argument of culture being superstructural, culture is a “whole way of life,” so it is constitutive in the shaping of society rather than epiphenomenal. In his famous critical cultural study of the Gilded Age, *The Incorporation of America* (1982), Trachtenberg argues:

> Just as my subject encompasses more than politics and economics, so my treatment of the corporate system extends beyond the technical device of incorporation . . . By incorporation I mean a more general process of change, the reorganization of perceptions as well as of enterprise and institutions. I do not mean only the expansion of an industrial capitalist system across the continent . . . but also, and even more predominantly, the remaking of cultural perceptions this process entailed. (3)

Similar to Williams who wanted to move British Culture Studies away from a focus on the elite and high theorists such as Edmund Burke and Matthew Arnold, Trachtenberg wanted to move American Cultural Studies away from a solely top down method that focused on intellectuals, those in powerful positions of leadership, and powerful institutions, employed by Americanists like Perry Miller or labor historians like John Commons. Trachtenberg instead wanted to focus
on the interplay and tension between dominant and non-dominant forces in the forging of a new common sense about the definition of America.

Using a Gramscian framework, Trachtenberg saw culture as the key battle ground in the shaping of common sense during the Gilded Age because it was a time period of dramatic change where “Hardly any realm of American life remained untouched.” His main question is “How did the changing forms and methods in industry and business affect the culture of American society in the Gilded Age, the shape and texture of daily life, and the thinking of Americans (4). According to Trachtenberg, it was at the level of culture that both the formation of large scale change was normalized, but also the level that saw the deepest resistance and opposition to change. Nancy Cohen and Doug Rossinow both helped me understand how left forces like Jane Addams and activists within the Social Gospel movement joined forces with lassie faire liberals to wage a culture struggle to develop reform liberalism. I discuss this at length in Chapter II. The combine forces of reform liberalism developed what Cohen calls the “administrative mandate” as a central tool to contain more radical forces with the social movement who were advocating for post-liberal, anti-capitalist future. My method of synthesis was to understand the significance of Cohen’s analysis, and with the aid of Gramsci’s insight on the passive revolution, and apply it to my understanding of FDR. I used historian Alan Brinkley’s close reading of the change in economic and political policies from anti-trust progressivism to Keynesianism during the development of the New Deal. Brinkley charts the change in political appointees in key decision-making institutions like the Federal Reserve and FDR’s advisors, and combines this with an intellectual history of these men by reading their academic books and memoirs, as well as a political history of the policy decisions coming out of the New Deal agencies.
Building on my understanding of the failure of left movements in the late 19th century, Gramsci’s focus on the importance of cultural struggle also helped me understand why the CPUSA was not successful in realigning New Deal liberalism. Like the Knights of Labor and the Populist Party in the 19th century (See Chapter II), at the height of their influence and strength, the CPUSA abdicated their role in leading the class struggle by reducing themselves to a silent junior partner role facilitating the middle management of the New Deal bureaucracy. This strengthened the development of a collective will around reform liberalism organized around the common sense of the New Deal FDR was promoting during the worse years of the Great Depression.

It was Gramsci’s insights on liberalism as a passive revolution that pointed me in this direction, but it was my archival research at the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University that helped me find the primary documents to chart the CPUSA’s abandonment of their more militant opposition to FDR. The CPUSA donated all of their archives to the Taminent library and the NY Public Library, so they are the primer sight for research on that social movement. Since the CPUSA ran its organization on the principles of Democratic Centralism, where all of the major policy and strategic decisions were debated and negotiated at their Central Committee meetings, national conferences, and world congress meetings of the Communist International, the easiest way to research changes in strategy is to conduct close readings of the reports issued at these meetings. Resolutions, major policy statements, and major speeches were all published in the monthly magazine and editorialized in the daily newspaper of the CPUSA. The sections in my dissertation on the CPUSA during the Great Depression relied heavily on writing and research conducted during my MA Thesis (M Hale). The method I used for evaluating my data on the CPUSA was also greatly aided by the
rich cultural histories produced by scholars in the 1990s. Robin Kelley, Fraser Ottanelli, Mark
Naison, Bill Mullen, and Neil Painter (among others). Because of the collapse of the Soviet
Union in the early 1990s, these scholars felt freed from the dominant school of institutional
historiography on the CPUSA led by Theodore Draper and funded by the Ford Foundation. Most
histories up until that point emphasized how the CPUSA as an institution was simply a puppet of
the Soviet Union and each CPUSA organizer was a mindless follower of the leadership. They
read policies issued from the Soviet Union and matched them with policies issued by the CPUSA
and made a causal link that the later was subservient to the former.

In contrast, cultural historians in the 1990s explored local CP branches and local archival
histories like Harlem’s public library, the Newbury Archive in Chicago, or the Sharecroppers
Union in Alabama. They also collected personal oral testimonies of little-remembered organizers
like Hosea Hudson. From these archives and oral testimonies, they were able to uncover flyers
for local marches and rallies, pamphlets denouncing or supporting local politicians or businesses,
and polemical debates between branches and between branches and the national leadership.
Supplementing strict quantitative methods, such as institutional vote counts and membership
demographics, they used a more literary method and read movement literature for what it told
them about local organizers own reasons for being involved in the CPUSA, often under great
threat to their own life—especially if they were black. They uncovered activists with personal
agency and individual motivation to argue their own point of view based upon the specific
political and cultural forms of oppression they faced in their community. Their method of
uncovering polemical debates rather than covering them over with larger institutional histories
that discuss large policies as already complete documents rather than deliberatively formed out
of contestation, and their method of uncovering lesser known voices who were locally or cultural
influential within the movement rather than just high-powered leaders, gave me important lessons for the formation of my own method.

*How did an Anti-New Deal Consensus Emerge from Dissidents in the 1950s*

Chapter II of my dissertation imagines a conversation between C. Wright Mills and William Buckley, Jr. The purpose of this thought experiment was to dramatize the surprisingly similar criticisms of New Deal liberalism by dissident intellectuals in the 1950s—from the left and right—who existed outside of the influence of major parties. Mills certainly existed outside of the direction and influence of the CPUSA, and Buckley did not see himself as an establishment Republican Party member either. In fact, he saved some of his most stinging rebukes for Eisenhower and Rockefeller Republicans. Because these dissident intellectuals existed outside of major political institutions, an institutional history was going to be insufficient. I knew that I found the most important leaders who were inspiring young people to rebel against the bureaucracy and ineffectiveness of New Deal liberalism based upon young 1960s activists own admissions in their pamphlets, reading lists, and memoirs. This is an example of how I used the participant observe memoirs to aid my study. I conducted a close reading of the memoirs and marked where there was similarity in their admissions of who the movement’s mentors were and which dissident thinkers influenced them the most. I paid particular attention when individuals from different competing factions of SDS agreed on who were their mentors, and I also paid close attention to the consistency of opinion across publications covering 50 years. But, how could I formulate an intellectual history that touched directly on Gramsci’s focus on leadership and cultural struggle?

When reviewing my MA research, I learned that an institutional history is an incomplete method for answering certain important questions. It is insufficient to simply record that the
CPUSA made certain changes in strategic policy (for example the move to the Popular Front strategy in 1935). I realized I needed to understand not only what their intellectual underpinnings were, but what made those intellectual motivations come to the fore at that historical moment and become popular among masses of people? I needed an intellectual history. But, an intellectual history that only considered the development of ideas in a vacuum and did not consider how those ideas became an organizing force among masses of people, was as insufficient as an institutional history. Therefore, I knew my dissertation needed to go beyond the methods of traditional intellectual history.

Since the 1970s, historians have increasingly critiqued the elitism of intellectual history to the point where in the 1990s there was worry of it surviving as a method at all. It is important to mention that scholars who defend intellectual history today generally make a sharp distinction between “intellectual history” and the older method “the history of ideas,” as Harvard historian Peter Gordon notes in his article “What is Intellectual History…” The history of ideas method was developed by historian Author Lovejoy who was a professor at John Hopkins from 1910-1939, and is largely discredited today. In his book, *The Great Chain of Being*, he laid out his method. He maintained that certain ideas have a trans-historical eternal nature. Gordon argues Lovejoy was influenced by a Platonic conception of ideas pre-existing outside of time in an ideal plane. The historian’s job, according to Lovejoy, was to organize a linear narrative around one central large idea that explains an entire epoch. The historian must show how that idea continually manifests itself and transforms in different guises. The key to the method was to uncover the defining principles, the assumptions, the internal coherence, the way people talked about the idea, and how it “conditions the mind” of everyone regardless of the differences of class, race, or gender. To accomplish this, history of ideas scholars conducted close analytical
readings of philosophic and religious documents such as treatises, scientific papers, and sermons. They maintained a top-down method because they reviewed documents from mainly well-educated men in leading circles of academia and politics. As was common to the elitism of the time, historians using the history of ideas method were able to make sweeping conclusions about the ubiquity of certain ideas by excluding less-educated, non-philosophic, non-academic voices from consideration. That is how they produced book titles like *The American Political Tradition and the Men that Created It* or *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* as though everyone in New England has the same idea that were transmitted from outside of history to “great men” to the masses in a unidirectional way.

Three developments in the 1960s challenged the history of ideas method. First was Michel Foucault’s intervention in the 1960s with his books *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* both of which defined and applied his method of archaeology and genealogy. Second was historian Quentin Skinner’s publication of his groundbreaking article “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas.” Skinner remains one of the most important intellectual historians publishing today. His article developed a contextualist method that influences many intellectual historians and helped build a bridge between cultural history and intellectual history. Lastly was the creation of New Labor History, by scholars such as Herbert Gutman who wished to create new methods of historical investigation to build a bottom up history that avoided a sole focus on institutional and “Zeus-like leaders.”

The methods that both Skinner, Foucault, and Gutman created can be broadly categorized by their belief that ideas must be contextualized and shown how they are social constructed in specific cultures through the circulation of what Foucault called particular discourses or what
Skinner called “speech acts.” Foucault argues he was looking to uncover the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history." Gordon summarizes “Skinner’s basic methodological posture amounts to a kind of historicist contextualism, according to which the meaning of an idea can only be understood when it is placed within the larger, historical context of linguistic utterances, written or verbal, of which it is a demonstrable part. Gutman argued that the focus on radical institutions or heroic unions ignores “ . . . the great mass of workers who belonged to none of these groups . . .” (Power and Culture 70). Drawing on what was at that time non-traditional modes of historical investigation, Gutman poured over diaries, seemingly unimportant sales transactions, family heirlooms, and other everyday artifacts much the same as an anthropologist or archeologist would investigate. He joined that evidence with census data and other government records to paint a deep and rich portrait of black family life that stood in stark contrast to the generalized, often racist portraits that dominated pervious histories of slavery and working people.

Building on the breakthroughs described above, recently historians have blended “cultural” and “intellectual” methods that create “an integrative or synthetic mode of inquiry that heals the schism between intellectual history and social history, which in recent years has redefined itself as socio-cultural history” according to historian Thomas Bender (181). Historian Casey Nelson Blake agrees, arguing “cultualist approaches have helped transform intellectual history . . . by the same token, intellectual history has remade other branches of historical scholarship and much of the humanities besides.” Many disciplines have “taken historicist and contextualist turns that demand approaches to the history of ideas and ideology that intellectual
historians . . . find congenial” (392-393). This is not surprising since, as Gordon argues, “a cultural historian devotes greater attention to the circulation of ideas; the intellectual historian pays greater attention to the ideas within their conceptual context alone.” Therefore a blended approach would yield a understanding of the creation of an idea within an intellectual discourse community, but at the same time also seek to understand how that idea became circulated in the wider public to become a widely accepted common sense. A new respect for intellectual history is evident in the election of one of the country’s most noteworthy intellectual historians as president of the Organization of American Historians, UC Berkeley historian David Hollinger, for 2012. Also, it is evident in the popular new professional association Society of United States Intellectual History and their award-winning blog.

This new synthesis between intellectual and cultural history renews American Studies’ foundations in the synthesis of intellectual, literary, and political history, updated for today by the criticism from social historians and post-structuralist theorist in the 1970s and 1980s, according to Blake. Richard Hofstadter, Louis Hartz, Leo Marx, and Alex Trachtenburg’s foundational work is being reconsidered by a new generation of scholars. As the new synthesis began to attract adherents and produce scholarly studies, it become clearer what is being left behind and what is being gained. Bender argues “Focus has been on the ethnography of groups and their expressive cultures, the development of more precise understandings of contexts, and the delineation of intellectual discourses . . . on the various ways human beings find and explicate meaning within a context of language and institutions” (187). Most importantly, scholars implementing culturalist approaches to intellectual history dropped the generalization about the “American Mind” and the search for ideas that connect entire nations—common in older intellectual histories by Perry Miller and Author Lovejoy.
Historian Jefferson Cowie’s recent award-winning book *Stayin’ Alive the 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* is the best example of a political-mined cultural history on the time period I am studying. Likewise, Historian Kevin Mattson’s book *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism, 1945-1970* is the most important intellectual history of the time period I am investigating. It is Cowie’s superb archival research that opened my mind to Nixon’s blue collar strategy and made me aware of the Nixon archives as a rich source for primary research. He combines this political history with a breathtaking cultural history showing how the cultural rage expressed by Archie Bunker, Merle Haggard, Bruce Springsteen revealed the frustrations Nixon’s New Majority Strategy tapped into in surprising and thought-provoking ways. At the same time, Mattson’s ability to detail the intellectual development of a large cross section of 1950s dissident intellectuals—from Dwight McDonald to C. Wright Mills, from Paul Goodman to Arnold Kaufman—is truly impressive. He does this by combining biography with intellectual history. His primary sources are the biographical details of a thinker’s life discovered from close readings of interviews, letters, and scholarly published biographies. He then combines those details with the thinker’s academic training, professional accomplishments, and scholarly production. He researches where the thinker studied, who they studied under, what was that mentor’s main professional contribution to their development as a scholar and activist, and who were their non-academic mentors (the way McDonald was for Mills). Reading personal correspondence available in the thinker’s collected papers generally stored in university libraries were his main method for discovering these details. Mattson then focuses on how these intellectuals circulated their ideas in intellectual and social movement circles by closely reading the articles they published and the scholarly debates they participated in. His ability to focus on the circulation and debate of ideas in activist
political journals such as *Politics, Liberation, Studies on the Left* and *New University Thought* had a particularly profound impact on my own method. Mattson conducts close readings of the articles that Mills and others published in the 1950s and 60s and then shows how the ideas they expressed were symptomatic of their biographical and intellectual training.

However, while Cowie and Mattson were both influential to me, there are several gaps, which show three key areas where I conducted further research in order to augment and develop their groundbreaking study. First, Cowie correctly locates the collapse of the New Left in the early 1970s, but he does not analyze the earlier decisions made by groups like SDS that led to this collapse. In fact, he makes no mention of SDS, SNCC, or other radical organizations such as the Black Panthers in his book at all. He is instead focused on dissident caucuses and democracy movements in trade unions in the 1970s. Second, his political history lacks a clearly articulated intellectual history. He has a brilliant chapter on “Nixon’s Class War,” yet he does not locate the rise of the New Right in a social movement that had a conservative intellectual tradition. George Nash’s (1976) renowned study of the modern conservative intellectual tradition could be usefully synthesized with some of Cowie’s important findings. For example, he does not mention Buckley and Myer’s doctrine of fusionism, nor Young Americans for Freedom, and the Sharon Statement. Lastly, while Mattson’s intellectual history is superb, it lacks any cultural history that examines how intellectuals’ ideas were absorbed by the masses. In other words, how did they translate their ideas into a collective will organized around a new common sense? Lastly, Mattson does not include an analysis of the more revolutionary factions of SDS like the Weathermen and PLP because he is interested in defending an argument that SDS had a more productive relationship with liberalism than a combative relationship. His defense of “radical-liberalism” is interesting, but it requires that he brackets out several of the foundational
documents critical of Kennedy and the New Deal and most of late-decade debates around revolutionary strategy by PLP and RYM. Historian Doug Rossinow’s work also defends the radical-liberal thesis and falls into a similar problem. My study seeks to build on the wonderful research of these scholars by combining elements of their methods in order to build a cultural-intellectual history that grounds itself in a close reading and qualitative textual analysis of archival documents without excluding major debates or factions within SDS.

In terms of sources, the questions of how Mills and Buckley formulated their anti-New Deal positions can be investigated more easily today than ever. In fact, currently there is a significant revitalization of Mills scholarship spearheaded by former SDSers, which provides a useful dataset to analyze Mills influence. A three volume set by SAGE Masters in Modern Social Thought series edited by a well-known former SDS activist, Stanley Aronowitz, was recently published. Furthermore, Hayden’s 1964 MA Thesis from the University of Michigan was recently published for the first time under the title *Radical Nomad: C. Wright Mills and His Times* with the addition of contemporary reflections by former SDS organizers who are now leading academics. Lastly, Aronowitz has a new biography. He argues “Mills’s work is experiencing a small but pronounced revival . . . the re-publication of four of his major books, with new introductions by the historian Nelson Lichtenstein (*New Men of Power*), the social critic Russell Jacoby (*White Collar*) political theorist Alan Wolfe (*The Power Elite*), and sociologist Todd Gitlin (*The Sociological Imagination*) is likely to aid in exposing his work to students and younger faculty.” Between the re-publishing of Mills work, the new biography, and the extensive reflections from former SDS members and leaders on Mills influence on the movement (all easily accessible through Ohio Link), now represents one of the best times to investigate how Mills influenced their analysis.
On the other hand, because of the popularity of Buckley’s work and the fact that the New Right won the cultural battle to formulate the anti-New Deal consensus in the post-1960s era, Buckley’s writings never went out of print, unlike Mills. His books *God and Man at Yale* and *Up From Liberalism*, along with his editorials at *National Review* magazine, which is still in circulation, are widely available for free online. What has changed dramatically in the last twenty years is historian’s willingness to research rightwing movements. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter VIII, a growing group of scholars have pioneered a field of conservative studies that was previously considered not worthy of academic investigation. These historians are working against the grain of the trend within liberal historiography to try and understand what conditions made the New Right popular instead of castigating their supporters as ignorant and manipulated. These texts include: Alan Brinkley, “The Problem of American Conservatism” and *Liberalism and its Discontents*; Jefferson Cowie, *Stay‘in Alive: The Last Days of the Working Class*; Darren Dochuk, “Rivial on the Right: Making Sense of the conservative Movement in Post-World War II America History”; Michael Kazin, “The Grass-Roots Right: New Histories of U.S. Conservatism in the Twentieth Century”; Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors : The Origins Of The New American Right*; Cory Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*. I supplemented these studies with conservative historians’ views on the rise of the New Right. These texts include: H.W Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*; Allen Matusow, *The Unravelling Of America : A History Of Liberalism In The 1960s*; George H Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement In America, Since 1945*.

Using qualitative textual analysis and close reading, I explore how Mills and Buckley’s ideas were seized by a small but passionate subgroup of social movement activists and translated
into recruitment materials aimed at analyzing and explaining a contemporary set of problems. In so doing, I use intellectual historian David Hollinger’s concept of “communities of discourse” in order to understand 1) the intellectual inheritance from Mills, 2) how intellectual ideas were used to unite a subgroup around a “common set of questions” 3) how the polemical debates and the practical experience trying to put those ideas into practice formed a subgroup’s identity around trying to find answers to a common set of questions. My focus on discourse communities formed by internal SDS publications like *SDS Bulletin, New Left Notes*, and *Studies on the Left* builds on the methods of cultural, intellectual, and New Labor history established by Foucault, Skinner, and Gutman which I described above. It also builds on the standard of the fusion of intellectual and cultural history set by Cowie and Mattson in their recent books.

In terms of data collection, I found the recruitment materials from SDS archived at the Library for Social Research in Los Angeles, the Tamiment Library at NYU, the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan, and the extensive SDS microfilm collection available on interlibrary loan from the Wisconsin State Historical Society, along with archival documents available for download at sds-1960s.org. I specifically looked at the documents which had been mimeographed over 50,000 times and hence gained the widest circulation. I ascertained the number of copies and circulation by cross referencing memoirs and published FBI reports on SDS’s activity. Therefore, I focused on SDS documents that served as the guiding mission statements and primary vehicles of articulating their goals, recruiting organizers and members, and popularizing their movement. These documents include: “The Port Huron Statement,” “America and the New Era,” “An Interracial Movement of the Poor,” “Don’t Mourn, Organize,” and important open letters and speeches by SDS presidents Tom Hayden, Carl Oglesby, Todd Gitlin, and Paul Potter that were turned into popular pamphlets. On top of SDS recruitment
literature, I examined SDS’s published reading lists. The “liberal study group” at Ann Arbor and Madison organized by SDS provides an interesting insight into their analysis of liberalism as well as their intellectual genealogy.

I read the manifestos and recruitment literature using qualitative textual analysis and rhetorical analysis influenced by Kenneth Burke. Burke is not only one of the most influential American rhetorical scholars of the 20th century; he was also deeply involved with and influential to the American Left. It was Burke’s intervention at the CPUSA’s writer’s congress that influenced the party to change its rhetorical appeals from “workers” to “the people” or “the masses” in order to broaden their appeal and to better reflect the shift to the Popular Front strategy in the international communist movement. His understanding of the connection between language and ideology and rhetoric as “a means to induce cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” informed my analysis.

I also examined evaluations of the various SDS mission statements in field reports from three of the most important SDS projects: Economic Research Action Project, the Worker Student Alliance, and RYM Action Factions (later coalescing into the Weathermen). The field reports are available at the archives mentioned above. The study of these documents allowed me to understand the debate over the positive and negative experiences of organizers actually trying to implement the analysis on the ground. The field reports from organizers can be studied in comparison with letters applying for membership and requests for clarification of the mission statement from the various local chapters to the national office. These letters are available on microfilm from the Wisconsin State Historical Society, which has recently issued a nice index available for download on their website. Lastly, I looked for debates around the formation of social movement strategy in the three publications issued by SDS: *SDS Bulletin, New Left Notes,*
and *Radical America*. The field reports, letters, and debates allowed me to see how the rhetorical appeals and recruitment literature were the result of struggle. This helped me understand how Hollinger’s concept of a discourse community worked in SDS. Rather than a top down static view of Mills ideas flowing directly to SDS leadership who in turn pushed the ideas directly to the organizers then to the potential recruits, the idea of a discourse community is dynamic and attempts to reveal the interchange, contestation, and playfulness in which social movements build their ideology and in turn their group identity.

One last point about archival research. No one research archive had a complete run of any of the internal publications of SDS. It was clear from the beginning of my archival research that online sources and some archival sources excluded certain debates. Several factors could contribute to this. One, all archives rely on donated materials—especially when considering social movements. Organizers are not the best about keeping detailed records for archivists to collect. They are too busy doing the overwhelming work of organizing to think about scholars in the distant future. Two, the people who have written most of the memoirs and most of the scholarly studies tend to come from a middle class, social democratic position. Their view is over-represented in the history and over represented in the archives. Three, most of the revolutionary factions split up shortly after forming. Because most of their work was done in the underground, records of their meetings and decisions are rare. Lastly, revolutionary groups like Progressive Labor Party and descendants of International Socialists still exist as organizations today. Many of their leaders from SDS are currently revolutionary organizers in unions and other organizations in civil society. They have not published memoirs or contributed to the scholarship on SDS. It is possible this is related to the fact that they do not want to out active organizers, or they might be too busy in their own organizations to focus on scholarship. Lastly, several
revolutionary organizers became so burned out by the 1970s, they dropped out altogether. Because of the incomplete nature of the archives, I needed to rely on the generosity of several non-sectarian SDS members who sent me important documents. Dick Flacks and Carl Davidson both sent me important documents missing from the archives. A missing *SDS Bulletin* debating the implementation of ERAP and documents from the Action Factions collected under the title *The Port Authority Statement* were both sent to me.

*Assessing the SDS and New Right’s View of the Labor Question*

While examinations of different strategic debates inside of SDS—such as their strategic positions on civil rights, anti-war, and women’s rights—have yielded important scholarly advances (Kazin and Issermen; Frost; Breines; Rosen), I wanted to ground my research in the labor question. The question of blue collar workers in the post-WWII period—while discussed often in essentialized ways—is rarely discussed at the level of the New Left’s social movement strategy. Furthermore, the New Left’s realignment strategy is rarely considered side-by-side with the New Right’s strategy. While my dissertation has quite a lot to say about the New Left and their rejection of working people as sold out cheerful robots, the decision to reject a focus on working people ultimately came down to a theoretically-influenced *choice* by leaders of the New Left to take energy and resources away from one area of organizing (namely organized labor and white rank-and-file workers) and place it in another area (namely the lumpenproletariat and third world fighters). By looking at the development of SDS’s social movement strategy as a series of theoretically guided choices by leaders influenced by certain intellectuals, then the research was simplified. I employed the same intellectual-cultural history methodology described above and grounded it in archival research I conducted at the University of Michigan.
I focused most specifically on Mills critique of post-war liberalism and his recommendation that the New Left “abandon the labor metaphysic” in his famous *New Left Review* article “Letter to the New Left” in 1960. Historians Miller, Isserman, Coker, Mattson, Levy, and Aronowitz all have brief sections in their respective studies focusing on this issue, but a deeper study was necessary to understand why a leading independent socialist intellectual involved with the union movement of the 30s and 40s abruptly abandoned that position in the early 50s. To accomplish this analysis, the articles Mills wrote for *Labor and Nation* while he was working for the Inter-Union Institute for Labor and Democracy in the 40s as well as his book on the post-war labor movement, *The New Men of Power: America’s Labor Leaders* helped shed light on why Mills moved from a focus on the working class to a focus on the middle class in his book *White Collar* in the early 1950s. Based upon a conversation we had at the conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Port Huron Statement, historian Howard Brick helped me gain access to the special archives where *Labor and Nation* was collected. These articles proved invaluable to my research in Chapter V. It also helped me develop my understanding of the discourse community formed in the 1950s by dissident intellectuals who critiqued the New Deal. My method builds on the standard Matttson’s study sets, but it asks the opposite question. Instead of researching how these dissident intellectuals were trying to save liberalism, as Mattson does, I am asking how they were trying to build a post-liberal common sense.

Additionally, Al Haber and his wife, the original founders of SDS who recruited Tom Hayden, wrote several influential polemical pieces criticizing the complete abandonment of “the labor metaphysic.” The one that received the widest circulation and discussion early on in SDS’s development was “Students and Labor,” which tried to find a balance between labor and student
activism. Paul Potter’s “The Intellectual as an Agent of Social Change” also clearly registers many of Mills ideas about intellectuals in a tone more suitable for a younger audience. I found both of these documents and several others in the archives at the University of Michigan, the center of SDS activity until the mid-decade.

In reading these documents, I used a qualitative textual analysis to review organizational statements and recruitment documents from SDS. I looked for example statements that reveal Mills’ critical view of liberalism and expressed their hostility towards the New Deal. To do this, I examined the following documents: “The Port Huron Statement,” “Students and Labor,” “America and the New Era,” “An Interracial Movement of the Poor,” “The Intellectual as an Agent of Social Change,” “Don’t Mourn, Organize,” "Toward a Revolutionary Youth Movement" (RYM), “Revolutionaries Must Fight Nationalism,” "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows." These were the most distributed national documents as revealed by participant memoirs and FBI files; they articulated the movements changing analysis and set the priorities and the agenda for the organizers. In addition, I read every issue of the SDS Bulletin, every issue of New Left Notes, and every issues of Studies on the Left and Radical America. These internal bulletins and magazines were the central deliberative organs of SDS. It is where reports were issued from their yearly conferences, their central committee, and it is how organizers shared ideas who lived in different parts of the country. They also reveal (particularly the later documents) the polemical debates that led to forms of factionalism and the June 1969 split. It was my ability to uncover these polemical debates around liberalism and the labor question and give them a full accounting in my dissertation that makes my research much different than many of the memoirs that make up a vast percentage of the scholarship on SDS that shielded readers from polemical debates—especially in the early decade. By exhaustively
combing through the archival record of SDS’s documents, I tried to live up to a standard set by Kirkpatrick Sale and his early comprehensive study of SDS. Sale stands alone in the depth of his research on SDS. This is evidenced by the fact that nearly all of the participant-observer memoirs quote from his study—especially Tom Hayden. But while exhaustiveness is a noteworthy principle of research, Sale’s study is guided by a journalistic method of who, what, where, why, and how. This is a tried-and-true method, but it often overwhelms the reader with data and contains very little analysis. I aimed at an exhaustive search of the archives that was guided by my theoretical framework and a research question that was focused on investigating failure using the labor question as my narrowed angle of analysis.

On top of recruitment documents and movement periodicals, I also read their academic position papers on New Deal liberalism and organized labor. Their opinions and historical studies reveal the changing questions and principles that guided the new critical view of the New Deal away from the Consensus historians like Hofstadter and Hartz. These works include: Jacob Cohen, "Schlesinger and the New Deal" (1961); Howard Zinn, New Deal Thought (1966); William Appleman Williams, Contours of American History (1966); Paul Conkin, The New Deal (1967); Ronald Radosh, The Myth of the New Deal (1967); Barton J. Bernstein, "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform" (1968). On organized labor, several groundbreaking pieces in Studies on the Left were very influential. They include Ronald Rodosh, "Corporate Ideology of American Labor Leaders From Gompers to Hillman." James Weinstein "Gompers and the New Liberalism," and the ongoing polemical debate they had with

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2 Published between 1959-1967, Studies on the Left started its existence in Madison, Wisconsin mainly from graduate students influenced by historian William Applemen Williams and sociologist C. Wright Mills. It was the first journal that published Mills’ “Letter to a New Left” for an American audience. Furthermore, it developed and incubated many of the most important intellectual themes of the New Left including the concept of “corporate liberalism” and extended Mills Power Elite theory with historical and empirical research. See Weinstein and Eakins for an edited collection of articles that appeared in Studies. See Mattson 229-262 for an intellectual history of the journal.
CPUSA historians Philp Foner and Herbert Aptheker in the pages of *Studies on the Left* in 1966. While they did not use Gramsci’s language, these texts—often written by graduate students of Williams or Mills or professors influences by them—reveal that the New Left clearly saw the New Deal as a passive revolution and traditional AFL labor unions as subservient to that passive revolution. In fact, it was young New Left theorists that developed the idea of “corporate liberalism” described in chapter I.³ These documents reveal that the New Left—particularly those involved with the journal *Studies on the Left* (see Chapter VII)—had a powerful analysis circulating among movement leaders. However, overall, the movement—particularly SDS—had a bad strategy to activate that analysis in the masses. They disregarded as non-revolutionary the very forces that became so revolutionary for the New Right.

I focused on Nixon’s advisors that staffed the Middle America Committee focused on Nixon’s 1972 reelection—Charles Colson, Kevin Philips, and Pat Buchanan. By exploring archival documents available at the Nixon Library—particularly memos and internal reports to the president collected under the subject heading “New Majority Strategy” as well as Philips’ often-cited book *The Emerging Republican Majority* and Buchanan’s less well known book *The New Majority Strategy: Nixon at Mid Passage*, I was able to reconstruct Nixon’s 1972 re-election strategy that focused heavily on targeting the white working class in opposition to the New Left. The excellent recent histories from Jefferson Cowie and Richard Mason helped guide me immensely, but I cannot emphasize how important it was for me to travel to the archives myself and look at the full text of the archival documents with my research question in mind, rather than just the selected quotes by Cowie and Mason. It gave me a fuller appreciation of what

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Nixon’s strategy and it gave me access to statistics and analysis that supported my argument that was just not available in the secondary sources. Lastly, I was granted access to reproductions of Charton Heston’s personal journals through the Screen Actors Guild Archive in Beverly Hills, California. The Popular Cultural librarian at BGSU helped me gain access to these sources.

**Conclusion**

It is possible that historiography on social movements in the 1960s and 70s is stuck in what historian C. Van Woodward famously once called “the twilight zone that lies between living memory and written history …one of the favorite breeding places of mythology” (xvii). He argues “The light cast by living memory dims as the numbers possessing it decline, while full illumination by history has been slow in coming and even slower in being comprehended.” 2012 marked the 50th anniversary of the Port Huron Statement. Living memory is dimming on the 1960s, and the breeding of mythology (eg. that the working class is essentially conservative, that the New Left was too radical to appeal to “middle America”) only bolsters the claims of centrist liberalism that limited reform is possible. But, following Woodward’s advice, we have yet to see the illumination of history. Given both the contemporary upsurge in radical activism along with older more confessional and self-reflective memoirs by former New Left activists wishing to mentor and participate in a younger generation of activism, and the historical distance of 50 years, now might be a crucial time to get beyond the twilight zone.

One of the major purposes of my research project was to investigate the consequences of misunderstanding the strategic miscalculations of the New Left. In the same way that the New Left had an incomplete understanding of the Old Left, the contemporary left resurgence after 1999 has an incomplete understanding of the New Left. Part of this insufficiency comes from the memoirs written by participants in the New Left, but another part comes from American left
activists’ continuing failure to learn their own history. This has led to unfortunate consequences both in the past and in the present. I hope my dissertation and the methods I developed serves as an intervention into this unfortunate situation.