

**Taxpayers and Homeowners, Forgotten Men, and Citizen-Workers: Theorizing
Conservative Egalitarianism**

by

Erin Baribeau

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Lisa J. Disch (Chair)
Professor Pamela Brandwein
Professor Robert Mickey
Professor Matthew D. Lassiter

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Chapter One:

Introduction:

"Equality is unfair": Race, "Backlash," and Ideological Development in American Politics

I. Introduction

When viewers tuned in to the popular CBS sitcom "All in the Family" (AITF) on October 19th, 1974, they would have heard the show's white working-class protagonist, Archie Bunker, complaining—once again—about equality. Already irritated upon learning that his neighbor, Irene Lorenzo, has been hired as a forklift operator at the docks where he works, Archie then discovers that she will be making the same wages. As he laments to great audience laughter, "Equality is unfair. What's the point of a man working hard all his life, trying to get someplace, if all he's gonna do is wind up equal?"¹ Throughout AITF's run, Archie understands gender and racial equality as a threat to his status as a white man. Equality is unfair if it means that he will be brought down to the level of women and nonwhites—or, worse, if these groups rise above him in status. For Archie, whiteness and maleness are sources of privilege. Equality, he thinks, will only unsettle this. Equality is a zero-sum game.

At first glance, it may seem unsurprising that a supporter of the Republican Party would speak of equality in pejorative terms. Indeed, in AITF's opening theme, "Those

¹ "All in the Family," Season 5, episode 6 (1974).

Were the Days," Archie laments the loss of a pre-New Deal America, singing, "Mister, we could use a man like Herbert Hoover again."² In both the popular American imagination and scholarship, the principle of equality has been characterized as a perennial and distinguishing characteristic not of the twentieth-century Republican Party—the party of Big Business and the wealthy—but rather of liberalism and the Democratic Party. For example, in *Party Ideologies in America*, John Gerring constructs a Republican "ideological epoch," from 1928 through 1992, in which individualism and antistatism, not equality, are defining themes.³ Moreover, and moving beyond party labels, equality has rarely been associated with the defenders of free-markets and wealth creation. William Graham Sumner is illustrative on this point. The late nineteenth-century conservative sociologist, anti-progressive, and defender of *laissez-faire* economics, juxtaposed equality against the liberty of the individual, writing that, "every effort to realize equality necessitates a sacrifice of liberty."⁴ Nonetheless, while certainly not an obvious trait of the party of Hoover, a story of equality that tacks the principle solely onto a Democratic epoch—or onto Progressivism and New Deal liberalism—ignores the ways in which equality became a key discursive trait of the Republican Party in the mid-twentieth century. Consequently, an account like Gerring's misses the ways in which a figure like Archie—angered over racial and gender equality—might actually be hailed by a specifically conservative language of equality.

² "Those Were the Days," Lee Adams (lyrics) and Charles Strouse (music).

³ John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 16-17.

⁴ William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (Harper & Brothers, 1883). Project Gutenberg. Online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18603/18603-h/18603-h.htm> (Accessed 1 May 2014).

Such a conservative championing of equality would reorient it from a Great Society-era focus on "leveling" the playing field between whites and blacks, men and women, rich and poor. A conservative language of equality, though ostensibly colorblind, would emphasize the threatened civil rights of working- and middle-class white Americans, the "Forgotten" majority, and the losers in an increasingly liberalizing society. Yet, in appealing to a mythical, colorblind majority, a conservative equality would ultimately strengthen, rather than weaken, the privileges of race and gender that Archie cherishes.

As Americans tuned in to watch AITF by the millions each week, some probably would have recognized Archie's beliefs and anxieties at work in their own lives. Indeed, for some fans, Archie's racial prejudice and contempt for equality was not unique to a fictional, Nixon-supporting "hard hat." Rather, for some viewers, Archie was "one of their own." For others, Archie was a figure of ridicule, or, at least, a "lovable bigot" with whom viewers could contrast their own racial liberalism.⁵ Indeed, and as Emily Nussbaum writes, Americans of diverse ideological beliefs reacted differently to Archie, as well as to the show's themes. Archie was able to "simultaneously charm and alienate viewers."⁶ Nonetheless, how might a subject like Archie be hailed by conservative discourses *supportive* of an egalitarian society—particularly if they reinforce the

⁵ Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach, "Archie Bunker's Bigotry: A Study in Selective Perception and Exposure," *Journal of Communication*, 24, 1 (March 1974): 36-47. Cited in Emily Nussbaum, "Norman Lear and the Rise of the Divided Audience," *The New Yorker* (7 April 2014).

⁶ Austerlitz quoted in Nussbaum, "Norman Lear and the Rise of the Divided Audience." See also Marty Kaplan, "Archie's America, and Ours." (Cited with author permission). As Kaplan writes, while audience reception data on AITF is hard to locate, the few studies that have been done provide conflicting data on how the show shaped viewers' attitudes on race.

advantages of whiteness while also claiming support for colorblindness and equality of opportunity?

What scholars and journalists have frequently termed the rise of the "New Right" is a story of this conservative adoption of equality, joined to an account of electoral and partisan realignment. According to this narrative, the Republican Party appropriated a popular language of equality so as to legitimate their conservative political claims on issues of race and the economy. In so doing, they fractured the New Deal Democratic coalition and built a new electoral constituency, as white working-class Americans abandoned the Democratic Party in the wake of the civil rights movement and the Great Society. According to Republican political strategist Kevin Phillips, writing in 1969 of this key switch, the election of Richard Nixon "bespoke the end of the New Deal Democratic hegemony and the beginning of a new era in American politics." As Phillips writes, Americans increasingly repudiated the Democratic Party's "ambitious social programming, and inability to handle the urban and Negro revolutions."⁷ White racial animosity and anxiety—over a deindustrializing economy and an enlarging welfare state that seemed to favor minorities—was channeled into electoral politics by political elites like Phillips, as Republicans brought together working- and middle-class white voters with a more traditional business constituency.

More than twenty years after Phillips' influential account of conservative ascendance, the journalist Thomas Edsall argued that a racialized "backlash among some of the Democrats' traditional constituencies" resulted from the Party's focus on empowering, politically and economically, formerly disempowered groups. Edsall's

⁷ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Arlington House, 1969), 25.

Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics (1992), ascribes this conservative success to an ideology of "conservative egalitarianism," a fusion of equality, bootstrap individualism, fiscal restraint, and racial conservatism. According to Edsall, while black civil rights discourses of equality and colorblindness had previously been used to challenge Jim Crow and Northern "de facto" segregation, Republicans after 1964 successfully adopted equality in their opposition to the Great Society's focus on "equality of outcome," using it to defend and justify white claims of "reverse discrimination." According to Edsall's "backlash" account, Republicans successfully appropriated equality, positing liberalism and the Democratic Party as emblematic not of an egalitarian society, but rather one that unfairly—even unconstitutionally—privileged racial minorities over whites. The Democratic Party agenda, in other words, enacted "inegalitarianism."⁸

This backlash story has become widespread in the popular imagination, as it provides an appealingly simple narrative of the rise of the Republican Party. For example, pollster and political strategist Stanley B. Greenberg writes that the election of Richard Nixon in 1968—catapulted by "an explosively angry electorate"— "marked the end of the New Deal Democratic majority" and brought "down the curtain on racial liberalism."⁹ According to the journalist E.J. Dionne, the "problems" of American politics are rooted in such an "explosive" electorate—in the cultural and racial tensions of

⁸ Thomas B. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, with Mary Edsall (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 146.

⁹ Stanley B. Greenberg, *Middle Class Dreams: The Politics and Power of the New American Majority* (Times Books, 1995), 4-5. Interestingly, Greenberg accepts backlash even while demonstrating that blue-collar union voters in suburban Macomb County, Michigan "did not easily sever their special relationship with the Democrats" until Reagan's re-election in 1984. As Greenberg writes, "In 1984, the voters of Macomb County turned their backs on the Democratic liberalism that had been so intertwined with the dream they had built and guarded." (30-31).

the 1960s, where, as Dionne writes, a "new conservative majority" of "upper-income" and "middle-to-lower income groups" destroyed "the dominant New Deal coalition by using cultural and social issues—race, the family, 'permissiveness,' crime—to split New Deal constituencies." Similarly, Rick Perlstein writes that the rise of the Republican Party and the election of Richard Nixon reflected the “angers, anxieties, and resentments in the face of the 1960s chaos” and the “fracturing” of the country.¹⁰ Accounts like these are both pervasive and emotionally engaging. Indeed, these authors touch on many Americans' very real frustrations with ideological gridlock in their politics and government.

Nonetheless, such backlash stories exhibit many explanatory and analytic weaknesses, and scholars have since stepped in to offer more nuanced accounts of the New Right and conservative egalitarianism. Specifically, some political scientists and historians have developed what I call "counter-backlash" stories that question the backlash narrative's inattention to the racial exclusions of liberalism and the Democratic party. Counter-backlash stories make two claims. First, they illuminate backlash's limited periodization, or its focus on the late 1960s. Second, they interrogate its narrow focus on conservative realignment. Both of these obfuscate an analysis of the racially exclusive and inegalitarian dimensions of New Deal liberalism and the Democratic Party. Indeed, many of the protections and redistributions of the New Deal—including Social Security and Federal Housing Administration loans—intentionally excluded African Americans, a consequence of the Roosevelt administration's appeasement of Jim Crow Democrats. In

¹⁰ E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Simon & Schuster, 1991), 12; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (Scribner, 2008), xii. See also Roger Hewitt, *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

addition, these scholars have also criticized the backlash account's problematic assumption that racial identities, groups, and interests are pre-given, rather than politically constructed. In other words, these scholars argue that a rethinking of backlash necessitates an analysis of the interactions between language, policies, and political contestation in constituting the political subjects of conservative egalitarianism.

This dissertation makes a discursive analysis of conservative egalitarianism that traces these processes of articulation, or political, institutional, and linguistic construction.¹¹ I analyze the linguistic resources, public policies, and political contests that, through conservative egalitarianism, made possible a broad and popular conservative coalition. My methodological approach consists primarily of close readings of texts, often accompanied by original archival research. I analyze newspaper articles, editorials, and citizen letters; speeches and interviews; legal doctrine and court decisions; organizational literature of political groups and associations; and popular television.¹² As I argue, new historiography and archival methods allow me to trace, through some of these materials, the discursive processes through which egalitarianism is rearticulated—from the redistributive racial projects of the New Deal through the so-called era of "backlash" in the late 1960s and 1970s. Critically, discourse analysis also allows me to demonstrate how non-elite citizens are *co-architects* in this rearticulation.¹³ I argue that while some American citizens are hailed by conservative egalitarianism, they are also

¹¹ By "articulation," I refer not simply to expression, but rather to political-linguistic fusion, such that something new is constructed *through* politics. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York: Verso, 2001), 113-114.

¹² David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Introducing discourse theory and political analysis," *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, David R. Howarth, Alette J. Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis, Eds. (Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹³ Thanks to Matthew Lassiter for this phrasing.

active political agents in the discourse's construction and circulation. Moreover, my discourse analysis shows how these citizens are always *contingent* political subjects, their identities and interests never fully fixed or pre-given prior to discursive construction—of which they are participants. As such, I argue and demonstrate that conservative egalitarian subjects are open to hailing by competing discourses.¹⁴

This dissertation contributes to political and democratic theory by providing a more theoretically informed investigation of the ways in which citizens become political-ideological subjects, as well as the ways in which they articulate and display what Hawley Fogg-Davis calls "racial meaning": that is, the ways in which race, a social and political construction, marks bodies in a racially-stratified society as particular kinds of subjects.¹⁵ Through discourse analysis, I show how the formation of racial and political subjectivity is a contingent process, and how citizens themselves are participants in discursive rearticulation and subject formation. I demonstrate that individuals' political identities are not manipulated, nor are grassroots discourses merely appropriated by political elites. The question in this dissertation thus becomes, how do individuals live race, as a constructed, non-biological, and yet "worldly" material relation? Relatedly, what are the contingent historical contexts within which individuals become conservative egalitarians?¹⁶ As I suggested above, and will pursue in Chapter Four, a popular-cultural

¹⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, 115. See also Elizabeth Wingrove, "Interpellating Sex." *Signs*, 24, 4 (Summer 1999): 875, 881.

¹⁵ Hawley Fogg-Davis, "The Racial Retreat of Contemporary Political Theory," in *APSA*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (September 2003): 555-564. Of course, not all theorists have retreated. For example, see Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Marek Steedman, "How Was Race Constructed in the New South?" *Du Bois Review*, 5:1 (2008): 49-67; and Clarissa Rile Hayward, *How Americans Make Race: Stories, Institutions, Spaces* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ As George Yancy writes, though race is a biological fiction, "one can live/embody the *fiction* of race in such a way that generates *real effects* in the social world." George Yancy, *Black Bodies*,

text like AITF should be seen as resource for investigating the ways in which individuals "live" race.

Backlash narratives have garnered much critical attention from empirical scholars. While political theorists have brought their analytic tools to bear on constructions of race, few have done so in the context of refining backlash narratives. In this dissertation, I take up this task of imaginative and historically informed scholarship, constructing a story of conservative ascendance in American politics that traces the emergence of political subjects that are hailed by, (re)present, and challenge conservative egalitarianism. Although my work aims more broadly to provide a discursive analysis of conservative egalitarianism, it also extends and deepens popular accounts of the rise of backlash in four key ways.

First, though Thomas Edsall introduces an intriguing concept that captures aspects of ideological development within American politics, his theoretical engagement with conservative egalitarianism is minimal.¹⁷ Specifically, he does not analyze conservative egalitarianism as a discursive complex, nor does he illuminate the linguistic and institutional processes through which equality is fused with laissez-faire individualism and an anti-civil rights platform. For example, Edsall does not mobilize the concept of colorblindness, which I argue constitutes one of the key raced discourses of conservative egalitarianism. My analysis of conservative egalitarianism as a discursive complex

White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 33-34. See also George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Beyond Edsall, conservative egalitarianism continues to remain theoretically undeveloped in scholarship in political science more generally. For example, though Benjamin Page and Lawrence Jacobs use the term "conservative egalitarianism" to describe what they identify as the general ideological outlook of Americans—a "middle-ground" that is "philosophically conservative and operationally liberal"—they make no mention of Edsall, nor do they recognize the history of this concept in relationship to race.¹⁷

understands it as deeply implicated by discourses of colorblindness. As such, conservative egalitarianism helps us to understand the ways in which some white citizens in a post-Jim Crow society marked by a disavowal of racism might nonetheless have practiced forms of "symbolic racism," supporting racial equality in principle while opposing it in practice.¹⁸ Indeed, conservative egalitarianism has done much work to hail those who reject explicitly racist discourses by rearticulating equality to an anti-civil rights and anti-welfare state platform. My discursive analysis of conservative egalitarianism shows how it fuses a "thin"—that is, non-contextual, non-substantive, and historically blind—vision of colorblindness with a discourse of equality.

I borrow this concept of a thin colorblindness from Reva Siegel, who analyzes colorblindness as a complex and contingent discourse, one that can be taken up by multiple and often-competing political identities and struggles. As Siegel writes, though formally a principle of racial equality, colorblindness can also be used to support "racial stratification."¹⁹ A thin colorblindness often does just this, evacuating the historical and philosophical critique of slavery and racial and economic subordination from the meaning of civil rights, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. In contrast, a "thick" colorblindness locates race historically and institutionally, emphasizing the ways in which race designates "real cultural differences amongst groups."²⁰ Conservative egalitarianism appropriates the discursive

¹⁸ See David O. Sears, Carl P. Hensler and Leslie K. Speer, "Whites' Opposition to 'Busing': Self-Interest or Symbolic Politics?" *The American Political Science Review*, 73, 2 (Jun. 1979): 369-384; David O. Sears and P. J. Henry, "The Origins of Symbolic Racism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 2 (): 259-275.

¹⁹ Reva B. Siegel, "The Racial Rhetorics of Colorblind Constitutionalism: The Case of *Hopwood v. Texas*." *Race and Representation: Affirmative Action* (Zone Books, 1998), 30.

²⁰ Siegel, "The Racial Rhetorics of Colorblind Constitutionalism," 31.

power of colorblindness from this more progressive tradition, one that had claimed a governmental *duty* to eradicate racial "caste."²¹ In so doing, conservative egalitarianism (re)presents equality as a goal to be achieved not through positive government, legal, or collective action—the kind of action outlined by President Lyndon Johnson in his 1965 Howard University address²²—but rather through individual merit and the free market. Conservative egalitarianism thus fuses a notion of race-blind, "universalized" civil rights to antistatism.

Further, by starting his story of conservative egalitarianism in the late 1960s, Edsall misses the ways in which a period of "white backlash" and the New Deal are also connected by populist anticommunist discourses. Though anticommunism shaped some whites' opposition to special preferences or "reverse discrimination" in the late 1960s and 1970s, Edsall does not acknowledge anticommunist sentiment in *Chain Reaction*, though he does mention white taxpayers' frustrations with the Democratic Party's tenet of

²¹ This is the language of Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan, who in his dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), stated, "in view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. *There is no caste here. Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.* In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved." (at supp. 559, my emphasis). As Julie Novkov, reading Reva Siegel, argues, an anti-subordination and anti-classification principle can be uncovered in Harlan's dissent. The anti-subordination principle was "rooted in the state's responsibility for enforcing the constitutional mandate of equal citizenship," while the anti-classification principle "criticized the state's efforts to enforce policies based in racial classification." Though conservatives have come to read these two principles separately, Novkov and Siegel argue that Harlan probably intended for them to be read co-constitutively. The anti-subordination principle mandated that the state address discrimination and inequality *as it is built into structures*, including the law and economy. Conservative egalitarian colorblindness, however, authorizes the restriction of government power; in practice, this has meant the preservation of "racial stratification." Julie Novkov, "Toward a Legal Genealogy of Colorblindness," Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 10-12, 2007), 5.

²² In his address at Howard University, Johnson spoke of equality in terms not of opportunity, but "as a fact and equality as a result."

"collective social responsibility."²³ For white conservative egalitarians opposed to increasing federal support for civil rights, an association of civil rights with communism makes ideological and conceptual sense: policies aimed at achieving racial equality, and "equality of outcome," were seen as communistic and inegalitarian, a form of redistribution that benefited particular groups in a way that was both unfair and in opposition to "free-market" principles of individualism and merit.

Second, while counter-backlash scholars expand the backlash account's truncated periodization, and acknowledge ideological affinities between liberalism and conservatism, their analyses tend to remain just as focused as the backlash narratives on political parties or partisan projects. Consequently, backlash and counter-backlash scholars alike often miss the ways in which conservative egalitarianism engaged a diverse group of citizens with relatively weak partisan attachments. Indeed, for many Americans, populist identities of "homeowners, taxpayers, and schoolparents" have done more to shape individual political identities than have Republican or Democratic partisan labels.²⁵

Third, backlash and counter-backlash scholarship often says little about the activism of the challengers of conservative egalitarianism, even as some acknowledge a complex social field of competing political claims and coalitions. Specifically absent are the voices of black civil rights and labor activists, who shaped alternative discourses of equality that could actively challenge conservative egalitarian claims to colorblindness and civil rights.

²³ Edsall, 136.

²⁵ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

I trace conservative egalitarianism's theoretical development and its challengers in key historical and institutional locations, from the 1940s through to the election and re-election of Ronald Reagan. In so doing, I focus on what Anna Marie Smith, reading Laclau and Mouffe, calls the "conditions of possibility" for the development of conservative egalitarian subjects who live race in different historical, institutional, and regional contexts.²⁸ In tracing these conditions of possibility, I bring the insights of historians and archival methods to bear on my reimagining. I argue that with and through these resources we can identify micro-level moments where ideologically and socioeconomically diverse citizens find meaning with, make political claims on behalf of, and challenge conservative egalitarianism.

These moments include citizen-to-citizen conversations, correspondence with political and judicial elites, and discourses in the news media, within political organizations and social movements, and popular culture. In these discursive investigations, I demonstrate the importance of raced populist signifiers or identities, rather than simply partisan affiliation, for individuals' (re)presentations of conservative egalitarianism. As populist signifiers, I show how these identities always remain open to challenge or contestation; their meanings are never entirely "filled."²⁹ Key conservative egalitarian subjects that I locate in historical and popular-cultural materials include white taxpayers and homeowners, as property-owning and contributing citizens, and the "(Forgotten) Man in the Street," the hard-working (and usually male) citizen who feels

²⁸ Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The radical democratic imaginary* (Routledge, 1998), 93.

²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (Verso, 2005) 17-18. As Laclau argues, the vagueness of a populist language is precisely what allows for politics, for the "simplification" of political space, and thus ultimately for the construction of hegemony. As he writes, making terms imprecise is "the very condition of political action."

left behind by his government and society. My discursive analysis of conservative egalitarianism also situates its development in relation to actors or agents who are often excluded in standard backlash and counter-backlash narratives. I bring to light the theoretical and practical challenges to conservative egalitarianism, situating the development of conservative egalitarianism alongside its discursive competitors. Specifically, I highlight the figure of the "black citizen-worker," who in challenging the discursive fusion of equality to racial and fiscal conservatism, presents us with alternative to conservative egalitarianism: a more historically and institutionally robust understanding of race and equality.

II. After Backlash: Rethinking Conservative Ascendance

Thomas Edsall's presentation of conservative egalitarianism in *Chain Reaction* describes it as a fusion of racial and fiscal conservatism. Though it embraced small government and free-markets in a moment of industrial decline, conservative egalitarianism attracted working and middle-class whites—wary of a pro-business agenda, and still supportive of a regulatory and redistributive state—through appeals to racial difference and deservingness. According to Edsall, conservative egalitarianism was thus able to construct an unlikely coalition of economically middling voters and a financial elite, groups whose political and economic interests, in theory, should have been opposed. Juxtaposing "equality of opportunity" against a so-called "Establishment liberalism," conservative egalitarianism appealed to white economic anxiety by casting as unfair and unearned many civil rights advances and Great Society economic redistributions. While liberals in the Democratic-controlled Congress and Presidency

championed “government-directed redistributive efforts,” like poverty alleviation and affirmative action, Edsall explains Republican success by underlining the GOP's characterization of liberalism as an ideology *not* of equality for all, but rather of preferential treatment for racial minorities—an equality that, as Archie Bunker feared, came at the expense of white Americans.³⁰

Reviewing *Chain Reaction* at the tail end of Republican presidential dominance, fellow journalists and academics had kind words to say about *Chain Reaction* and its timeliness, as a Democrat captured the White House for the first time since 1976.³¹ Most of these reviewers also accepted Edsall's conventional backlash narrative: that while in principle, racial equality had been supported by a majority of white Americans, by the 1960s the late national mood had soured; white Americans turned away from civil rights as it increasingly came to stand (in their view) not for equality of opportunity, but rather for federally-enforced equality of outcome and affirmative action—a term that had initially been used in the New Deal, in the context of the National Labor Relations Act, to demonstrate the power of the federal government to protect a particular group of citizens, in that case workers.³² Whites who may have been sympathetic to racial equality were more hesitant to support it if, in practice, equality meant “sacrifices or setbacks to their own well-being.”³³ As *Chain Reaction's* backlash account explains it, conservative

³⁰ Edsall, x, 130, 141, 146.

³¹ Bill Clinton's campaign strategists had read, and were influenced by, *Chain Reaction* leading up to his 1992 election. James R. Grossman, "Traditional Politics or the Politics of Tradition? Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics," *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 21, No. 3(September 1993): 533-538.

³² Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.

³³ Roger Hewitt, *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 18. As Hewitt writes, with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, “the drive for guarantees of fundamental citizen *rights* for African Americans” was transcended by “a post-mid-

egalitarianism captured this moment of white anxiety and uncertainty, seizing upon these conflicts over race and fiscal policy, and building a coherent worldview—and a new conservative majority—to understand and engage them. Edsall's book explained this Republican capture in a commonsensical way, illuminating the causes of a purported liberal decline and the "fracturing" of American society. As Jonathan Kirsch of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, *Chain Reaction* was "refreshing," as it spoke of politics "in terms of the quality of life of men, women and children in the real world rather than merely the winning and losing of elections."³⁴ Nigel Ashford called *Chain Reaction* a "wonderfully rich and well-written history of electoral politics from 1964 onwards," drawing upon a multitude of sources.³⁵

However, while positive in their overall assessments, some reviewers pointed out weaknesses in Edsall's account of conservative ascendance. As James R. Grossman argued, *Chain Reaction's* history was too narrow, missing the long-term "social processes" that had led to "white backlash," including "a second reconstruction in the

1960s phase focusing on the broader goals of equality of *outcomes* to set to right the wrongs of slavery and racism.”

The theme of Lyndon Johnson's 1965 State of the Union Address, "The Great Society" arguably encompasses major civil rights legislation, including the Civil Rights of 1964 and the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and 1968, the "War on Poverty" initiatives (jobs and education programs), and the creation of Medicare and Medicaid. As Johnson told the nation in his address, "We worked for two centuries to climb this peak of prosperity. But we are only at the beginning of the road to the Great Society. Ahead now is a summit where freedom from the wants of the body can help fulfill the needs of the spirit." Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union" (Jan. 4, 1965). Online: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26907>. See also The Learning Network, "Lyndon Johnson Outlines 'Great Society' Plans," *The New York Times* (Jan. 4 2012). Online: <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/jan-4-1965-lyndon-johnson-outlines-great-society-plans/>

³⁴ Jonathan Kirsch, "Book Review: The Politics of Race and Taxes in America: Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics, by Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall," *The Los Angeles Times* (Nov. 13 1991).

³⁵ Nigel Ashford, Book Review, *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (July 1993): 625-626.

South and the Great Migration" in the North.³⁶ For James M. Fendrich, Edsall incorrectly attributed Democratic electoral failure to civil rights overreach. In fact, Democrats did too little for white and black Americans alike, failing "to restructure the political economy" or make "economic rights" a priority.³⁷ And though Katy J. Harriger, writing in the *Baltimore Sun*, believed that *Chain Reaction* "overstated" the "central importance of race,"³⁸ Michael C. Dawson argued that *Chain Reaction* was "systematically biased," as it presented "only the case of working-class whites." As Dawson writes, Edsall failed to document the challenges to conservative egalitarian claims of "whites concerned with fairness."³⁹ Racial conflict between black and white Americans, Dawson wrote, is not simply the result of "a confrontation" between "self-interest and principle," but rather "between different conceptions of racial reality, fairness, and different conceptions of the good society."⁴⁰ As Grossman similarly noted in his review, "blacks are insignificant actors in this book," which focuses on "white people, who react to 'race.'"⁴¹

In addition to those authors who critiqued Edsall's account while accepting the basic contours of backlash, some political scientists and historians have since developed persuasive counter-narratives to backlash accounts of Republican hegemony. For example, the historian Thomas Sugrue challenges the claim that, as Edsall writes, conservative egalitarianism had "broken the Democratic New Deal 'bottom-up' coalition"

³⁶ Grossman, 536.

³⁷ James M. Fendrich, Review, *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (May 1993): 388-390.

³⁸ Katy J. Harriger, "Monday Book Reviews: Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics," *Baltimore Sun* (January 6, 1992).

³⁹ Michael C. Dawson, "Review: Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics by Thomas Byrne Edsall; Mary D. Edsall; Shadows of Race and Class by Raymond S. Franklin; The End of Equality by Mickey Kaus," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (Dec. 1993): 1020-1022.

⁴⁰ Dawson, 1021.

⁴¹ Grossman, 536.

after 1964.⁴² Sugrue's portrait of World War II era Detroit is framed by what he calls an "urban antiliberalism": a rejection of racial and economic equality that "had deep roots in a simmering politics of race and neighborhood defensiveness that divided northern cities well before" the emergence of George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and a "new" Republican majority.⁴³ By bringing this "urban antiliberalism" to our attention, Sugrue not only interrogates the post-1964 periodization of backlash, but he also calls into question the backlash account's focus on racial conservatism within the Republican Party. He illuminates racial conservatism within Democratic-voting neighborhoods in cities like Detroit.

Dan Kryder and Robert Mickey agree, noting that terms like "backlash" or "chain reaction" misleadingly posit "conflict as an exception to the 'normal' logic of even-tempered politics, rather than as the rule." As Kryder and Mickey write, backlash accounts incorrectly posit a Republican-led fracturing of a solid New Deal coalition after 1964. Rather, and turning to the work of historians like Sugrue, Kryder and Mickey argue that "white resistance to civil rights" and a decomposition of the New Deal coalition occurred in many Northern cities as early as the 1940s.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the New Deal itself was already a racially exclusive redistribution of wealth and resources, essentially

⁴² Edsall, 5

⁴³ Thomas Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964," *Journal of American History* (September 1995): 551-578.

⁴⁴ Daniel Kryder and Robert W. Mickey, "The Politics of Racial Backlash: Consequences of an American Metaphor," (draft, presented at the 2007 Annual Meetings of the Western Political Science Association, March 8 2007), 3, 14 (cited with author permission). See also Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2004). Singh's introduction provides a rich and yet concise overview of what he calls a misleading and "abbreviated periodization of the civil rights era" in various historical accounts, "as well as fallacies about the South as an exception to national racial norms." For Singh, "backlash" accounts (he references *Chain Reaction* in his footnotes) often cloak "the more complex and contentious racial history of the long civil rights era" (6-14).

"affirmative action for whites," as the historian Ira Katznelson has written.⁴⁵ These accounts, too, call into question the backlash account's figuring of Republican (and conservative egalitarian) ascendance as a direct response to Great Society liberalism.

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson also seek to tell a different story of realignment, though one that does not look back to the New Deal, but rather forward to the late 1970s. According to the authors, a causal story of the "crash" of liberalism and the ascendance of the GOP is "superficially appealing," but incorrect. Hacker and Pierson posit a "great switch point" not in 1964 or 1968, but rather 1978, where they point to Republican-generated policy shifts on spending, taxation, and regulation, alongside the growth in corporate-sponsored political action committees. Nixon did not represent a "backlash," Hacker and Pierson argue, but rather a "broad acceptance of the liberal consensus."⁴⁶ While the authors' economic analysis is important for interrogating backlash, it nonetheless fails to account for the deeply racial components of conservative egalitarianism: a discourse of free-markets, merit, colorblindness, and individualism that is commonsensical *because* it simultaneously hails individuals as particular racial subjects.

While these scholars and others have addressed the problem of periodization in backlash accounts—as well as accounting for the racial policy commitments of both Republicans and Democrats—their counter-narratives tend to focus on party politics and

⁴⁵ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

⁴⁶ Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics* (Simon & Schuster, 2010), 95-98. See also Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton University Press, 2009). According to Bartels, and contra-backlash, "low-income whites have actually become more *Democratic* in their presidential voting behavior" over the last fifty years. Bartels argues that a "familiar" story of electoral realignment, whereby Republicans capture anxious working-class whites by focusing on race and culture, is "largely mythical." (3-4).

institutions to the exclusion of other actors and sites. Relatedly, few have illuminated the co-constitutive role of language and institutions in their counter-narratives. Put differently, many counter-backlash stories have not adequately illuminated conditions of possibility—the discursive processes that we need to uncover in order to investigate empirical claims regarding when, where, and how white "racial resentment" arises. How do citizens themselves live and (re)present race? How and where do they position themselves as raced (and gendered and classed) political subjects with stakes in a particular way of life? That is, how are the structural effects of redistributive policies made meaningful through discourses that make race and racial difference, particularly between whiteness and blackness?⁴⁷

Joseph Lowndes' goal in *From the New Deal to the New Right* (2009) is to take up this task: to pay "close attention to the way that language reshapes political identities (and therefore interests)." As Lowndes writes, a backlash account like that presented in *Chain Reaction* "masks" the "long-term process" by which such political identities and interests are created and recreated. Specifically, backlash fails to account for the discursive fusions of "racism, antigovernment populism, and economic conservatism," and how these fusions are institutionalized through "party-building, social movement organizing, and the exercise of state power." Moreover, backlash accounts hamper our ability to champion "antiracist" and "egalitarian" policies, as backlash continues to shape "the political worldview of many liberals" and "too many intellectuals, institutional actors,

⁴⁷ Mary Hawkesworth, "Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender: Toward a Theory of Raced-Gendered Institutions," *American Political Science Review*, 97, 4 (Nov. 2003): 529-550.

and activists."⁴⁸ Though Lowndes does not mention, nor theorize, conservative egalitarianism in his story, he somewhat gestures at this concept when he writes that the Republican Party represented race through "a language of economic conservatism both regionally and nationally."⁴⁹

Lowndes' counter-backlash study rightly emphasizes the role of long-term discursive innovation in the rise of the New Right. For example, his chapter on Dixiecrat founder Charles Wallace Collins emphasizes the ways in which linguistic reconfiguration was central to a project of electoral realignment as early as the 1940s. As Lowndes shows, Collins believed that poor white southerners' opposition to black civil rights could push them towards a more economically conservative politics, even as they remained attached to the New Deal. Yet discursive reconfiguration was first required. A doctrine of states' rights, self-ownership, and personal freedom had to be linked to both free-market conservatism and support for Jim Crow. In addition to this discursive re-periodization, Lowndes' book persuasively looks to culture as a critical site of discursive innovation. In the novel *Gone to Texas* and the Clint Eastwood film, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, Lowndes reads representations of "the victimized white American who wreaks vengeance on an authoritarian state." Through these mediums of literature and film, Lowndes argues that *Gone to Texas*' author, Asa Earl Carter—a member of the Klan and the Alabama Citizens' Council, as well as a speechwriter for George Wallace—helped to popularize, more broadly, an ideology of "antipathy to centralized authority." Carter constructed "a new

⁴⁸ Joseph Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (Yale University Press, 2009), 161.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5, 10. See also Victoria Hattam and Joseph Lowndes, "The Ground Beneath Our Feet: Language, Culture, and Political Change," in *Formative Acts: American Politics in the Making*, Stephen Skowronek and Matthe Glassman, eds. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

form of political subjectivity... that would oppose both elites... and groups perceived as calling for 'special rights' and acting as parasites on the social body." For Lowndes, fiction and film, in many ways unlike "conscious political speech," can "make sense out of a complex political world and provide models for identification and action."⁵⁰

Though Lowndes' excellent work interrogates backlash, much of his study remains focused on what he terms the "institution of the party," whether through an analysis of party platforms and conventions, or the writings and speeches of politicians and intellectuals, including Wallace Collins, the presidential campaigns of Governor George Wallace and Richard Nixon, and the conservative *National Review* magazine, helmed by William F. Buckley, Jr. For example, in his analysis of Governor Wallace's 1964 and 1968 presidential campaigns, Lowndes writes that the Governor successfully "drove a wedge into the New Deal coalition outside the South and severed the party identification of many Democrats, thereby creating new opportunities for the Republican Party." Similarly, Nixon challenged the New Deal Democratic coalition by creating "sharp wedges between significant elements of that coalition," and *National Review* magazine created "discursive links with the South" that helped to establish "the groundwork for strategic work among Republicans seeking new conservative allies within the party."⁵¹ For Lowndes, a political scientist seeking to understand how "political regimes are created, altered, occasionally dismantled," this focus makes sense. As Lowndes understands his intervention, his work seeks to analyze "the meaning and effects of the speeches, writings, and private correspondence of actors in relation to the distinct political and institutional contexts in which they emerged, particularly the

⁵⁰ Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 141, 151, 154.

⁵¹ Lowndes, 8-9, 107, 54.

mediating institution of the party."⁵² However, though Lowndes emphasizes the significance of populist language—as he argues, Wallace could differentiate himself from both Democrats and Republicans because he engaged populist, antigovernment discourses⁵³—much of what appears in his account as micro-level analysis of political change fails to foreground the voices of actors who are not elites, nor easily classified as partisans. Further missing from Lowndes' challenge to backlash—and Lowndes is not alone in this regard—are the voices of challengers to conservative egalitarianism, as I noted above.

III. A Discursive Analysis of Conservative Egalitarianism

Thomas Edsall's concept of conservative egalitarianism, understood as a multilayered set of raced discourses, is extremely useful for a rethinking of backlash and counter-backlash narratives. By tracing conservative egalitarianism's theoretical development, my dissertation enriches and extends the work of political scientists and historians by moving beyond party politics and elite voices. My account instead emphasizes the creation of racial meaning in citizens' lives, as well as the construction of raced populist signifiers or identities. Moreover, by contextualizing conservative egalitarianism, I situate its development in relation to actors or agents who are often excluded in other accounts, including discursive challengers.

My discursive analysis of conservative egalitarianism contextualizes this historical process of fusion. As noted above, I investigate the long-term discursive processes through which individuals become conservative egalitarian subjects,

⁵² *Ibid*, 159.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 78.

understanding themselves as deserving and privileged white subjects.⁶⁰ My analysis moves between macro- and micro-levels of discourse analysis, focusing on the linguistic and non-linguistic materials that shape, and are shaped by, political subjects as particular raced, classed, and gendered individuals and groups. This analysis allows me to identify key discursive components of conservative egalitarianism that appear in interactions among citizens and elites, in neighborhoods and mass culture, in the 1940s and beyond. Illuminating these moments of hailing and self-constitution thus allows me to extend and enrich critiques of Edsall, underlining problems with periodization and the simplistic "givenness" of attitudes about race in *Chain Reaction*.⁶²

Moreover, by tracing the discursive development of conservative egalitarianism to the New Deal, my analysis illuminates an ideologically complex story about the development of political and racial identities in twentieth-century America. My history demonstrates that one's identity as a Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, perhaps matters less for understanding the success of conservative egalitarianism than do individuals' identification with particular raced discourses and populist identities or signifiers, all of which are unconstrained by a particular periodization, time frame, or political party.

⁶⁰ As Michael Katz writes of the historical development of the category of the "undeserving," because Americans tend to be averse to class-consciousness or class identity, "political discourse has redefined issues of power and distribution as questions of identity, morality, and patronage." Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (Pantheon Books, 1989), 8.

⁶² In *Suburban Warriors*, the historian Lisa McGirr employs a "thick" methodological approach that similarly investigates the ways in which men and women, at the micro-level of the "local," energized conservatism and the conservative movement in the suburbs of Orange County, California. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

In drawing attention to these signifiers, I move away from a focus on partisan affiliation and simplistic binaries that tend to reify party positions on race. Without jettisoning liberalism and conservatism as analytic concepts, I argue that we should understand their ideological content as unstable and context-specific. Indeed, various liberalisms and conservatisms have, in different moments in American politics, embraced understandings of rights embedded in white racial identity and economic privilege, and both have failed to explicitly address the structural effects of racism and discrimination. This is particularly true of the New Deal, in which the social and economic liberalism of Roosevelt's Democratic Party was largely predicated on white racial citizenship. A discourse of colorblindness is significant here as well: By historicizing the concept of colorblindness as a component of conservative egalitarianism, I rethink the ways in which both liberalism and conservatism have constructed racial meanings of whiteness and blackness.

In this sense, I suggest that we might understand conservative egalitarianism as a discursive (re)presentation of the New Deal. Of course, conservative egalitarians have not necessarily sought to abolish the New Deal, especially those entitlements that continue to have broad support in the American public. Rather, I suggest that conservative egalitarianism has reified New Deal era discursive constructions of whiteness and blackness. More specifically, I suggest that conservative egalitarianism has sought to counter the discursive power of the civil rights movement(s) and Great Society, both of which reinterpreted the New Deal as a set of unfulfilled promises—a project to be continually renewed and extended to African Americans through collective and government action.

In Northern industrial cities like Detroit, Michigan, the New Deal shaped raced claims to government largesse, particularly by subsidizing homeownership for whites. Figuring conservative egalitarianism as a discursive (re)presentation of the New Deal, this dissertation understands Detroit as an exemplary historical, institutional, and geographic site of this representation. Though a key part of my story centers on black labor activism in a Southern city, I emphasize the similarities between discourses that championed anti-civil rights sentiment across the Mason-Dixon line. I thus move away from an emphasis on Southern realignment and "massive resistance," as these stories have already been adequately told. Rather, by looking to the discourses of working- and middle-class white Detroiters in the 1940s and the 1970s, I draw attention to conservative egalitarianism's ascendance in Northern cities, as white men and women in the cities and suburbs were hailed not necessarily (or solely) by party, but rather by populist signifiers.

IV. Chapter Outline

I develop a discursive analysis of conservative egalitarianism through four historical, institutional, and popular sites. Each of these sites is a critical location for understanding the processes through which conservative egalitarianism becomes common sense for some Americans. Specifically, I bring conservative egalitarianism's development alive by tracing the discursive components and populist signifiers that are rearticulated in these moments.

In Chapter Two, I bring the insights of recent historical scholarship on the New Deal to challenges the standard backlash account's periodization and focus on partisan

strategy. I argue that the "breakdown of the New Deal coalition" component of many backlash stories misses an analysis of the New Deal as a set of "racial projects": social, political, and economic policies that, shaped by beliefs about whiteness and blackness, "reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines."⁶³ I look to the ways in which some historians and political scientists have (knowingly or not) challenged the backlash account, demonstrating the New Deal's multiple racial projects that were both inclusionary and exclusionary, in terms of policy and discourses of racial difference. I argue that such (re)presentations of the New Deal, and an account of how some white Detroiters claimed their place within these projects, helps us to see the discursive preconditions for conservative egalitarianism. Specifically, I show how New Deal era fusions of whiteness with claims to deserving property rights reappear within conservative egalitarianism. I focus on the city of Detroit in the 1940s, one site of local political activism in which some white Detroiters—in a bid to protect racially homogeneous neighborhoods as homeowners and taxpayers—fused dependence, undeservingness, and communism to a black racial identity, and independence, deservingness, and free-market capitalism to a white racial identity.

Chapter Three provides a rereading of the Detroit busing case *Bradley v. Milliken* at the district level (1971) and in the Supreme Court (1974). Through an archival engagement with citizen letters, newspapers, speeches, and legal documents, I develop the local and national discursive context of antibusing sentiment around *Milliken's* reception in Detroit, and I argue that we understand the conflict over busing as a key site in the development of conservative egalitarianism. First, reading the letters of Detroiters

⁶³ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 56. Thanks to Lisa Disch for suggesting this framing.

opposed to busing for desegregation, I theorize the contested and complicated ways in which white Detroiters voiced their opposition to busing. Attending to class-based variations within busing opposition, I argue that antibusing sentiment in Detroit was not simply the product of working-class "white backlash," but rather that antibusing citizens from multiple ideological and class positions were engaged in the discursive development of conservative egalitarianism. Further, this chapter interrogates a discourse of "de jure" and "de facto" segregation that was used by average citizens and elites alike, and which constituted a key component of conservative egalitarianism. This binary—which contrasts legal or formal segregation with segregation that results from individual choice—was deployed by citizens opposed to busing, Democratic and Republican politicians, and the Supreme Court so as to authorize certain forms of racial segregation as nonjusticiable, and hence outside of the purview of federal civil rights remedies, including busing. By casting some forms of racial segregation as the result of free choices, this binary ultimately obfuscates the New Deal era institutional and ideological roots of segregation and structural inequality in non-Jim Crow Northern cities.

In Chapter Four, I look to television as a site through which, as Lowndes tells us, political subjects might "make sense out of a complex political world."⁶⁴ I provide a reading of the 1970s CBS sitcom, "All in the Family" (AITF), in which I ask, how do Archie Bunker and other characters on the show display racial meaning? More specifically, in what ways does AITF represent what Kirsten Marthe Lentz calls "whiteness in crisis," a conflict that conservative egalitarianism speaks to through its own

⁶⁴ Lowndes, 141.

claims to equality of opportunity and the mantle of civil rights?⁶⁵ Archie Bunker is depicted as assigning blame for his predicaments on both racial minorities and a Liberal Establishment, and in this sense, AITF appears to provide us with a standard portrait of "white backlash." However, though AITF in some ways mirrors a backlash narrative, I argue that the show does critical and constructive discursive work, presenting us with moments in which Archie's self-identification as a white conservative Republican appears open to reconfiguration. I read AITF as a site of popular discursive representation, construction, and interrogation, and I theorize Archie's self-identification with two longstanding American signifiers: the "Forgotten Man" and the "Man in the Street," identities which have been deployed on behalf of widely divergent ideological and political goals. Forgotten by his government and "liberal" culture, Archie self-identifies as an average citizen who has a common sense awareness of how things ought to be. Yet at home, he is challenged by the progressive ideas of his daughter and son-in-law, and his neighborhood and workplace are also coming undone: women are being hired at the docks where he works, and African American and Jewish families are moving into his traditionally white, Protestant neighborhood. Though Archie is challenged by these developments, I argue that AITF presents the (Forgotten) Man in the Street—as with all political subjectivities—as open to ideological disruption. Emphasizing these moments of disruption, I argue that AITF can help us to contrast "white backlash" with a more contingent and critical story of political self-identification and change.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I turn to the Memphis sanitation workers strike of 1968, foregrounding the voices of black civil rights and labor activists. I argue that within this

⁶⁵ Kirsten Marthe Lentz, "Quality versus Relevance: Feminism, Race, and the Politics of the Sign in 1970s Television," *Camera Obscura*, 43, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2000): fn. 45, fn. 47.

strike for collective bargaining rights we can uncover a discursive challenge and alternative to conservative egalitarianism. To theorize this challenge, I frame the strike as a counterpublic: not simply a labor strike, the workers' movement contested New Deal discursive formations that were to become resources for conservative egalitarianism. First, I argue that the sanitation workers' strike countered the racial exclusions of the New Deal and the American labor movement. Encapsulated in their call to action, "I AM A Man," the black sanitation workers claimed the right, as what I call "black citizen-workers," to unionize a predominantly black occupation. In their demand to be seen as equal citizen-workers, the sanitation workers countered paternalistic discourses that posited the workers as incapable of equal citizenship, and as prone to communistic influences. Second, I argue that the workers' counterpublic articulated a more substantive conceptualization of race and racial equality, one that could be taken up against conservative egalitarianism's claims to the mantle of equality and civil rights. I contrast the workers' egalitarianism, which emphasizes the necessity of structural economic reform, with a conservative egalitarian colorblindness that forecloses the possibility of institutional and structural civil rights remedies. Moreover, as a community-oriented colorblindness, I argue that the workers' egalitarianism did not rely upon the abstracted and race-neutral individual of conservative egalitarianism. Rather, their egalitarianism sparked solidarity across lines of class and gender in Memphis' black community, engaging women and members of the black middle-class who identified with the strikers' plight and cause *as* black men and women. Tending to this complex negotiation of the individual and the community—and of race, class, and gender identities—I argue that the Memphis sanitation workers' discursive legacy remains critical for the pursuit of racial

and economic equality in the twenty-first century, particularly as conservative egalitarianism remains, for some Americans, a compelling discursive frame through which to understand equality and civil rights.

Chapter Two:

Before Conservative Egalitarianism: (Re)presenting the New Deal

"Whites pay taxes; Negroes get housing and relief."
"Negroes have not earned the right to live with whites."⁶⁶

I. *Introduction*

Popular accounts of the New Deal have often characterized it as a universal and egalitarian expansion of the federal government: a set of public policies that provided Americans with equal opportunities for social and economic mobility and security, including employment and retirement, a college education, peaceful labor organizing, and homeownership. Over the past twenty years, scholars in the fields of history and political science have begun to interrogate this narrative. More specifically, their retellings draw explicit attention to the New Deal's systematic exclusion of African Americans, demonstrating that the New Deal was not simply racially egalitarian, nor racially exclusive, but rather that both elements existed in a tense and yet mutually reinforcing relationship. In illuminating the New Deal's racial exclusions, these accounts have not only focused on the policies of the Roosevelt administration, but have also provided

⁶⁶ Samples of language used by white opponents of the Sojourner Truth Houses, Detroit (1942). Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (Harper & Brothers, 1955), 95.

impressive evidence of pre-"white backlash" discourses of race and racial difference that would be rearticulated in conservative egalitarianism.⁶⁷

Conservative egalitarianism appropriates discourses of equality and civil rights in the service of conservative fiscal and racial policy aims, juxtaposing a free-market understanding of equality of opportunity against government mandated "equality of outcome." Particularly over the last forty years, conservative egalitarianism has shaped and championed understandings of white (as opposed to black) civil rights, opposition to reverse discrimination, and a thin colorblindness that posits race as mere skin color, and not as an endemic feature of political, social, and economic institutions. Though these discursive components arise in a particular historical and political context, many can be connected to the New Deal. Recent historical work on the New Deal demonstrates that white elites and homeowners, prior to the late 1960s and the rise of the New Right,

⁶⁷ For example, see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the second ghetto: Race and housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1983); Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942* (Temple University Press, 1984); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1985); Thomas Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964," *The Journal of American History*, 82, 2 (Sep. 1995): 551-578; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton University Press, 1996); Thomas Sugrue, "All Politics is Local: The Persistence of Localism in Twentieth-Century America," *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*. Jacobs, Novak, & Zelizer, Eds. (Princeton University Press, 2003); David M.P. Freund, "Making it Home: Race, Development, and the Politics of Place in Suburban Detroit, 1940-1967" Vol. 1 (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999); David M.P. Freund, "Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America," *The New Suburban History*, Kruse & Sugrue, Eds. University of Chicago Press, 2006); David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Ira Katznelson and Suzanne Mettler, "On Race and Policy History: A Dialogue about the G.I. Bill," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Sep. 2008): 519-537; Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (University of California Press, 2010); Anthony S. Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Michael Hiltzik, *The New Deal: A Modern History* (Free Press, 2011); Colleen Doody, *Detroit's Cold War: The Origins of Postwar Conservatism* (University of Illinois Press, 2013).

engaged in a similar language of exclusive white property rights—similar to a conservative egalitarian language of white civil rights—making commonsensical for themselves the intersections of race, redistribution, and equality in their own neighborhoods.

In this chapter, I argue that these historical (re)presentations of the New Deal prompt a retelling of the standard narrative of conservative egalitarianism. Rather than understanding the New Deal as simply egalitarian and universal or racist and particular, scholars have reframed the New Deal as a set of multiple "racial projects," some of which were committed to racial equality and others to racial segregation and discrimination. As a set of policies that use politically constructed representations of race and racial difference to decide, "who gets what," racial projects authorize particular racial subjects as deserving of the public's resources.⁶⁸ Scholarship on the New Deal that emphasizes its multiple racial projects shows us not only how the New Deal's safety net programs were implemented on the ground; it further illustrates the ways in which citizens identified with racial subjectivities or identities that were constituted by and through the New Deal's extension of the economic safety net, and how such identities structured political conflict on the ground. Turning to historical re-readings of the New Deal can thus help political theorists to uncover the long-term processes through which some citizens come to identify with, circulate, and represent racial meaning. It is with this more complex story of the New Deal as a set of multiple racial projects that we need to begin an analysis of conservative egalitarianism.

⁶⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 1994) 56, 59.

I mobilize the work of historians of the New Deal to demonstrate how a rethinking of the New Deal's egalitarianism challenges two central components of dominant accounts of the rise of the New Right and the ascendance of conservative egalitarianism. First is claim about periodization—which locates "white backlash" in the mid-late 1960s—and ideology—which suggests that the New Deal coalition was unified until backlash—that characterizes many backlash narratives. Second, scholars analyzing the rise of the New Right have used this periodization to focus on partisan identities and strategies, including those of the campaigns of Richard Nixon, as well as the Southern Strategy.

First, standard accounts of the ascendance of the New Right posit that it was only in the 1960s, in a moment of "white backlash" to the civil rights gains of African Americans, that the "Democratic New Deal 'bottom-up' coalition" was broken.⁶⁹ In this narrative, the New Deal had been supported by a broad and unified coalition that agreed upon a universal and egalitarian extension of economic opportunity. Backlash was a response to the Great Society and War on Poverty's overextension of the welfare state and federal support for civil rights, particularly to programs perceived as threatening to "white civil rights," or as promoting "reverse discrimination."

However, understandings of white racial identity and racial difference that undergird and support conservative egalitarianism—including the image of the deserving and meritocratic taxpayer, and the notion of white civil rights—appear within, and are constituted by, the racial projects of the New Deal. Specifically, historical scholarship shows us how New Deal programs helped to discursively construct a relationship

⁶⁹ This is Edsall's phrase. *Chain Reaction*, ix, 5.

between whiteness, deserving property ownership, and free-markets. Discourses that supported white citizens' sense of entitlement to economic resources or goods, particularly housing, also shaped whites' beliefs about blackness and undeservingness. The New Deal coalition was not an egalitarian project based on shared understandings of economic opportunity for all. Rather, it was a fragile coalition that held together because of its racial exclusions.

Urban historians of New Deal era Detroit show us how fusions of whiteness to deserving homeownership became a part of everyday discourses in local political conflicts, thus providing the discursive preconditions of conservative egalitarianism. A labor city of rapidly expanding and government-backed homeownership, Detroit was one site of local political activism in which some whites, according to a 1952 Wayne State University study, constructed blacks as "bad citizens" who were "spreading out," had "too many rights," or should not be given the same "full and equal rights."⁷⁰ These white Detroiters figured themselves as independent and deserving citizens, with hard-earned rights to both homeownership and the choice of living in segregated neighborhoods. Though Edsall's backlash account might lead us to think that such discourses were primarily a feature of "white backlash" in the late 1960s, national observers of Detroit's mayoral elections in the 1940s understood the New Deal itself as creating the conditions for rightward political-ideological transformation. Analyzing the mayoral election of Edward J. Jeffries—in a contest that was dominated by race and redbaiting—a November 1945 edition of *Newsweek* even suggested that, "For those who have contended that the political trend in this country is not toward the left but the right, the Detroit election

⁷⁰ Arthur Kornhauser, *Attitudes of Detroit People Towards Detroit: Summary of a Detailed Report* (Wayne State University Press, 1952), pp. 6, 10, 13, 26.

provided new substantiating facts."⁷¹ This election will be analyzed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Second, dominant backlash accounts that describe the rise of the New Right as a feature of the late 1960s also tend to characterize it as a Republican project or initiative. In so doing, these stories have focused on partisan identity and political strategies, including those of the campaigns of George Wallace and Richard Nixon, and the Southern Strategy. These accounts often overlook the ways in which conservative egalitarian discourses of race and racial difference that conservative Republicans adopted in the 1960s share a great deal with racial discourses articulated in the New Deal era, by Democratic, Republican, and nonpartisan voters alike. Discursive fusions of whiteness, property, and deservingness were not Republican or conservative innovations, but rather were constructed through long-term political processes involving multiple agents. As historical scholarship on the New Deal demonstrates, these discourses were integral to both defenders of the New Deal and its opponents, both within and outside of Jim Crow.

For example, historians of Detroit illustrate that while committed to particular redistributive policies of the New Deal, many of the city's white workers and union members— particularly those who were members of segregationist white "homeowners associations"— voted for both Democratic and Republican, liberal and conservative candidates in various local, state, and national elections. Though perhaps committed to the Democratic Party, white homeowners also voted for rightward leaning candidates in

⁷¹ Quoted in Carl O. Smith and Stephen B. Sarasohn, "Hate Propaganda in Detroit," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1946): 26, footnote 3. Indeed, even seven years earlier a national public opinion poll had found that "over 70 percent of those consulted wanted the Roosevelt administration to move in a 'more conservative' direction." M.J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within 1830-1970* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 123.

key mayoral elections in the 1940s. In these elections, white Detroiters' self-identification was shaped not so much by partisan affiliations or ideology; rather, they identified with a discourse of deserving white homeownership. Thus, in a "politics of place," what mattered for many white Detroiters was not necessarily their identification with a particular party, but rather with particular kinds of racial subjectivities.⁷²

By mobilizing historical work that interrogates the New Deal's claims to universality and equality, we can more carefully and accurately tell the story of the rise of conservative egalitarianism in American politics. Discursive features of conservative egalitarianism were constituted not simply in a moment of partisan-generated "backlash"; rather, they were politically constructed and supported through a long-term process of discursive innovation and negotiation.

II. Rethinking the New Deal

The New Deal is often touted as a universal and egalitarian racial project, with some policy exceptions. These narratives of the New Deal not only describe its colorblind extension of economic opportunity and security to all Americans, but they also tend to highlight the Roosevelt administration's support for racial equality and civil rights. For example, Michael J. Klarman writes that the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were important symbols of "progressive racial change." As Klarman continues, "However discriminatory its administration, the New Deal at least included blacks within its pool of

⁷² As Thomas Sugrue writes, America's "politics of liberalism" has been "a politics of place": it is at the local level "where the meaning and implementation of federal policies" occurs. And it was with the New Deal that many Americans for the first time felt the direct presence of the federal government in their lives. Sugrue, "All Politics is Local: The Persistence of Localism in Twentieth-Century America," 302-03.

beneficiaries." Moreover, "the vast expansion of national power during the New Deal would eventually enhance the federal government's ability to protect the rights of southern blacks."⁷³ President Roosevelt would even take executive action on civil rights, enshrining colorblindness into the law through the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941, whose goal was to eradicate "discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin." The Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) gave the federal government the power to enter into the "private" marketplace and "take action against alleged employment discrimination."⁷⁴

Other scholars have emphasized that both the administration of the New Deal and its entitlement programs were racially exclusionary. Some of these key programs—including Social Security, minimum wage and maximum working hours laws, and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) home loans—explicitly excluded farm and domestic labor, work that was done primarily by African Americans. Moreover, redlining, practiced by both realtors and the FHA, excluded blacks from the promise of homeownership.⁷⁵ By these exclusions, the New Deal forged an economic divide along

⁷³ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 110-111.

⁷⁴ "Fair Employment Practices Committee," The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, The Department of History at George Washington University. Online: <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/fepc.cfm> (Accessed June 11, 2014).

⁷⁵ Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Living Apart: How the Government Betrayed a Landmark Civil Rights Law," *ProPublica* (Oct. 28, 2012). Online: <http://www.propublica.org/article/living-apart-how-the-government-betrayed-a-landmark-civil-rights-law> (Accessed Dec. 19, 2013). A key facilitator of economic stability and a middle-class life, the New Deal's home loan initiatives supported the building of racially segregated neighborhoods until the 1950s. The Veterans Administration and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) also condoned banks' refusals of home loans for black soldiers, and between 1934 and 1962, almost one hundred percent of all FHA-backed home loans were given to whites. When they did build public housing for African Americans, state and local governments "relocated" blacks to constrained areas of inner cities, tearing down integrated and

racial lines, and it circulated discourses of racial identity, particularly fusions of whiteness to deserving, independent, and entitled homeownership.

Of course, this scholarship is not the first to notice the New Deal's multiple racial projects. Even Klarman's more positive assessment emphasizes that we "must not overstate the New Deal's racial progressivism."⁷⁶ As Klarman continues, "Had it posed too great a threat to the racial status quo, white southerners would have never supported the New Deal."⁷⁷ Indeed, African Americans were among the first to highlight New Deal's relative indifference to their welfare. As a 1935 Howard University report on the racial structure of the New Deal concluded, "*social planning generally has availed [the Negro] little* either because of its underlying philosophy, or because its administration has been delegated to local officials who reflect the unenlightened mores of their respective communities." In 1936, Thomas Arnold Hill of the National Urban League also denounced the New Deal's racial exclusions, referencing the "Forgotten Man" decades before conservative egalitarians would hail "forgotten" white Americans. As Hill said of the New Deal's limited and racialized extension of economic opportunity, "the Negro remains *the most forgotten man* in a program planned to deal new cards to... millions of workers."⁷⁸ Historical accounts of the New Deal that emphasize its racial exclusions provide us with a more nuanced account of its multiple racial projects, thus illuminating the ways in which it existed alongside, and not in tension with, racial

predominantly black neighborhoods so as to make way for all white "redevelopment." Through a government-supported process known as "redlining," loan companies graded white neighborhoods as "the least risky and black neighborhoods as the most," thus discouraging the "mixing" of "inharmonious racial or nationality groups." Whites were encouraged to abandon neighborhoods marked "hazardous," even if only a few black families lived in the area.

⁷⁶ Klarman, 111.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Quoted in Hiltzik, *The New Deal: A Modern History*, 308, 320 (my emphasis).

conservatism. In so doing, these retellings help us to trace discursive commonalities between the New Deal and conservative egalitarianism.

Yet such criticisms, much like overly favorable portraits of the New Deal, often miss an analysis of its multiple racial projects, as illustrated by Ira Katznelson and Suzanne Mettler's debate regarding the G.I. Bill of 1944. This debate demonstrates how the New Deal's was at once racially egalitarian and exclusionary. According to Mettler, the Bill—which extended educational, training, and entrepreneurial opportunities to returning servicemen—promoted "equal opportunity" and "political equality" for both white and black veterans. In fact, Mettler calls the G.I. Bill "the *most* racially inclusive policy of the era,"⁷⁹ certainly more inclusive than other forms of public assistance administered by local Jim Crow authorities. According to Mettler, not only did African American veterans take advantage of a federally guaranteed college education: through the G.I. Bill, they also increased their overall civic participation.⁸⁰ Although Katznelson agrees with Mettler that the G.I. Bill was formally "universal," he disputes the claim that it was practically inclusive. According to Katznelson, the G.I. Bill's implementation, particularly in the South, was "flawed" in terms of black participation. From his perspective, the G.I. Bill itself was "crafted in southern-led congressional committees to make universal benefits consistent with racist practices." Though the policy outlines of the New Deal may have been egalitarian, they "were deeply injured by their encounter with Jim Crow."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Katznelson and Mettler, 525.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 528.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 530-531.

Katznelson provides evidence of the New Deal's discursive innovations, particularly its fusions of a white racial identity with justifiable, and deserving, claims to the public's resources. As he persuasively argues, white Americans in the 1930s and 1940s were actually the first beneficiaries of what we now refer to as "affirmative action." In this narrative of the New Deal, Katznelson seeks to alter the country's "historical attention span,"⁸² reorienting our gaze backwards from the Great Society in order to see the New Deal's redistributive policies as a form of positive government action that privileged white Americans. In this reorientation, Katznelson not only asks us to rethink the federal government's role in shaping and facilitating economic opportunity, but also presents the New Deal coalition as fragile and dependent upon the tenuous support of Southern Democrats who, as proponents of "states' rights," agreed to receive federal New Deal money only when guaranteed that local Jim Crow authorities would control its disbursement.

As Katznelson and Mettler demonstrate, the liberalism of the New Deal Democratic Party has provided philosophical and material resources for the institutionalization of both racial equality and exclusion. Their work thus pushes us to tell a more nuanced story of the New Deal, one that does not contrast it to Jim Crow, but rather explains how it provided support for institutional segregation and discrimination across the Mason-Dixon line. This kind of scholarship (re)presents the New Deal not simply as one kind of racial project, but as multiple racial projects: a fusion of discourses of racial egalitarianism and racial exclusion.

⁸² Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), xii-xiii.

Anthony Chen's story of the New Deal also describes it as promoting multiple racial projects. Chen challenges "backlash" accounts of the rise of the New Right. He does so by drawing explicit connections between conservative egalitarianism and discourses that emerged in opposition to New Deal Fair Employment legislation in the 1940s. As he writes of language used to oppose FEP legislation, it "bore striking resemblances to the discourse of 'conservative egalitarianism' allegedly inaugurated by Goldwater and perfected by Reagan."⁸³ Specifically, Chen's analysis of citizen, business, and Republican opposition to the FEPC illustrates pre-conservative egalitarian discursive fusions of colorblindness, antistatism, and "white civil rights" that characterized antidiscrimination legislation as a form of special preference or "reverse discrimination."

According to Chen, Republicans, and some "self-identified" non-Southern Democrats, opposed FEP legislation because, in their eyes, claims of "civil rights" and "discrimination" were covers for an "attempt to secure preferred treatment for a small minority at the expense of the equally sacred 'civil rights' of the majority."⁸⁴ In Chen's analysis of the multiple racial projects of this era, though some Republicans voiced their colorblindness and support for the "idea of racial equality," theirs was what we might now call a thin colorblindness. Opponents of the FEPC expressed their hostility using a pre-conservative egalitarian language of free-markets, merit, and anti-government populism.⁸⁵ Moreover, many white constituents of Republican legislators also engaged

⁸³ Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972*, 148.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 71. Even when relatively liberal Republicans in states like California desired to take racially egalitarian positions on fair employment, they were often stymied by the racial conservatism of those they represented. See Anthony S. Chen, Robert W. Mickey, and Robert P. Van Houweling, "Explaining the Contemporary Alignment of Race and Party: Evidence from California's 1946 Ballot Initiative on Fair Employment," *Studies in American Political Development*, 22 (Fall 2008): 204-228.

these purportedly colorblind discourses, contrasting FEP legislation with “American ideals.” Chen quotes a resident of Lakewood, Ohio, who wrote to Senator Robert Taft on the matter of the FEPC: “In *our* land, a person should be judged for his qualifications, ability, and character – and not for the color of his skin.” Thus, before conservative egalitarianism, some whites believed that the federal government would force employers to hire minorities, or that it would “confer special privileges on minorities.”⁸⁶

Daniel Martinez HoSang's explication of "political whiteness" in California politics in the 1940s similarly illuminates anti-government and anti-civil rights discourses that championed both colorblindness and explicit racial exclusion. In his challenge to the "backlash" story, HoSang describes FEP legislation as one of multiple racial projects. Like Chen, he demonstrates discursive fusions of "anticommunist and antiregulatory narratives" within anti-FEPC arguments that were not simply juxtaposed to, but rather also "celebrated some tenets of racial tolerance and liberalism." As HoSang finds in these state-level fair employment debates, "liberal commitments" to equality and opportunity could be expressed precisely because they operated within strict racial boundaries. Liberalism, HoSang continues, "was always already racial."⁸⁷

I argue that this scholarship, which focuses on the discursive features of the New Deal, can help us to more finely illustrate the multiple racial projects of the New Deal that forged racial identities and shaped political conflict. Particularly at the micro-level, in citizens' experiences of political conflict and negotiation, historians and political scientists have emphasized non-Southern stakeholders' contributions to the New Deal's racial exclusivity, as well as the ways in which white claims to property were shaped by

⁸⁶ Chen, 48, 73.

⁸⁷ HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*, 20, 25.

such exclusions well before the era of conservative egalitarianism. These scholars provide us with a portrait of white homeowners in regions without Jim Crow laws living in racially segregated neighborhoods and guarding their access to New Deal benefits with vigor.

As David M.P. Freund compellingly argues, pre-conservative egalitarian discursive fusions of free-market capitalism, colorblindness, individual choice, and property rights were often mobilized by whites in order to justify racial segregation in housing. Yet, as Freund demonstrates, it was not necessarily "free markets" or unregulated private choice that gave white Americans access to homeownership. Rather, it was "affirmative action for whites": homeownership was facilitated by federal action on the part of liberal New Dealers, specifically through the FHA's home mortgage credits. According to Freund, and in the context of unprecedented government expansion and intervention in the marketplace, the Democratic Party adopted a language of free-markets in order to reassure business interests that the New Deal was not aimed at communistic "'state control' of private enterprise."⁸⁸

Katznelson's discussion of Southern Democratic opposition to New Deal programs is illustrative here. For Democrats concerned about the stability of Jim Crow, the communistic "leveling" effects of the New Deal's interventionist welfare state might dangerously put "the Negro and the white man on the same basis," as Democrat James Mark Wilcox of Florida feared.⁸⁹ Yet, as Freund also emphasizes, anticommunist discourses were not attractive to, or instrumental for, elites or politicians alone. Nor was anticommunism a unique feature of some Southerners' opposition to the New Deal. White

⁸⁸ Freund, "Marketing the Free Market," 23.

⁸⁹ Katznelson, 60.

homeowners appropriated this language when explaining their own claims to property and economic security, as well as their opposition to federal intervention on behalf of African Americans' economic independence.⁹⁰ Both Katznelson and Freund demonstrate that anticommunism also figured in Northerners' associations of whiteness with deserving homeownership and free markets, and blackness with dependence and communism.

In the context of the New Deal's expansion of government, whites' accusations of a communist and civil rights alliance—or of racial equality's communist undertones—make sense, politically and conceptually. These accusations not only served to delegitimize African Americans' claims to resources like subsidized homeownership or education; white homeowners' anticommunism also made their own claims to, and experiences of, the New Deal both meaningful and justifiable. A key signifier that expressed racial difference, the deserving white homeowner (and often self-identified taxpayer) sought to protect his property rights from both black outsiders and an interventionist state. The white homeowner saw himself as a hard-working, meritocratic, independent, and tax-contributing citizen, and he spoke in a language of free-markets. Whereas communism was understood to "level"—or to make all undeservingly equal—free-market capitalism rewarded individual effort. Though African Americans also sought government-subsidized homes, white homeowners viewed them as undeserving of homeownership. The white homeowner saw the "unfair" provision of housing for blacks—especially in or near white neighborhoods—as a form of unearned special preference, dependence on the state, and communism.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Freund, "Marketing the Free Market," 12-14, 16, 31.

⁹¹ Though African Americans, part of a Second Great Migration, found employment opportunities in war era Detroit, most black migrants and their families were often forced into

It is important to acknowledge that discursive fusions of civil rights, racial equality, and communism are not without some factual or historical merit. There were indeed political and strategic links between some segments of the nation's civil rights communities, the labor movement, and the American Communist Party. This should not be surprising, as the Party had been one of the earliest and most consistent supporters of racial equality and economic justice. Indeed, communists were a part of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) and the National Negro Congress (NNC) both during and after World War II.⁹² A vocal opponent of Jim Crow, the Communist Party viewed African Americans as "the most subjugated and expropriated segment of the American proletariat."⁹³ However, while political relationships existed between these two movements, when whites engaged discourses of antistatism and anticommunism, they were justifying their own claims to homeownership in a moment when government was increasingly interventionist on *their* behalf.

single, rented rooms in a small area of the city known as "Paradise Valley" or the "Black Bottom." Cathy MacDonald, "Detroit's Black Bottom and Paradise Valley Neighborhoods." Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, MI. Online: <https://www.reuther.wayne.edu/node/8609> (Accessed May 12, 2014).

⁹² Doody, *Detroit's Cold War: The Origins of Postwar Conservatism*, 10-14. Detroit's Communist Party had been one of the country's largest in the 1930s, mobilizing black and white autoworkers during the Depression. Especially after the Ford River Rouge strike in 1932, and law enforcement's violent suppression of the strike, the Party actually gained sympathy. Of course, this frightened the business community. As Doody writes, Detroit's business elite "reacted with horror when Communists led mass protests" in Detroit during the Depression years. However, Doody is quick to emphasize that these elites had long attributed any and all labor agitation to Communism. As Doody quotes Detroit Bishop Michael J. Gallagher, speaking on the General Motors sit-down strike in 1937, there was "Soviet planning behind it." The House Un-American Activities Committee even held hearings on Detroit's labor movement in 1938. For more on African Americans' involvement in, and support for, various communist movements and organizations, see Robin D.G. Kelley, "'Comrades, Praise Gawd for Lenin and Them!': Ideology and Culture among Black Communists in Alabama, 1930-1935," *Science & Society*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Spring, 1988): 59-82.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 49.

White Americans understood government-guaranteed homeownership as a hard-earned right. As the scholars discussed above demonstrate, white homeowners understood this entitlement through discourses of race and racial difference. By illuminating these discourses, I argue that scholars who (re)present the multiple racial projects of the New Deal also challenge standard narratives of partisan-generated "white backlash" and conservative egalitarianism. As the following sections will demonstrate, urban historians of New Deal and war era Detroit challenge standard backlash accounts by illustrating, much earlier than the late 1960s, the circulation of discourses of white propertied identities. In the neighborhoods and workplaces of Detroit, whiteness was fused to notions of deservingness, independence, and anticommunism, whereas blackness was fused with undeservingness, dependence, and communism.

III. *A "Politics of Place": Deserving (White) Homeowners in Detroit*

Urban historians have provided particularly rich, micro-level depictions of pre-conservative egalitarian discourses. In their focused studies of war era Detroit, I argue that Dominic Capeci, Jr., Thomas Sugrue, and Colleen Doody demonstrate the political construction of whiteness as a formative political and propertied identity.⁹⁴

Pre-"white backlash" discourses that figured deserving homeownership and citizenship as white were prevalent in Detroit's white ethnic working- and middle-class

⁹⁴ The historian Arnold R. Hirsch's study of housing integration in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in the city's South Deering neighborhoods, similarly documents pre-conservative egalitarian discursive fusions of whiteness with a free-market language of homeownership. As Hirsch demonstrates, white opponents of integration celebrated their independence and work ethic as if it was achieved "without government help." Reading local neighborhood newspapers, Hirsch provides a rich portrait of these neighborhoods, where whites—who "worked like hell and saved"—juxtaposed their work ethic and deservingness against blacks. Hirsch, *Making the second ghetto: Race and housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

neighborhoods in the 1940s, composed predominantly of Polish, Italian, and Irish workers. It is important to emphasize that the racial identities of these groups was meaningful only as it was further constituted through identities of neighborhood, class, ethnicity, and gender.⁹⁵ Taking into account the importance of these intersectional modalities, working-class whites in Detroit juxtaposed their deserving identities, as white beneficiaries of the New Deal, against those of African Americans, whom they classified as undeserving and non-contributing Others.⁹⁶ When and if economic opportunity was extended to black Detroiters, some whites interpreted it not as an earned right, but rather as an overextension of federal power, or worse, an example of communism.

Dominic J. Capeci, Jr.'s work on housing in war era Detroit illuminates these discourses of the deserving and the undeserving, situating housing within a politics of racial unrest and scarcity "in an era of rising expectations and blocked opportunities."⁹⁷ Indeed, the conflict over the physical and symbolic space of Detroit's neighborhoods—we might think of these neighborhoods as constituted by racial boundaries of deservingness and undeservingness—was arguably a contest over the very meanings of equality and opportunity. This is particularly true of Capeci's analysis of the Sojourner Truth Houses, a defense housing project built by the federal government in the early 1940s.

⁹⁵ John Hartigan, *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁹⁶ What Theda Skocpol calls the long-standing "institutional and cultural oppositions between the morally 'deserving' and the less deserving" were characteristic of the racial project of government-backed homeownership in Detroit, where "Who got what?" depended upon raced constructions of deservingness. Skocpol quoted in John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 63.

⁹⁷ Capeci, ix.

Responding to wartime housing shortages in the city, the Detroit Housing Commission originally planned in 1941 to build two defense housing projects, one white and one black. Yet when the federal government decided to move the black housing site, Sojourner, to a predominantly white area, residents of the target area reacted immediately, picketing the site when black families arrived in the winter of 1942.⁹⁸ Eventually, an interracial coalition in support of the project was victorious, and black families moved into Sojourner in April 1942.⁹⁹

According to Capeci, opposition to Sojourner and other black housing sites was particularly prevalent amongst "status-conscious" Polish Detroiters, who had an otherwise "amiable, peaceful coexistence" with African Americans during the Depression. This relationship transformed with the war, and with increased demand for housing, and Polish Detroiters united in their opposition to racial integration. As Capeci says of the links between racial identity and claims to property, Polish Americans "placed the highest priority on purchasing their own houses." Homeownership, cultural community, and stable and homogeneous neighborhoods were all connected in the discourses of Poles, who, like "other ethnics in similar settings elsewhere," sought to "protect their economic and emotional investment from outsiders," specifically African Americans.¹⁰⁰

Though Sojourner sparked a particularly violent reaction, white opposition to black socioeconomic mobility was exhibited well before and after Sojourner, in the city's

⁹⁸ Frank B. Woodford, "Storm over new housing in Detroit: History of Project Which Brought on Race Riots," *The New York Times* (Mar. 15, 1942), E7.

⁹⁹ Joe T. Darden et al., *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development* (Temple University Press, 1987), 118-19.

¹⁰⁰ Capeci, 78, 147.

factories, schools, and churches. For example, a riot that took place at Northwestern High School in February of 1940 was instigated by whites who opposed to the changing “racial composition” of the high school. According to Capeci, the language of white Detroiters at the scene resembles that which would be mobilized around Sojourner, particularly discursive constructions of the white taxpayer and black tax recipient, as well as anticommunism. As one white police officer at the scene claimed, the trouble at Northwestern was caused not by whites, but by blacks, who—unlike white homeowners—“don’t pay any taxes anyway.”¹⁰¹ Police officers spoke not only of the burdens being placed on white taxpayers by integration, but they also equated the goals of racial equality with something foreign and un-American. As Capeci quotes one police interrogator at the scene, members of the Young Communist League—the interrogator called them “comrades”—were behind such violence.¹⁰² These assumptions, that communist-affiliated blacks disrupted white advantage and utilized public programs without contributing to society, came to define the conflict over housing in Detroit.¹⁰³

Thomas Sugrue's work on New Deal and war era Detroit illustrates similar discursive fusions of whiteness and entitlement and blackness and undeservingness. Reading the records and public documents of Detroit's ethnically diverse white homeowners associations—as well as city and regional newspapers and government documents— Sugrue uncovers pre-conservative egalitarian discourses around homeownership that fuse beliefs about individualism, free-markets, and antistatism with

¹⁰¹ Capeci, 21-22 (my emphasis). Capeci traces raced taxpaying discourses in the city's churches, too. For example, Reverend Constantine Dzink, a pastor with the St. Louis the King Parish Church in Northeast Detroit, complained in 1943 of blacks moving into his predominantly white and Polish neighborhood. Fusing whiteness with a taxpaying status, Dzink argued that blacks only “burdened Catholic taxpayers,” writes Capeci.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 78.

whiteness. These discourses also construct a dependent and “transient” black community, regardless of African Americans' own claims to homeownership and equal citizenship.

Defenders of deserving homeowners, white "homeowners associations," or "neighborhood" or "protective" associations, were active political agents in Detroit during and after the war. According to Sugrue, they were often created or supported by real estate developers who sought to exclude blacks from predominantly white neighborhoods through the enforcement of restrictive covenants and zoning laws—an action supported by FHA appraisal policies that ruled black neighborhoods as risky. Like Freund, Sugrue also shows how these businesses and real estate agencies helped to create and circulate discourses of free-markets with "white civil rights," often expressed as the "choice" of responsible homeowners to live where one chooses.¹⁰⁴ For example, as Sugrue quotes Karl H. Smith, a partner in one of Detroit's largest real estate agencies, as saying that homeowners' associations were valuable because they upheld “property values and property restrictions" while also opposing "unjust tax levies for the benefit of shiftless drifters who have not guts enough to want to own a home of their own.”¹⁰⁵ Homeowners associations viewed open housing policies not as an example of equality, but rather as a strategic action to, as the Warrendale Improvement Association put it, use white tax money “to create agitation” amongst whites and blacks.¹⁰⁶

White homeowners associations further justified their segregated neighborhoods through a language of “defensive localism.”¹⁰⁷ As Sugrue writes, these associations upheld the dignity of an explicitly “white community" while "paternalistically" protecting

¹⁰⁴ Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics," 557-58.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 568.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 573.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 557.

its families, "women, and children against the forces of social disorder that they saw arrayed against them and the city."¹⁰⁸ White homeowners fused this racism and populism to liberal understandings of democratic citizenship. As Sugrue adds, whites joined these associations because they championed "the values of self-government and participatory democracy."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, white opponents of housing developments like Sojourner believed not only that they had a right— as responsible, tax-paying, and self-governing individuals— to homeownership. They also engaged discourses that claimed protection from what conservative egalitarians would label "reverse discrimination." As Sugrue's work demonstrates, white opponents of black public housing often accused the federal government of favoring a racial "minority" over a white "majority."¹¹⁰ As some whites feared, their exclusive and hard-earned right to homeownership was threatened by "grasping Blacks" and federal officials.¹¹¹

Colleen Doody's portrait of war era Detroit furthers this narrative of rising expectations and zero-sum politics. Critically, and challenging backlash narratives of a solid, pre-1964 New Deal coalition, Doody argues that racial conflict over New Deal era housing in Detroit "made it quite clear that no liberal consensus for integration existed amongst Detroit's whites." Rather, white workers, "inspired by the New Deal's promise to

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 557; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 211. See also Elaine Tyler May, "Cold War— Warm Hearth: Politics and the Family in Postwar America." In *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Fraser & Gestle, 153-182. Princeton University Press, 1989. Gendered discourses around white femininity and the family, and racist assumptions about black masculinity and sexuality, were key components of these white homeowners associations.

¹⁰⁹ Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics," 557.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 576.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 565.

create a nation of independent homeowners," denied similar claims made by black Detroiters to the New Deal's promise of homeownership.¹¹²

In tracing the figure of the deserving white homeowner in Detroit, I argue that Doody draws an explicit connection between the New Deal and conservative egalitarianism, even though she does not use this terminology. Rather, she writes that discourses of racial deservingness in war era Detroit "would later be a key component of modern conservatism."¹¹³ One of these components is a thin understanding of colorblindness. In asserting their rights as homeowners, some proponents of exclusive white claims to property also expressed some kind of support for racial equality. For example, as Doody quotes a newsletter of the Courville District Improvement Association, white homeowners were not "preaching racial intolerance," since the "'colored race are as human as we are'." Yet as Doody emphasizes, this colorblindness was voiced alongside concerns for white social and economic security. White homeowners feared that their property values would decline if blacks moved into "their" neighborhoods. Of course, they were often right, as Katznelson and others have shown with regard to government-backed redlining.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Doody, 55. Though scholars differ on a periodization of the New Deal era, I take it to include—in terms of policy and rhetoric—economic recovery actions taken by the Roosevelt administration through the 1930s, as well as the expansion of economic and social opportunity triggered by the United States' participation in World War II.

¹¹³ Doody, 75.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 49, 61. Though white homeowners in Detroit often expressed opposition to racial integration and black public housing through a language of rights, choice, and antistatism, Detroit NAACP Executive Secretary, Gloster Current, understood their arguments differently. As he suggested, it was the government's active "support of segregation"—and not necessarily free "choice"—that buttressed whites' belief that they "have a moral and just right to prevent Negroes from moving into so-called white neighborhoods where they perforce may choose to live." In effect, Current was speaking of the New Deal as an exclusionary racial project: white Detroiters' beliefs about race and racial difference did not arise suddenly, and somehow exclusive of government policy. Doody, 58.

Doody's work also brings anticommunist discourses to the forefront of an analysis of conflict over housing in Detroit. Specifically, I argue that her focus on the city's war era debates over unions, communism, and "the proper role of government on the issue of race rights," demonstrates pre-conservative egalitarian discursive fusions of civil rights with communism, or some form of anti-free-market and "collectivist" ideology. Despite examples of biracial solidarity within the labor movement, some white workers in Detroit's auto industries explicitly associated racial equality with communism.¹¹⁵ For example, as Doody quotes a group of UAW and homeowners association members who sought to disassociate themselves from more racially progressive labor activists, "Reds in the CIO like [R.J. Thomas, president of the UAW], haven't got anything to do with the taxpayers of Detroit".¹¹⁶ Simultaneously union members and proud homeowners, these white workers undoubtedly supported aspects of the New Deal. They also engaged anticommunism and discourses of deserving and contributing citizenship when guarding their exclusive claims to the New Deal's resources.

IV. *White Homeowners and the Mayoral Races of 1943, 1945, and 1949*

As demonstrated above, racial projects that construct a deserving and propertied white identity—through official government policy, as well as within community organizations—have been as integral to the New Deal and the Democratic Party as they have been for conservative egalitarianism. In their claims to entitlement, white

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of racism within the auto industry, see Kevin Boyle, "There are no Union Sorrows that the Union Can't Heal': The Struggle for Racial Equality in the United Automobile Workers, 1940-1960." In *Labor History*, 36, 1 (1995): 5-23.

¹¹⁶ Doody, 50. For a discussion of the UAW's relationship to racial equality and the civil rights movement, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*. Oxford University Press, 1979.

homeowners celebrated free-market capitalism and opposed communism, even though their access to middle-class security was the result of the government's intervention into the marketplace and a vast expansion of the welfare state.

By looking to the city's mayoral elections in 1943, 1945, and 1949, historians of war era Detroit challenge the partisan-focused narrative of the rise of the New Right. They do so by showing how partisan affiliation, or associations with specifically "liberal" or "conservative" ideologies, were perhaps less important for white ethnic voters than were identifications with the deserving and entitled homeowner—a figure that was mobilized by antistatist mayoral candidates and political figures in Detroit. Though many white homeowners in Detroit remained committed to aspects of the New Deal, and voted Democratic at the national level, they also voted for rightward leaning candidates at the municipal level. For white homeowners, the racial stability of their neighborhoods was one of their most critical political concerns. These whites were often up for grabs in the city's non-partisan mayoral elections, where political opponents of the New Deal constructed similar associations between whiteness and deservingness.¹¹⁷

In the 1943 mayoral election, the incumbent Mayor, Edward Jeffries, defeated the labor-supported candidate, Frank Fitzgerald. According to Capeci, though Jeffries had faced some political backlash from conservative white voters following his "inexperienced" response to the June 1943 race riots, he planned to defeat Fitzgerald "by

¹¹⁷ Though Midwestern states had once been "a bastion of Republicanism and business boosterism", writes James Truett Selcraig, by the early 1930s Michigan Democrats constituted a majority in the state legislature. James Truett Selcraig, *The Red Scare in the Midwest, 1945-1955: A State and Local Study* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 1.

deliberately playing to threatened, prejudiced, and anti-labor whites."¹¹⁸ Community and homeowners' association newspapers in Detroit's ethnic white neighborhoods participated in creating and interpreting this prejudice, warning, for example, that a Fitzgerald victory would mean black inundation of white neighborhoods and schools. As Doody writes, the city's major newspapers also influenced racial discourses in these elections. Most of the Detroit press backed Jeffries, who they claimed was the best man to protect the "property owners of Detroit."¹¹⁹

Discourses of race and homeownership continued to influence municipal politics in 1945, shaping both Jeffries' campaign and some white voters views on the proper scope of the federal government.¹²⁰ In 1945, Jeffries ran against another labor candidate, Richard Frankenstein, the Vice President of the UAW.¹²¹ In this election, the Jeffries campaign forged a direct link between antigovernment populism and opposition to racial integration. Indeed, according to a 1946 study by Carl O. Smith and Stephen B. Sarasohn (which Colleen Doody relies upon in her own analysis), for "thousands of white voters" in the 1945 election, the major campaign issue was the survival of "white supremacy" in the city.¹²²

Active participants in shaping discourses of racial difference, community organizations and newspapers hailed white homeowners throughout the election, warning

¹¹⁸ *Detroit and the "Good War": The World War II Letters of Mayor Edward Jeffries and Friends*, Dominic J. Capeci Jr., Ed. (The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 16. The summer of 1943 saw race riots grip the nation. In Detroit, the riots resulted in the death of thirty-four individuals, with hundreds injured, and millions of dollars in property damage. See Max Herman, "Detroit (Michigan) Riot of 1943," *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, Volumes 1 & 2, edited by Walter Rucker and James Nathaniel Upton (Greenwood Press, 2007).

¹¹⁹ Doody, 54-55.

¹²⁰ Capeci, *Detroit and the "Good War,"* 48.

¹²¹ Doody, 54.

¹²² Smith and Sarasohn, 32.

them of Frankenstein victory. In her analysis of the 1945 election, Doody often references one of these participants, the influential Detroit publisher and staunch anticommunist, Floyd McGriff. His suburban neighborhood newspapers claimed to represent the views of hard-working property owners, including Polish Detroiters. These were residents of "small towns, all single homes (a few doubles but not many) and practically no apartments": thus, not renters, but rather those white Detroiters who McGriff believed had a stake in their communities.¹²³

In the 1945 election, McGriff supported Jeffries as a defender of these white property owners, and he used his newspapers to hail white homeowners and influence the election. For example, in one October issue of McGriff's *Home Gazette*, the Brightmoor Business Associates printed an advertisement that read, "Every Home Owner has a special interest in the November 6th election."¹²⁴ As Doody writes, McGriff's *Gazette* helped to discursively fuse whiteness with deserving homeownership, speaking to Polish Detroiters' hard work in "paying off their homes with factory wages" and their fears that their hard work was threatened by racial integration and its attendant property value losses. As Doody adds, McGriff refused to acknowledge any "extension of the rights embodied in the New Deal" to African Americans. Rather, he and his supporters framed housing and the achievement of homeownership in Detroit zero-sum terms. If black Detroiters gained, whites would ultimately lose.¹²⁵

¹²³ McGriff's papers included *The Redford Record*, *The Brightmoor Journal*, *The Southfield Sun*, *The Township News*, *The Livonia News*, and *The Home Gazette*; "In the Northwest Detroit Field," Ad looking for an assistant to the advertising manager. Writings, Floyd McGriff Papers. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

¹²⁴ Smith and Sarasohn, 37.

¹²⁵ Doody, 56.

As McGriff's newspapers hailed patriotic white homeowners, taxpayers, and free-marketers, they also preached anticommunism. As with the conflict around Sojourner, the discourses of the mayoral elections of the 1940s contributed to a broad and popular fusion of communism with labor and civil rights. McGriff opposed labor candidates like Frankenstein because, as he argued, they would usher in socialism, degrade work ethic, and ultimately turn the United States into a "nation of mollycoddles."¹²⁶ Labor would also bring—indeed, had *already* brought—a civil-rights supporting communism to America, undermining the "natural" social order. As Smith and Sarasohn write, McGriff feared that the election was part of a broader communistic "social" experiment being conducted in Detroit. For example, in one issue of the *Gazette*, McGriff argued that, "Detroit, it is evident, has been chosen by the Communist hierarchy as the guinea pig city of America."¹²⁷ Moreover, in associating blackness with communism, the *Gazette* perpetuated discourses that constructed African Americans as undeserving, lacking in independence and democratic agency. In this narrative, black Detroiters were not legitimately demanding their rights, but were rather being wooed by communist outsiders. For example, when George Crockett, correspondent for the black newspaper the *Michigan Chronicle*, endorsed Frankenstein in 1945, McGriff's *Gazette* labeled him a "Communist front man" who chiefly sought to agitate "the colored people along Communist lines."¹²⁸

As Smith and Sarasohn document, even the Jeffries campaign mobilized a language of communist social experimentation, accusing the CIO's Political Action

¹²⁶ "Squirrels, screwballs and security." Writings, Floyd McGriff Papers (no date). Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

¹²⁷ Smith and Sarasohn, 44-45.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 39.

Committee of attempting to "use Detroit as a spring-board" for a communist "revolutionary crusade." As the campaign warned, "If they can seize Detroit, the industrial metropolis of the nation, they figure all other industrial communities will follow suit." The *Detroit News* actively supported this language while hailing patriotic white Detroiters and urging them to vote for Jeffries. Constructing an imagined, racially homogeneous community of proper Detroiters, one *News* advertisement read, "A vote against Communism is a vote for Americanism. Every Detroiters who loves his city and wants to keep Detroit for Detroiters will vote against Communism tomorrow. A vote for Jeffries is a vote against Communism. Re-elect Mayor Jeffries."¹²⁹

Ultimately, the race- and redbaiting had an effect, and Jeffries won the 1945 election with fifty-six percent of the vote.¹³⁰ According to Smith and Sarasohn, though working-class Polish neighborhoods—"populated by thousands of members of the UAW-CIO"—had voted "overwhelmingly Democratic" in state, county, and national elections, Jeffries was able to increase "his percentage of the total vote" in these neighborhoods "from 16 to 39 percent over his primary percentage." He also won all neighborhoods comprised of native whites of various socioeconomic classes. It is likely that for many of Detroit's whites, partisan identification or loyalty mattered less in this election than did appeals to deserving and responsible homeownership and anticommunism. As Smith and Sarasohn write of the election results, "There can be little doubt that the concentrated

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 43-44.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 47.

bombardment of voters in these areas with anti-negro and communist-bogey propaganda largely determined this result."¹³¹

Fusions of white homeownership, free-market capitalism, and anticommunism reappeared in the 1949 election, when a conservative-leaning candidate, Albert Cobo, faced off against George Edwards, an anticommunist labor activist. According to Doody, Cobo's campaign framed the building of "government housing projects" for black renters as a threat to white property owners, while the Detroit Real Estate Board "reminded voters that 'a welfare-state mayor and council' would support policies that were 'just another way of killing the freedoms of man and putting business into the hands of socialistically inclined bureaucrats.'"¹³² Testifying to the political variability of Detroit's white working-class neighborhoods four years after Jeffries' reelection, Cobo won a majority of the votes cast by blue-collar white workers.¹³³ Twenty years before "white backlash," Detroit's white neighborhoods demonstrated not necessarily the political features of a solid New Deal coalition, but rather a volatile mix of tentative support for government redistribution, white property rights, and anticommunism.

V. *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the ways in which historians of the New Deal have (re)presented it as a set of multiple racial projects, illuminating both its racial exclusions and discursive innovations, and tracing the ways in which the New Deal's

¹³¹ Smith and Sarasohn, 48-50. Predominantly black neighborhoods voted overwhelmingly for Frankenstein, while Jewish neighborhoods voted fifty-nine percent for Frankenstein (though here, too, Jeffries increased his vote percentage, from twenty-eight percent in the primary to forty-one percent in the final election). The AFL and Teamsters backed Jeffries (Selcraig, 50).

¹³² Doody, 60-61.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 60-62.

economic redistributions helped to constitute whiteness as a political and propertied identity. Specifically, I argue that historical retellings of the New Deal help us to illuminate the discursive preconditions for conservative egalitarianism, thus challenging standard narratives of the rise of the New Right that locate "white backlash" to racial equality in the mid-late 1960s.

More broadly, I argue that similar historical (re)presentations can help political theorists to uncover racial meaning and political development as it occurs through discursive innovation in multiple micro- and macro-level institutional sites, particularly within a "politics of place." By illuminating the New Deal as a set of multiple racial projects, we are able to see the creation of a propertied white identity at the local level—the invested, deserving, and responsible citizen concerned about minority "special preferences"—well before "white backlash." Before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. challenged discursive fusions of civil rights and communism, and before Detroit anti-busing activists in the 1970s targeted desegregation in education as a denial of white civil rights, the figure of the deserving and independent white homeowner was circulating in cities outside of Jim Crow.

Finally, I argue that conflicts over federal housing and the Detroit mayoral elections of the 1940s are micro-level examples of a larger political battle over the potential extension of economic equality to African Americans. This was particularly true in the context of ethnic white blue-collar neighborhoods, where the political and racial identities of those opposed to black homeownership were in large part constructed through, and not in opposition to, federal redistribution programs, specifically

government-backed homeownership.¹³⁴ Thus, while the limited scope of the New Deal was undoubtedly influenced by Southern Democrats, white urban- and suburbanites outside of the South were also concerned with maintaining a segregationist racial order, especially if it meant protecting the racially "homogeneous" composition of their neighborhoods and workplaces.

¹³⁴ Robert C. Lieberman, *Shaping Race Policy: The United States in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

Chapter Three:

Detroit's "Second Reconstruction": Navigating "de jure/de facto" and Colorblindness in *Milliken v. Bradley*

I. Introduction

Writing in the *Detroit Free Press* in the early 1970s, journalist William Grant described busing for desegregation as part of a broad "second Reconstruction."¹³⁵ Though it was formally enshrined in law, Grant acknowledged that full racial equality still required further social and economic restructuring, and the *Free Press* supported busing as a policy that could bring the nation closer to achieving such equality. The paper cheered District Federal Judge Stephen J. Roth's 1971 busing order in the Detroit school desegregation case *Bradley v. Milliken*.¹³⁶ In his final judgment, Roth concluded that the state and school board were ultimately responsible for racial segregation in the city's schools, and he ordered that students be transported between schools in the city and suburbs. As Roth argued, such an inter-district or "metropolitan" plan was the only effective remedy for achieving actual desegregation.

Though the *Press* acknowledged many Detroiters' likely resistance to school desegregation, it also asked the city's residents to look in the mirror. As the *Press* had argued in 1970, Detroiters were "likely to discover quickly that they and others have been

¹³⁵ William Grant, "Busing Called Only Way to Integrate," *Detroit Free Press* (date unknown). Box 11, folder 2, Clippings, Stephen J. Roth Papers, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

¹³⁶ *Bradley v. Milliken*, 338 F. Supp. 582, Dist. Court, ED Michigan 1971.

hiding behind a false distinction between de facto and de jure segregation."¹³⁷ A legal and political discourse that explained and justified residential and educational segregation as "de facto"—or unintentional, the result of free choices rather than formal law—encouraged Detroiters “to cheer while the Supreme Court integrated the South, secure in the knowledge that our policies were pure.”¹³⁸ The *Press* was critical of these widely held beliefs of segregation's "unofficial" status in Northern cities, like Detroit.

Scholars have done much to analyze the legal facts and arguments of the *Milliken* case, in both Roth's court and in the Supreme Court. However, less attention has been focused on understanding and tracing the antibusing discourses around *Milliken* at both the national and local levels. *Milliken's* legal pronouncements on the constitutionality of busing—both Roth's ruling, which mandated state action to promote desegregation, and the Supreme Court's rejection of Roth's interdistrict order—occur within a historical and political context in which conservative egalitarianism is being articulated, in Detroit and beyond. In what ways do the discursive features of citizen and elite antibusing arguments help to crystallize an emerging conservative egalitarian discourse of equality and colorblindness?

With this chapter, I enter into this period, which backlash scholars identify as the rise of the New Right, and I analyze antibusing discourses at both the local and national level. I argue that key discursive elements of conservative egalitarianism—particularly fusions of racialized property claims to colorblindness and claims of antiracism—were constituted and came together coherently within the conflict over busing. The de jure/de

¹³⁷ Editorial, “As We See It: Law Holds for Detroit As Well as for Dixie,” *Detroit Free Press*, (Fri. Aug. 21 1970). Box 11, folder 4, Clippings 1970, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

¹³⁸ Editorial, “As We See It: Law Holds for Detroit As Well as for Dixie.”

facto distinction is a critical component of this constitution. Juxtaposing "official" and "unofficial" forms of racial segregation, this distinction allowed homeowners in segregated cities without Jim Crow laws to defend their racialized property claims in a purportedly race neutral language.¹³⁹ As I demonstrate, this distinction was engaged by actors at multiple levels of analysis, including antibusing citizens in Detroit, political elites, and the Supreme Court.

The adoption of the de jure/de facto binary was one way in which opponents of busing enacted a thin colorblindness. According to these opponents, a true and correct reading of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 1964 Civil Rights Act required courts to narrow the instances in which judges could hand down desegregation orders. In their understanding, equal protection claims required strict evidence of state-enacted discrimination. De facto segregation, characterized as the result of individuals choosing freely where to live and go to school, was thus out of the Constitution's reach. Positive government action could not, and should not, correct inequalities that resulted from free markets and free choices. For the state to do otherwise—to force white parents to send their children out of their local districts—would be reverse discrimination.

Conservative egalitarian claims of reverse discrimination were often present in the letters of Detroit citizens writing to Judge Roth in their opposition to his decision. By analyzing some of these letters, I theorize the contested and complicated ways in which Detroit's citizens understood his busing decision and its consequences for their own neighborhoods. In defending the de jure/de facto binary, some white Detroiters engaged in a conservative egalitarian fusion of colorblindness, choice, and reverse discrimination,

¹³⁹ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

attempting to legitimate their claims to racially homogeneous neighborhoods and schools. As they believed, busing was an attempt to experiment with or engineer a process of integration that should occur voluntarily and by choice in a "free" housing and educational market. In forcing whites to bear the burdens of integration, antibusing Detroiters argued, busing violated the civil rights of white taxpayers. For example, as Christine Gates wrote to Judge Roth in 1972, as a "taxpayer" she was "insulted" by his busing order, and "as an American" she "demanded to know what right he [had] to take away my rights."¹⁴⁰

While expressing their rights as parents and taxpayers, white opponents of busing sometimes cited fears of federalization or centralization of education. As discussed in Chapter Two, white taxpayers and parents in Detroit believed that they had earned the right, through meritocratic hard work—and not communistic special privileges—to choose where to live and where to send their children to school. I bring to light the complexity of citizens' arguments against busing, with Detroiters residing in wealthier suburbs—who would have been included in an interdistrict remedy—fusing colorblindness to their propertied white identities in ways that often differed from those of their working-class counterparts. As Matthew Lassiter argues, discourses of colorblindness nurtured and protected the "class privilege(s)" of wealthier suburbanites, and reinforced the "barriers of disadvantage facing urban minority communities."¹⁴¹ As I demonstrate, such claims to colorblindness were used by some of Detroit's suburbanites to express opposition to racial equality in a purportedly non-racist, or race-neutral,

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Christine Gates to Judge Roth, Box 12, folder 4, 1972. Stephen J. Roth Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

¹⁴¹ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, 5.

language. By attending to these variations in antibusing arguments, this chapter thus understands antibusing activism in Detroit not simply as a form of working-class racism or backlash, nor as a simple mirroring of elite discourses. Rather, I understand these citizens as giving shape to the discursive development of conservative egalitarianism.

In addition to tracing discursive patterns and themes in citizen responses to *Milliken*, this chapter moves to the national level to analyze President Nixon and the Supreme Court's engagement with the de jure/de facto distinction. I argue that the Court's majority opinion in *Milliken* and Nixon's public statements on busing bring together in a significant way key discursive elements of conservative egalitarianism. In a bid to hail white parents and voters in "innocent" Northern neighborhoods, Nixon created an association between busing and so-called "activist" federal courts and the Democratic Party—despite the fact that many Democratic and identifiably liberal legislators opposed busing. Nixon and the Court also fused equality with a thin colorblindness, antistatism, and "local control." In shaping and circulating these discursive associations, political elites thus made commonsensical, at the level of national politics, an understanding of equality that prioritized the civil rights of white suburban taxpayers and homeowners.

By contrast, in refusing the significance of the de jure/de facto distinction, I argue that Roth's *Milliken* decision, as well as the dissent of Justice Thurgood Marshall in the 1974 Supreme Court case, offered a competing understanding of race that went beyond skin color and emphasized the ways in which racial exclusion is institutionalized. *Milliken* laid bare Detroit's complex race and class geographies, shaped by institutions and policies of housing segregation that had roots in the New Deal era. Had it not been struck down by the Supreme Court in 1974, Roth's interdistrict order would have

included Detroit's mostly white, wealthier suburbs—a necessary component of any desegregation remedy, Marshall argued, since a suburban ring of “all-white schools” had been intentionally created around the city and its increasingly all-black schools.¹⁴² As Marshall argued, in protecting the suburbs, his colleagues on the Court were upholding a dual school system in the city of Detroit. An inter-district remedy would have challenged conservative egalitarian characterizations of race as mere skin color by attacking structural inequality, or “access to resources and opportunities.”¹⁴³ It would have undermined the political and discursive power of de jure/de facto as a binary that explained racial segregation in Northern neighborhoods as an unintentional byproduct of individual choice, rather than state action and racism.

II. *Interrogating De Jure/De Facto in Detroit: Segregation in Housing and Education*

Judge Stephen J. Roth's *Milliken* decision, ordering busing between the city and the suburbs of Detroit, challenged beliefs about Northern innocence with respect to segregation. However, his decision—which invigorated antibusing politics in Michigan—was not the first or only busing case in the state. In Pontiac, Michigan in 1970, Judge Damon S. Keith also found the city guilty of creating racially segregated schools. In this case, the de jure/de facto binary, and a thin colorblindness, is contrasted with an understanding of race that acknowledges its structural and historical dimensions, and thus emphasizes the necessity of state action to address racial inequality.

¹⁴² *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717, at 783 (1974).

¹⁴³ In contrast, structural explanations of inequality demonstrate the ways in which practices of exclusion are “built into structures such as laws and other institutions.” Clarissa Rile Hayward, “Making interest: on representation and democratic legitimacy,” in *Political Representation*, Shapiro, Stokes, Wood, & Kirshner, Eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 112-113.

Officials with the Pontiac school board utilized the de jure/de facto binary in their defense. While the board acknowledged that unofficial or voluntary segregation might exist in the city, they claimed that it was not legally sanctioned. As they reasoned, they were thus “under no Constitutional duty to undo” forms of segregation that they “[had] not caused.”¹⁴⁴ However, Judge Keith challenged the meaningfulness of this binary, arguing that the distinction between de jure and de facto segregation was practically irrelevant. His argument struck a blow against an authoritative legal discourse that rendered as non-justiciable forms of segregation seen as having emerged from choice or market-based forces.¹⁴⁵ As Keith wrote, government must take “affirmative steps” to “alleviate” the problem of racial segregation, even if that segregation “came slowly and surreptitiously rather than by legislative pronouncement...”¹⁴⁶ In his decision, Keith drew attention to the ways in which the de jure/de facto binary served to obscure the roots of segregation in education, and he reaffirmed the government’s constitutional duty to eradicate such segregation. However, in emphasizing this obfuscation, Keith sent a signal to those who wished to defend the significance of the binary and its discursive authority, and the debate over de jure/de facto became a site for the articulation of conservative egalitarianism.

¹⁴⁴ *Davis v. School District of City of Pontiac, Inc.*, 309 F. Supp. 736 (1970).

¹⁴⁵ As Robert Carter of the NAACP argued in 1965, “*De facto* segregation fosters the misconception that the racial separation it describes is purely accidental, not the responsibility of government and, therefore, outside the reach of the fourteenth amendment.” Quoted in Matthew D. Lassiter, “De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth,” *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, Eds. (Oxford University Press, 2010), 37.

¹⁴⁶ *Davis v. School District of City of Pontiac, Inc.*, 309 F. Supp. 734 (1970); “Book excerpts: Judge Damon Keith rules with lasting impact,” (March 3, 2013), *Detroit Free Press*. Online: <http://www.freep.com/article/20130303/OPINION05/303030118/Book-excerpts-Judge-Damon-Keith-rules-with-lasting-impact> (Accessed Aug. 4 2013). See also Maureen McDonald, “The Battle of Pontiac: Integration Wins, After All,” *The Ann Arbor Sun* (22 Jan., 1976).

Conservative egalitarianism appropriated the de jure/de facto binary from the civil rights tradition, using it to defend white property interests. As Matthew Lassiter reminds us, the de jure/ de facto binary was not initially circulated by opponents of federal civil rights remedies. Rather, it first appeared within the civil rights movement, used by both the National Urban League and Dr. King. However, these civil rights leaders adopted the distinction not as a binary, but in order to illuminate segregation outside of the South.¹⁴⁷ During a visit to Detroit in 1963, King told a crowd that, “de facto segregation in the North... is just as injurious as the actual segregation in the South.” As Lassiter emphasizes, King was not making a "legal argument" to distinguish de jure from de facto racial segregation.¹⁴⁸ Rather, he was calling on Americans to take as seriously as Jim Crow forms of structural inequality in cities like Detroit.

Nonetheless, in affirming the de jure/de facto distinction so as to draw attention to racial segregation in the North, King may have ultimately hurt the civil rights movement's larger legal agenda. Equal protection claims under the Fourteenth Amendment required evidence of “state action.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, in naming as de facto FHA policies that sanctioned housing segregation, King not only put them outside of the reach of Constitutional remedy; he also contributed to the discursive context of conservative egalitarianism, in which courts as well as whites opposed to integration, picked up what

¹⁴⁷ Lassiter, “De Jure/De Facto Segregation,” 25.

¹⁴⁸ Lassiter, “De Jure/De Facto Segregation,” 25-26.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 26-27. Title II, Section 201 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act states, “Discrimination or segregation by an establishment is supported by State action within the meaning of this title if such discrimination or segregation (1) is carried on under color of any law, statute, ordinance, or regulation; or (2) is carried on under color of any custom or usage required or enforced by officials of the State or political subdivision thereof; or (3) is required by action of the State or political subdivision thereof.” Transcript of Civil Rights Act (1964). Online: <http://www.ourdocuments.gov>

Lassiter terms a "false binary" to explain school segregation as colorblind. In this understanding, segregation was cast not as the result of state action, but rather as the outcome of free choices in the housing market.¹⁵⁰

The *Milliken* trial, which began in the Eastern District Court of Michigan on April 6 1971, followed a 1970 "integration and decentralization plan," passed by the Detroit Board of Education, which would have redrawn school boundaries and "maximized" desegregation within the city of Detroit. Though the plan was somewhat limited in scope, opposition from citizens and politicians was immediate. White homeowners groups, including the Citizens' Committee for Better Education (CCBE), successfully recalled council members who supported the plan, and the state legislature passed "Public Act 48," nullifying desegregation and placing "school districts under control of local neighborhoods."¹⁵¹ The NAACP responded the following August, filing suit on behalf of two African American children, Ronald and Richard Bradley, "and parents of all minority children attending Detroit public schools."¹⁵²

The NAACP ultimately attacked school segregation through housing, demonstrating Detroit's history of residential segregation and discrediting myths about free choice in the market. Among the evidence provided at trial, the plaintiffs showed that blacks and whites at similar socioeconomic levels were "still almost completely segregated" residentially.¹⁵³ Perhaps surprisingly, the NAACP's evidence convinced even CCBE lawyer Alexander Ritchie, who, as Paul Dimond writes, experienced a "deep

¹⁵⁰ Lassiter, 27.

¹⁵¹ Samantha Meinke, "Milliken v Bradley: The Northern Battle for Desegregation," *Michigan Bar Journal* (Sept. 2011); Paul R. Dimond, *Beyond Busing: Reflections on Urban Segregation, the Courts, and Equal Opportunity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 27.

¹⁵² Meinke.

¹⁵³ Dimond, 47.

personal conversion” on the issue of integration.¹⁵⁴ Though he initially lacked “sympathy” for the plaintiffs’ cause, Judge Roth also came to recognize the state’s active role in constructing a “color line of racial ghettoization in” Detroit and Michigan.¹⁵⁵

In contrast, the defendants in *Milliken*, including the Governor and the Detroit and Michigan Boards of Education, sought to reaffirm *de jure/de facto* as a meaningful limit on state action. Arguing that neither the state nor the school board had engaged in intentional action, they concluded that the court had no duty to order a remedy: “There is no constitutional duty to eliminate *de facto*, as opposed to *de jure*, segregation of the public schools.”¹⁵⁶ A brief filed by the State Board of Education similarly adopted the *de jure/de facto* discourse, arguing that the Constitution could not be used to justify “racial balance,” an otherwise political and social experiment.¹⁵⁷ However, as Roth would ultimately conclude regarding the viability of the *de jure/de facto* binary, as well as the Constitution’s reach in this case, “If racial segregation in our public schools is an evil, then it should make no difference whether we classify it *de jure* or *de facto*.”¹⁵⁸ In his argument, Roth importantly denied the meaningfulness of *de jure/de facto* as a binary, since the state was implicated in *de facto*, as well as *de jure*, segregation.

¹⁵⁴ Dimond, 54. As Ritchie stated after the case, “A lot of us discarded all our old slogans during this case... It was an education in what kind of world we live in.”

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 32, 73.

¹⁵⁶ Defendant Memorandum Briefs, Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 1, folder 3 (Aug. 1970).

¹⁵⁷ Brief of the Michigan State Board of Education, Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 1, folder 4. In contrast, some busing supporters questioned the very meaning and viability of the binary, and well before *Milliken*. As the *Free Press* had argued in 1970, the distinction was meaningless. Moreover, the *Press* emphasized that an effective integration plan would need to include Detroit’s more affluent and predominantly white suburbs. Editorial, “As We See It: Law Holds for Detroit As Well as for Dixie,” *Detroit Free Press*, (Fri. Aug. 21 1970). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 4, Clippings 1970.

¹⁵⁸ Lassiter, “De Jure/De Facto Segregation,” 42.

Indeed, Roth's final opinion was damning: "Governmental actions and inaction at all levels, federal, state and local, have combined, with those of private organizations, ... to establish and to maintain the pattern of residential segregation throughout the Detroit metropolitan area."¹⁵⁹ As the judge emphasized, and as discussed in Chapter Two, New Deal and war era agencies had "openly advised and advocated the maintenance of... racially and economically harmonious" neighborhoods. Moreover, the school board had created "optional attendance zones" in racially transitional neighborhoods, allowing white students to "escape" not only "identifiably 'black' schools," but also identifiably Jewish ones. Roth also discussed the ways in which real estate agencies and banks had contributed to segregation. As Robert Sinclair writes, while housing costs did play a role, "discriminatory real estate practices" shut black Detroiters out of the city's newly expanding suburbs. Moreover, in those neighborhoods where blacks did purchase homes, realtors often engaged in "rumor spreading, panic selling" and "block-busting," scaring away white residents and potential buyers.¹⁶⁰ Black Detroiters could thus not, as a discourse of "official" and "unofficial" segregation posited, "live anywhere they could afford."¹⁶¹ This was not a "free" housing market. Rather, blacks were "contained" in the central core of the city.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ *Bradley v. Milliken*, 338 F. at 582 (1971).

¹⁶⁰ Sinclair, 49-52.

¹⁶¹ Jennifer A. Huff, "'The Only Feasible Desegregation Plan:' *Milliken v. Bradley* and Judge Roth's Order for Cross-District Busing," *The Court Legacy*, 15, 2 (2008): 8-9. The evidence showing that black Detroiters, unlike their white ethnic counterparts moving up the class ladder, had faced higher levels of discrimination and segregation may have also influenced Roth. As "Italian, German, Jewish, Russian" and other "white" groups were able to move out of the city and into "secondary concentrations," African Americans were "held in as a contained population."

¹⁶² Huff, "'The Only Feasible Desegregation Plan:' *Milliken v. Bradley* and Judge Roth's Order for Cross-District Busing."

Visual representations of Detroit's social geography, which linked residential and educational segregation in the city, also played a critical role in convincing Roth. A “ten-by-twenty-foot map of the city,” showing areas dominated by segregated housing, was strategically set up behind the defense so that Roth could see it at all times.¹⁶³ The Judge cited this geography in his decision, noting the rapid decrease in the city’s total population after 1950, the increase in the suburban population, and the transformation in the racial composition of Detroit’s schools.¹⁶⁴ Between 1961 and 1970, the number of identifiably black schools increased while the white student population decreased; between 1968 and 1970 alone, “Detroit experienced the largest increase in percentage of black students in the student population of any major northern school district.”¹⁶⁵ The school district also consciously bused black pupils away from closer “white” schools with open seats, though they never bused white students to open black schools.¹⁶⁶

III. *Can the Suburbs “find its’ (sic) soul”?* *Fighting for an Inter-District Remedy, from Detroit to the Supreme Court*

¹⁶³ Dimond, 40-42.

¹⁶⁴ The construction of the suburbs and federal highways, and the movement of industry out of the city core were also directly subsidized by various levels of government. Robert Sinclair, *The Face of Detroit: A Spatial Synthesis* (Wayne State University, 1970), 49-52. Box 12, folder 10, Misc. Reports, 1970, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

¹⁶⁵ *Bradley v. Milliken*, at 585-86 (1971). As Robert Sinclair writes, Detroit had become more racially segregated by 1962 than it had been decades earlier. Most blacks in 1970 lived in the poorest inner core of the city, while much of the white working and middle-class had moved into a surrounding “belt of mixed neighborhoods, with mainly white areas to the northwest, northeast, and southwest sides of the city.” Yet Sinclair is apt to note that “mixed” didn’t necessarily mean integrated. Rather, it described neighborhoods in which whites were increasingly moving out. Sinclair, 50.

49-52.

¹⁶⁶ *Bradley v. Milliken*, at 588 (1971).

The Paul Holler family of Orchard Lake hoped that Roth's decision ordering inter-district busing would allow the suburbs of Detroit to "find its' (sic) soul."¹⁶⁷ Indeed, it was the suburbs, as Roth supporter Mrs. D. Crawford of Flint wrote in 1972, that remained "100% white in spite of so-called open housing."¹⁶⁸ Class divisions were a key issue in the *Milliken* proceedings, due in part to the participation of the CCBE. Whereas the CCBE initially intervened in the case to oppose busing, Ritchie ultimately helped convince Roth that desegregation was a matter of social class geographies as well as race. As Ritchie argued, an effective desegregation plan would have to include the city's "latticed up" suburbs in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties.¹⁶⁹ A Detroit-only plan would be meaningless and ineffective, quickening "white flight" and integrating only Detroit's poor blacks and remaining whites.¹⁷⁰ Roth agreed, arguing that effective desegregation would require a remedy that went beyond city limits.¹⁷¹ While the

¹⁶⁷ Letter from The Paul Holler family of Orchard Lake, MI, to Judge Roth (October 5, 1971). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 28, Correspondence.

¹⁶⁸ Letter to Judge Roth from Mrs. D. Crawford of Flint, MI (March 24, 1972). Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 1, Citizen Correspondence. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 made it illegal "To refuse to sell or rent after the making of a bona fide offer, or to refuse to negotiate for the sale or rental of, or otherwise make unavailable or deny, a dwelling to any person because of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, or national origin." Sec. 804. [42 U.S.C. 3604].

<http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/hce/title8.php>

¹⁶⁹ Ted Goczkowski, "500 in Taylor meet in furor over busing," *The Detroit News*, (Thurs. Sept. 30 1971). Detroit Schools folder, Box 10, Law Notes of Stephen J. Roth, Bentley Historical Library; William Grant, "Detroiter Switched His Stand: Lawyer Key Figure in Busing Plan," *Detroit Free Press* (June 15, 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 11; Detroit Schools folder (Box 10, Law Notes of Stephen J. Roth, folder 42).

¹⁷⁰ Brief of intervening defendant Denise Magdowski. Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 1, folder 27 (March 1972). Though, as historians have noted, "white flight" had begun decades earlier.

¹⁷¹ Dimond, 79. Inter-district remedies had already been discussed in other states, and they were preferred by some Democratic politicians. For example, in 1970, Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff of Connecticut proposed legislation "to hurdle the political boundary lines and neighborhood housing patterns that encourage the flight of whites to the suburbs and tend to imprison blacks and the poor in city ghettos." As Ribicoff then argued, "We must end residential as well as educational segregation if we are serious in trying to bring this country together." "Senator Seeks to Break Suburb Race Bars," *Detroit Free Press* (Sun. Nov. 29 1970). Box 11, folder 4, Clippings 1970, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

plaintiffs in *Milliken* had wanted to take “incremental” steps, Roth pushed for suburban participation, pointing to Michigan's history of busing students across district lines, and often for as long as an hour.¹⁷²

Roth's decision in *Milliken* was significant in that it mobilized diverse forms of opposition to busing within the city of Detroit and its suburbs. Some Detroiters were opposed to busing tout court; others opposed the interdistrict nature of the order; many Detroiters, though opposed to busing, demanded that if it were to occur, it must be interdistrict and include suburban school districts. Ritchie supported Roth's interdistrict remedy because he came to recognize the intersectional forces of race and class that shaped segregation. Indeed, though the nation's schools were increasingly segregated by race, they were almost as “socially class segregated.”¹⁷³ Many white Detroiters reluctantly supported an interdistrict remedy because they believed that they—and not wealthier suburbanites—would otherwise bear the primary burdens of desegregation. In their opposition to a Detroit-only plan, these predominantly working- and middle-class

¹⁷² Dimond, 80-84. As Dimond writes, there was nothing in Michigan's educational and legal history that precluded Roth from making this decision. Moreover, Roth did not think it necessary to prove that the suburbs had intentionally discriminated against blacks—even though, for example, there was evidence that black students in Royal Oak had been bused across district lines to Detroit. Rather, Roth argued that it was enough to have found the state guilty. Moreover, as the *Detroit Free Press* noted, Roth did have legal precedent to include the suburbs. Even in *Brown*, the Supreme Court argued that district courts could order the “revision of school districts and attendance areas’ as part of efforts to achieve desegregation.” William Grant, “Subdivisions Aren't ‘Sovereign:’ Roth Case Based on Legal Precedents, *Detroit Free Press* (Fri. May 5, 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 9, Clippings. Grant points to *Hunter v. City of Pittsburgh* (1907), where the Court argued that “a state ‘at (its) pleasure’ may change the powers granted local governments, ‘may take without compensation such property, ‘hold it itself or vest it in other agencies, expand or contract the territorial area or unite the whole or a part of it with another municipality.’” And in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1966), the Court said that, “political subdivisions of states – counties, cities or whatever – never were and never have been considered as sovereign entities.”

¹⁷³ Dick Hubert, “The Duluth Experience,” *Saturday Review* (May 27, 1972): 55-59. Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 29, Misc. Journals.

whites mobilized racialized fears of “identifiably” black urban schools, which to them signaled both physical danger and low educational standards.¹⁷⁴ For some, opposition to busing was rooted specifically in fears based on racial stereotypes. They feared that their children would experience physical and sexual violence if sent to desegregated schools. Myths of the “black rapist”¹⁷⁵ appeared in some of the letters sent to Roth, and in the arguments of neighborhood newspapers like the *Northeast Detroit*. For example, as one unnamed busing opponent said in a penned “limerick” sent to Roth, “You can move as far as St. Clair, Or any where else that you care. Your kids can’t escape, From murder and rape.”¹⁷⁶

In the following section, I trace antibusing discourses in Detroit, focusing on letters sent by city residents to Roth, local and national newspapers, and organizational literature. I argue that two dominant themes appear in the discourses of Detroiters who were opposed to busing: first, fusions of the idea that busing was an inegalitarian, discriminatory, and interventionist (and sometimes communistic) policy; and second, intersectional discourses of race and class in which the meanings of whiteness were expressed differently by suburbanites and working-class Detroiters. Though residents in Detroit and its suburbs sometimes engaged in similar antibusing discourses—including their claims to reverse discrimination, and their self-identifications as colorblind and deserving taxpayers and homeowners— I illuminate the ways in which those who

¹⁷⁴ An interdistrict plan, writes Jennifer A. Huff, might have kept white students in the majority in Detroit’s schools, preventing “*further* white flight out of Detroit.” It was this likelihood, Huff also notes, that motivated some black “community control advocates,” who favored black control over schools, to oppose the plan. Huff, “‘The Only Feasible Desegregation Plan.’ *Milliken v. Bradley* and Judge Roth’s Order for Cross-District Busing,” 5, 9.

¹⁷⁵ For example, see Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist,” *Women, Race, and Class*, 1st Ed. (Vintage, 1983).

¹⁷⁶ “Here Comes the Judge,” (author and date unknown). Box 12, folder 4, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

identified as city residents, in contrast to suburban residents, often opposed busing through a language of class instability or precariousness.

IV. *Reading Milliken in Detroit*

Partisanship or ideology was not a certain guide to one's stance on busing in the 1970s, and busing supporters and opponents could be found across the political spectrum, in Detroit and nationally. For example, James A. Venema, President of the "Positive Action Committee, Inc." incorrectly assumed that Democratic Senator Joseph R. Biden of Delaware would be in favor of busing. In a biting letter sent to Biden in November of 1976, Venema accused him and other liberals and progressives of deceiving the "American public." "The liberal mind is a wonder to behold," Venema wrote, asking Biden if his own children would "remain insulated from the social programming being designed and executed by 'limousine liberals.'"¹⁷⁷ While Venema attacked Biden as an elitist liberal, Biden had already voted in favor of several pieces of antibusing legislation in Congress, even referring to busing as a "bankrupt concept."¹⁷⁸ Indeed, prominent liberal Democratic politicians, including Biden, Birch Bayh (Indiana), and John Dingell (Michigan) publicly opposed busing, introducing legislation in their respective states that would have limited "cross-district" or suburban busing. Dingell, then representing

¹⁷⁷ Letter from James A. Venema, President of "Positive Action Committee, Inc." (New Castle, Delaware) to Sen. Joseph R. Biden (Nov. 26 1976). Mothers Alert Detroit: Correspondence September 1976-March 1977, Box 1, Shirley Wohlfield Papers. Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

¹⁷⁸ Brett Gadsden, *Between North and South: Delaware, Desegregation, and the Myth of American Sectionalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 221. As Gadsden writes, Biden also came to "explain his conditional support for school desegregation" through a distinction between de jure and de facto segregation. Biden was for "busing only as a means of specifically addressing de jure segregation in schools." Biden was opposed "to busing as a remedy for racial imbalance" (2).

Michigan's 16th district, was a supporter of the 1964 Civil Rights act, "despite the threat of a tough primary challenge." Yet by the 1970s Dingell, who represented white homeowners and taxpayers opposed to busing, had become an antibusing "leader."¹⁷⁹

By contrast, for some pro-busing black and white Detroiters, busing was a policy that could target the institutional and structural causes of racial segregation in Detroit and its suburbs. As the Detroit Branch of the NAACP argued, Roth's rulings "made public the pattern of racial segregation which lies beneath the surface of the broken (sic) promises made by America to its Black citizens." For the Reverend Thomas McAnoy, Roth rightly refused "to be hung up on 'de jure and de-facto.'" Rather, the judge recognized that there was "inequity" in Detroit's educational system, and refused to let a meaningless binary stand in his way.¹⁸⁰

However, though the NAACP supported busing for desegregation, black Detroiters' opinions on busing were mixed. As the *Detroit Free Press* reported in 1972, a "slight majority of Detroit blacks" were in favor of busing. Some engaged discourses of equality when explaining their support for the policy. For example, Norma Woodard, a Detroit mother, favored "busing as an avenue to educational opportunity for children."¹⁸¹ Nonetheless, many African Americans in Detroit and elsewhere were pessimistic: could integrated schooling truly benefit black children? Indeed, some argued that busing only served to bolster a myth of "black inferiority," which, as Gwendolyn E. Osborne wrote in a 1975 edition of the *Chicago Defender*, had long "crippled" the

¹⁷⁹ James E. Ryan, *Five Miles Away, A World Apart: One City, Two Schools, and the Story of Educational Opportunity in America* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 96-98; Edsall, 90.

¹⁸⁰ Letter of Reverend Thomas McAnoy of Detroit, MI, to Judge Roth (Sept. 28 1971). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 28, correspondence.

¹⁸¹ Jo Thomas, "Busing Debates Rage On – Out of Court," *Detroit Free Press* (Sun. July 23, 1972). Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 11, clippings.

nation's black children. For Osborne, busing—even an interdistrict remedy—was not enough. In fact, it was a diversion from the real problems of structural inequality, which she described as “the 250-year old system of education which perpetuates the educational inequities which permeate our society.”¹⁸² Also writing in the *Defender*, Dr. Charles G. Hurst, Jr. argued that busing was counter-productive, fomenting political controversy that opportunistic politicians could then seize upon. For Hurst, “The real core of the problem [was] represented by white parents who fled central city areas to avoid living next to black people and now [found] their sanctuaries threatened in a new way.”¹⁸³ As Hurst seems to suggest, both white parents and their political representatives ultimately benefited from the antagonistic politics generated by busing.

Black Nationalist groups, who sought control over black-owned institutions, also opposed busing. Some black business leaders in Detroit, including Lawrence Doss, President of New Detroit Inc., opposed integration and favored community control of schools. (Re)appropriating a discourse of local control in the name of black independence, Doss argued: “Forced integration that would send students out of the region where their parents vote would wreck the concept of community control.”¹⁸⁴ As did some whites, black Detroiters often voiced concerns for their children's physical safety. Yet their fears were not motivated by racial stereotypes; rather, black parents

¹⁸² Gwendolyn E. Osborne, “What I think... Busing and education not related,” *Chicago Defender (Daily Edition)* (March 6, 1975), p. 10.

¹⁸³ Dr. Charles G. Hurst, Jr., “Busing is simply another race theme,” *Chicago Daily Defender* (8 March 1972).

¹⁸⁴ William Grant, “Busing Opposed By New Detroit,” *Detroit Free Press* (Aug. 6 1971). Box 11, folder 6, Clippings 1971, Stephen J. Roth Papers. In 1971, a group of Chinese parents in San Francisco similarly emphasized community culture and control in their arguments against busing. Such reassignments of their children, they argued, were “unconstitutional and would destroy the cultural and educational life of the Chinese community in the city.” “Chinese Fight School Busing,” *Detroit Free Press*, (18 Aug. 1971). Box 11, folder 6, Clippings 1971, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

feared for their children's safety in a city that had a long history of white racism and violence. "There are white people who aren't ready for the 20th century," William Floyd told the *Press* when explaining his opposition to busing. Floyd referenced the goals of racial equality, noting that his daughter would probably "get a better education" in the suburbs. However, he did not want her to be in a "hostile area." Similarly, Dorothy Riley, a mother and librarian, opposed busing because, as she told the *Press*, "Younger kids are at the mercy of white kids."¹⁸⁵ Though most black parents interviewed by the *Press* did not view busing as a policy that was "forced" upon them, they knew that many whites spoke of busing in this way. Indeed, in celebrating Roth's decision, the NAACP nonetheless signaled a warning about entrenched white privilege: desegregation would fail, the NAACP said in a press statement, because "the ending of that segregation is painful and unpopular with White people."¹⁸⁶

The NAACP's pessimism was warranted, as white busing opponents did not view busing as a policy that would, first and foremost, enact equality. Rather, and speaking primarily as invested and deserving taxpayers and homeowners—and not necessarily as partisan subjects—these Detroiters participated in the articulation of conservative egalitarianism by explaining busing as an inegalitarian and sometimes communistic form of social experimentation that undermined their property rights. In the following two subsections, I first illuminate the discourses of opposition to busing in Detroit and its suburbs, where some white residents fused claims to colorblindness with the *de jure/de*

¹⁸⁵ Jo Thomas, "Busing Debates Rage On – Out of Court."

¹⁸⁶ "Press Release: Statement on Detroit School Desegregation Case," (July 26 1972), The Detroit Branch of the NAACP (Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 7, 1970-72). We might argue that the NAACP's view of antidiscrimination law in this case is "expansive" – that such laws actually abolish "the *substantive* conditions of Black subordination" (my italics). Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," *Law and Social Movements*, Michael McCann, Ed. (Ashgate: 2006), 485.

facto binary, anticommunism. I then argue that although these conservative egalitarian discursive fusions were common across class lines, they were often configured differently by antibusing whites, depending on which side of the class divide its speakers inhabited.

i. Colorblindness, Parental Control, and the New Red Scare

Judge Roth's *Milliken* decision mobilized Detroiters who were inclined to oppose government policies they saw as forms of reverse discrimination. By effectively declaring Detroit's "geographies of separation"¹⁸⁷ unconstitutional, Roth was calling for positive government action to target structural racism and discrimination, and his inter-district remedy would have reshaped the city and region's socioeconomic boundaries, as well as the ways in which resources for education were distributed. Yet for white busing opponents, Roth's order was antithetical to their understandings of equality and colorblindness. Busing was not a civil rights initiative, they argued; rather, it was a denial of *their* civil rights as white taxpayers and parents.

Such claims were common to antibusing discourses at the local and national level, and amongst both elites and ordinary citizens. Opponents of busing enacted a thin colorblindness in their rethinking of the legal and political scope of civil rights; in their understanding, any discussion of civil rights had to include the perceived discriminatory harms to whites that followed from court-ordered busing. For example, as Republican Senator Robert P. Griffin said of busing in a newsletter to his constituents in Michigan's 9th district, "unreasonable punishment ought not be imposed upon the children of a new generation who are guilty of nothing but being born black or white. Racial discrimination

¹⁸⁷ Thanks to Lisa Disch for this phrasing.

is no less discriminatory just because it is court-ordered.”¹⁸⁸ In 1973, Griffin attempted to institutionalize this belief, sponsoring an antibusing bill to amend the Constitution so that it could “not be construed to require that pupils be assigned or transported to public schools on the basis of their race, color, religion or national origin.”¹⁸⁹

National newspapers also gave form to conservative egalitarianism. For example, a *Washington Post* editorial in the summer of 1972 deemed Roth’s decision “uncommonly... a racial balance solution.”¹⁹⁰ *Milliken* was “racial proportioning,” the editorial continued, and “a substantive and dangerous reassertion of race as the defining feature of the individual citizen.”¹⁹¹ Edward F. Cummertford of the *Wall Street Journal* similarly spoke to the unconstitutionality of busing as a form of reverse discrimination. From Cummertford's perspective, “‘Racial balance’ is racism pure and simple, and no amount of legal or sociological double-talk can change it. We are equal before the law, or we are not.”¹⁹² Referring to segregation in the North as the result of free choice, Cummertford continued, “When any child, regardless of his race or color, is forced to attend a school other than the one he normally would attend for no reason except his race or color,” his rights are taken away.¹⁹³

Some citizen letters to Judge Roth also referenced reverse discrimination. Though they claimed colorblindness, they also contrasted their rights as white taxpayers with

¹⁸⁸ “Michigan Memo: Senator Griffin Speaks Out Against Forced Busing” Office of the Assistant Minority Leader, Washington D.C. Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 7, 1970-72.

¹⁸⁹ S.J. Res. 9. Introduced January 4th, 1973. The Library of Congress. Online: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d093:S.J.RES.9:>

¹⁹⁰ Editorial, “Busing: The Push-Pull Effect,” *The Washington Post* (Sun. July 23, 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 9, clippings.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Edward F. Cummertford, “Mere Creatures of the State?” *The Wall Street Journal* (Mon. Nov. 16 1970). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 4, Clippings 1970.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

what they saw as the special privileges being given to blacks. For example, according to Warren resident and antibusing activist Lillian Dannis, "If the NAACP can raise millions of dollars on this kind of charges it's time the taxpayer starts to fight for his rights."¹⁹⁴ Two "Very Concerned Parents" also worried about the effects of busing on the "Rights" of "white people" fought for by "our forefathers." They claimed that they were not racists, but rather believed "in judging each person for 'what he or she is', but not judging a race as a whole."¹⁹⁵ Self-identifying colorblind busing opponents referred not only to individual or taxpayer rights: they also fused a thin colorblindness to white "parental rights," or the rights of parents to choose where to send their children to school. As a "Disgusted Taxpayer" wrote to Roth, federal judges were interfering in the private realm of the family. Parents and faith, not government, should guide a child's development. As the "Taxpayer" continued, "No one should restrict the God given right of an American Citizen, as a Parent, to have control of his own children's education."¹⁹⁶ Citing parental rights, Joseph Crawford of Wyandotte feared that busing was the "first step" in the federal government's scheme to "take the child away from the parents." "Once they can take your parental control away," Crawford declared, "they've got no more worry. If you're not going to fight for your child you're not going to fight for anything."¹⁹⁷

In their opposition to busing, these parents and taxpayers described the policy as a political prize for a privileged racial minority; in their eyes, blacks used busing not to achieve educational opportunities, but rather expanded political and economic power.

¹⁹⁴ "National Anti-Busing Organization," *Northeast Detroit* (Sept. 30 1976) (Clippings June-Dec. 1976 folder, Carmen A. Roberts Papers. Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor.

¹⁹⁵ Letter from "Very Concerned Parents" to Judge Roth (May 7 1972). Box 12, folder 4, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

¹⁹⁶ Letter to Judge Roth from "Disgusted Taxpayer" in Detroit, MI (1972). Box 12, folder 1, Citizen Correspondence, 1972, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

¹⁹⁷ Jo Thomas, "Busing Debates Rage On – Out of Court."

This expanded power, some whites argued, was a form of reverse discrimination; busing would undermine their rights and liberties as whites. As Detroit resident Steve Mirka told Roth, the “quest” for equality on the part of “Black Moderates” had been “subverted for special demands and privileges,” of which he lists the “Black flag, Black studies, Black principals, black teachers, Black reeveance (sic), etc.”¹⁹⁸ With the power to privilege and empower one group over another, WMUZ program director Chuck Cossin, Jr. wondered if the “mighty” and power-hungry Roth would next decide “where the busses will run, who will be bussed where, where future schools will be built, and so on.” Cossin continued, “Roths (sic) style of dictatorial justice may make headlines, but it seriously threatens the well being of school children and the liberty of us all.”¹⁹⁹ Miss S. E. Leeper of the United Tool & Die Corporation of Detroit told Roth that busing was an “unconstitutional act” that promoted “racism – or racial balance if you prefer it to be called.”²⁰⁰ She then questioned Roth’s authority as a judge, asking, “From whence is it derived? I feel you are over-stepping your authority in this instance – perhaps crediting social conscience as a proper source for said authority.”²⁰¹ Residents of Hazel Park responded to Roth’s decision by passing a resolution accusing federal judges of “questionable rulings, interpreting the laws in a manner which causes under (sic)

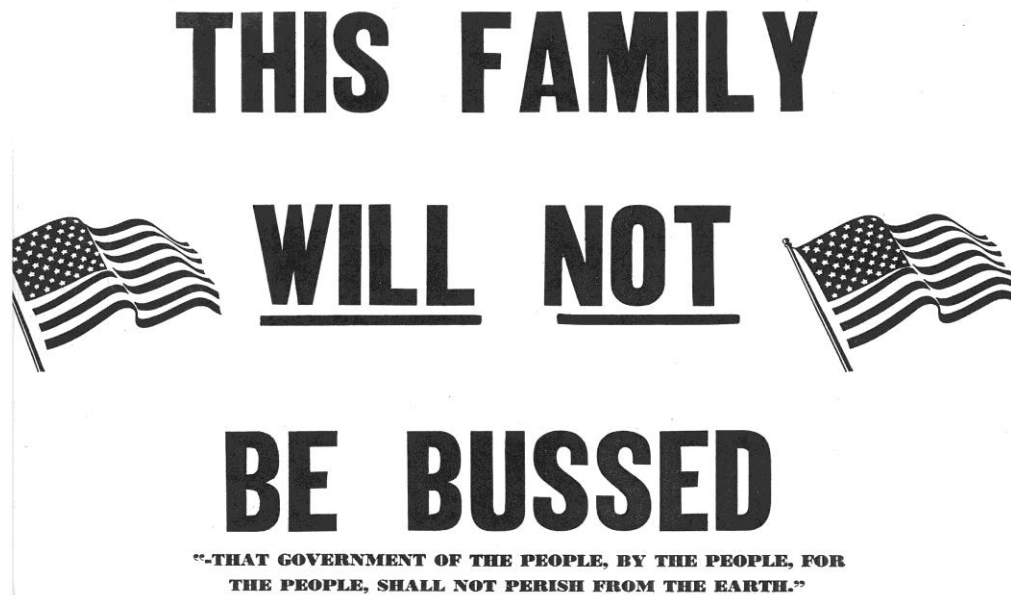
¹⁹⁸ Letter from Steve Mirka of Detroit, MI to Judge Stephen J. Roth (Nov. 25 1970). Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 27, Citizens Correspondence, 1970.

¹⁹⁹ Editorial Comment, WMUZ (Detroit, MI), sent by Chuck Cossin, Jr., Program Director, to Judge Roth (April 11, 1972). Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 1, Citizen Correspondence.

²⁰⁰ Letter from Miss S. E. Leeper of the United Tool & Die Corporation of Detroit (2200-2220 Eighth Street) to The Honorable Stephen J. Roth (Nov. 19, 1970). Box 11, folder 4, clippings 1970, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

hardship to many people of the land.”²⁰² Even non-Michigan residents, like Phoebe J. Braun of Sheboygan, WI, voiced their disapproval. According to Braun, judges like Roth were “out to ruin the nation” and take away what she interpreted as a white majority’s rights. Roth, she wrote, was distorting the laws of the nation’s Founding Fathers in order “to protect criminals and minority groups.”²⁰³ For these opponents of busing, Roth was exercising unchecked state authority that discriminated against whites in favor of undeserving nonwhites.



1. Antibusing flyer, Carmen A. Roberts Papers, 1972-1981. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

²⁰² Excerpt of Minutes from Hazel Park City Council meeting (Aug. 14, 1972), sent to Judge Roth by Ruth Lindsey, City Clerk (Aug. 16, 1972). Box 12, folder 2, Citizen Correspondence, 1972, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

²⁰³ Letter from Phoebe J. Braun of Sheboygan, WI to Judge Roth (June 19 1972). Box 12, folder 4, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

Sometimes associated with property rights, parental rights, and reverse discrimination in these letters was fear of governmental “experimentation” for the achievement of undemocratic social ends. Mrs. Donna Moran of Harper Woods accused Roth of “abusing” his authority, “turning our places of learning into experimental laboratories with our children used as guinea pigs.”²⁰⁴ C.B.W. Maddock of Detroit attached this experimentation to a particular ideological cause, arguing that busing was a “partisan, political” policy, the “offspring of those pseudo-intellectual sociologists and ultra-liberals who are trying to force this in order to make social changes.”²⁰⁵ One Southfield resident similarly associated his antibusing stance with opposition to social experimentation, federal courts, and civil rights organizations, asking the *New York Times*, “Did the NAACP and Roth really think we would allow them to experiment with our children?”²⁰⁶ Newspaper editorials, in Detroit and nationally, also articulated a conservative egalitarianism that championed parental rights against an experimental regime. For example, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* claimed that Roth’s ruling enacted “mass experimentation,” using children to atone for America’s “past sins” of slavery and discrimination.²⁰⁷

In referencing experimentation, antibusing discourses constructed the policy as something unnatural and undemocratic. Busing was a forced interference into the private lives of deserving and innocent white parents and taxpayers; it was an example of the

²⁰⁴ Letter from Mrs. Donna Moran of Harper Woods, MI to Judge Roth (April 6, 1973). Box 12, folder 4, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

²⁰⁵ Letter from C.B.W. Maddock, Rector at St. Paul’s Memorial Church, Detroit, MI to the Rt. Rev. Richard S. Emrich (copied to Judge Roth) (June 22 1972). Box 12, folder 4, 1972, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Joyce A. Baugh, *The Detroit School Busing Case: Milliken v. Bradley and the Controversy over Desegregation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 174.

²⁰⁷ Editorial, “The Detroit Ruling,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Wed. Sept. 29 1971) (Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 6, Clippings 1971). Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

state undermining whites' personal choices, and not—as Roth had argued in his *Milliken* decision—a remedy for addressing inequalities that the state had sanctioned. In their letters to Roth, antibusing Detroiters assured the Judge that they would do everything possible to protect their children from becoming victims of what they deemed to be an interventionist state. As a Dearborn resident writes, Roth seemed to have “limitless power to reach out to any boundry (sic) and rule on people’s lives. Perhaps it’s time we had restrictions on the powers of a federal judge.”²⁰⁸ Livonia resident John Strubank spoke of a domino effect of busing. In a letter to President Nixon that was copied to Roth, Strubank wondered, “It would seem America is in deep trouble when the Federal Government decides who our children will associate with and not the parents. What can we expect next?”²⁰⁹ These writers thus constructed busing as a first step in a government scheme to brainwash school children. In a 1972 letter to the *Teacher’s Voice*, a Michigan Education Association publication, E.J. Duncan of Allen Park claimed that busing was not “designed to achieve ‘integration’ or ‘quality education.’” Rather, it was simply a federal ruse to “capture a child’s mind,” “weaken parental authority,” and “erode states (sic) rights.”²¹⁰

Fears of an interventionist and experimental state were amplified in some letters to Roth, in which antibusing whites associated busing with a “dictatorial” federal government. For example, E.J. Duncan of Allen Park argued that busing advocates were

²⁰⁸ Letter from Mrs. Anita (?) of Dearborn, MI (June 28, 1972). Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 4, 1972.

²⁰⁹ Letter from John Strubank of Livonia, MI to President Nixon (Nov. 18 1970); copied and sent to Judge Stephen J. Roth (Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 27, Citizens Correspondence, 1970)

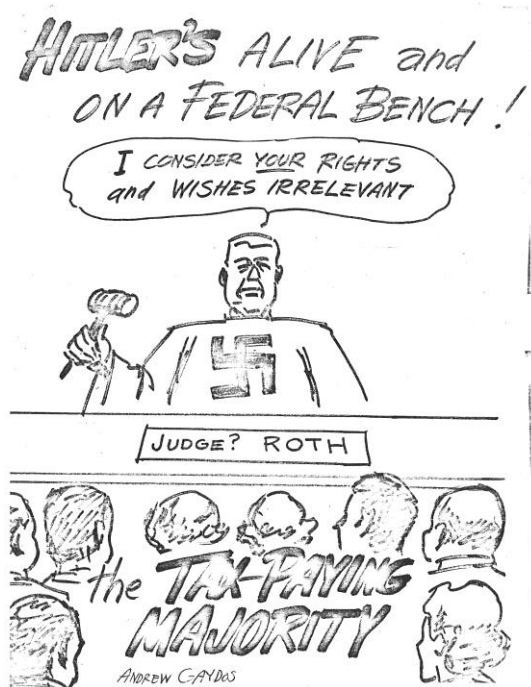
²¹⁰ E.J. Duncan of Allen Park, “Busing ‘for birds’”, Letter to the *Teacher’s Voice*, Michigan Education Association (Sept. 4 1972) p. 4 (Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 8, Clippings 1974). Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

“destroying our nation and setting up a one-world dictatorship.”²¹¹ Roth as dictatorial scientist, experimenting with children for the purposes of federal control, was a major theme in Bedford Township resident Andrew Gaydos’ cartoons, sent to Roth in 1972. In one drawing, a king-like Roth points to a figure, hovering with a machete over a baby, while a “concerned parent” tries to intervene. A hooded “pro bussing bigot”—again, signifying the belief that busing is a policy of reverse discrimination—looks on happily. In another cartoon, Roth is portrayed as a mad scientist, happily experimenting with the lives of children. Finally, a third cartoon associates Roth with fascism, and charges him with taking away the rights of a “Tax-Paying Majority.” White Detroiters’ characterizations of Roth as a threat to children was manifested in both word and physical action. While Gaydos often describes Roth as dangerous to children, antibusing activists took to the streets to voice similar—if more threatening—concerns, as in East Detroit in July 1972. Here, rally-goers held signs that read, “Judge Roth Child Molester!”²¹²

Conservative egalitarian antibusing discourses, like the anti-civil rights discourses of the New Deal era, also constructed an alliance between civil rights and communism. By calling into question Roth’s authority to order busing, antibusing Detroiters were calling into question his allegiance to the nation and to capitalism. Fears of communist infiltration defined some antibusing arguments. In Detroit, busing opponents wondered: If the government could tell parents what to do with their children, why wouldn’t it also tell them how to live? Indeed, as a 1972 edition of the *Saturday Review of the Society*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² William Grant, “De Facto Segregation at Issue in Denver...” *Detroit Free Press* (Mon. July 17, 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 11, Clippings.



2. Cartoon drawings sent to Judge Roth, signed by "Andrew Gaydos 'Magyar'" from Andrew Gaydos of Bedford Township, MI. Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 4, 1972. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

described “forced busing,” it had become “the Red scare of the 1970s.”²¹³

“A Very Concerned Mother” voiced her opposition to busing by citing such fears, telling Roth that America “could be destroyed... by one Foolish Judge being wooed by enemy agents! Open your eyes! ... Are you one of them?”²¹⁴ Charles A. Brooks of Grosse Pointe Park named these “enemy agents,” seemingly equating Roth with Fidel Castro. As Brooks wrote, just as Cuban refugees “fled the Castro who took the children on busses and educated them in the ways of communism... decent Americans will flee Roth, and his busses.”²¹⁵ Cuban and Communist imagery reappeared in a pamphlet sent to Roth by a citizen who had noticed it being passed out in his or her neighborhood. The pamphlet warned American citizens that Communist forces were preparing to capture their children. A mysterious “Brain Trust,” the pamphlet exclaimed, was “NOW the principal moving element behind the decision of Federal Judge Stephen J. Roth to order massive cross-district bussing between Detroit area schools.” Roth’s “tyrannical order” was not aimed at achieving “racial integration,” but rather “the total capture of your children’s minds.” Fusing Communism to civil rights, the author(s) of the pamphlet characterized the NAACP, specifically, as “a major instrument” of the “Socialist-Collectivist Brain Trust.”²¹⁶ Four years after Roth handed down his decision, Carol Mancini, “Area resident and Parent,” wrote to *The Advertiser* in July 1976, fusing

²¹³ William Serrin, “The Most Hated Man in Michigan,” *Saturday Review of the Society* (Aug. 26, 1972), 13-14. Box 12, folder 2, Citizen Correspondence, 1972, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

²¹⁴ Letter from “A Very Concerned Mother” to Judge Roth (June 26 1972). Box 12, folder 4, 1972, Stephen J. Roth Papers.

²¹⁵ Letter from Charles A. Brooks of Grosse Pointe Park, MI, to “Philip J. Roth” (incorrect name) (no date). Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 29, Correspondence.

²¹⁶ The back of the pamphlet also urges readers to visit the Bishop Francis X. Ford Bookstore, where they can find books with titles like “Child Seducers,” “Communism and the NAACP,” “Soviet Inferno,” and “Thugs and Communists.” Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 3, Citizen Correspondence, 1972.

public education with communism. She told her readers, “bussing is but a first step in losing our freedoms. If you don’t believe me, just ask any Communist member. You can find him at your local public school. They’ve got plans for us. Something about burying us, I think.”²¹⁷

ii. City & Suburbs: Fusing Class and Whiteness in Detroit

While exceptional in its levels of paranoia, anticommunist antibusing arguments did illuminate widely held fears that parental rights were being taken away in the name of something foreign and un-American. This fear was common in letters from both Detroit residents and suburbanites. Yet for suburbanites particularly, opposition to busing was expressed through claims to antiracism and colorblindness. For these whites writing to Roth, explicit discussions of race (or racism) are nearly absent. In defending their work ethic—and, as a result, their affluent neighborhoods and good schools—these whites speak in a conservative egalitarian language of individual choice and meritocracy that, like the *de jure/de facto* binary, ignores or denies structural racial inequalities. In this sense, white suburbanites' opposition to Roth's interdistrict order can be read as a protection of racialized property claims, even as they do not state so explicitly.

Grosse Pointe resident Cindy Chaisson’s letter to Roth gestured to this desire. While often “stereotyped” because she lived in an “affluent” area, Chaisson noted that she “worked hard, went to school, sweated and toiled” to create “a nice community” for her children. Busing, she argued, was “unfair to property owners” like her, who pay “between six and seven times the property taxes” that Detroit residents do. Chaisson

²¹⁷ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Advertiser* (July 1976), Clippings. June-Dec. 1976, Carmen A. Roberts Papers, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor.

believed that she had earned her community's quality schools. Busing not only undid her hard work, but it unfairly asked her to pay for others who did not earn such advantages. Chaisson claimed that her opposition to busing was not borne from racism, and she linked the protection of her property to her colorblindness. "I'm color blind," she argues. "I judge people as individuals."²¹⁸

In a letter addressed to state representatives and copied to Roth, Birmingham resident Joseph S. Ogden similarly stated that he had worked hard to establish good schools for his children. As Ogden also noted, his tax dollars contributed to quality schools in the inner city, as well. Though not complaining about this financing, and the "less motivated" recipients of his tax money, he was—and "perhaps violently"—opposed to "any social plan which would cause us to lose the benefits of our labor."²¹⁹ Ogden fused his opposition to busing with antistatism. "We do not want to slip into a welfare society, if you will, where it no longer makes any difference whether you are a contributor or simply a recipient of other people's labors." For Ogden, work ethic, merit, and taxpaying contribution were implicitly tied to racial difference, even though he—like others—claimed that he was colorblind. For example, as Ogden further argued, he was "not opposed to bussing because of (racial) integration," and he would even be in favor of "open housing."²²⁰ Of course, it is likely that the open housing Ogden advocates would not affect his own Birmingham neighborhood.

²¹⁸ Thomas, "Busing Debates Rage On – Out of Court."

²¹⁹ Letter to state legislators from Joseph S. Ogden of Birmingham, MI; cc'd to Judge Roth (Jan. 1st, 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 1, Citizen Correspondence, 1972.

²²⁰ Letter to state legislators from Joseph S. Ogden of Birmingham, MI; cc'd to Judge Roth (Jan. 1st, 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 1, Citizen Correspondence, 1972.

Claims of colorblindness also characterized a letter from William and Helen Young of Grosse Pointe Park, MI. In it, the authors, both teachers in the Detroit area, approvingly cite a *Detroit News* editorial in which the paper argued that the judge had "confused *de facto* and *de jure* segregation rather than made a clear distinction between them." The authors further argued that as innocent taxpayers, they would ultimately have to pay for busing. They asked the judge: "Will you donate the difference between your salary and that of the average teacher to implement your decision?" Though they claimed to be nonracist—they both "teach integrated classes and attend an "integrated church to worship"—the Youngs worried that Roth's decision would be the first in a series of runaway racial quotas. As they sarcastically added: "Where does it all end? Will we bus Eskimos to Indiana, Hawaiians to Minnesota, New York Jews to Arkansas, West Coast Chines to Florida, all in the interest of integration?"²²¹

As with suburbanites, some white Detroiters feared that busing would not only harm their children, but also lower the value of their homes and property. However, while also engaging in raced discourses of taxpaying and homeownership, these Detroiters voiced a sense of class precariousness that appears unique to their socioeconomic status. Though many of these residents spoke about race in more explicit terms than their counterparts in places like Birmingham and Grosse Pointe, their letters highlight the extent to which class anxiety— and an awareness of suburban privilege—shaped their opposition to busing. Detroiters residing in less affluent neighborhoods of the city argued that busing—and especially a Detroit-only plan—would unfairly burden them. Busing,

²²¹ Letter from William and Helen Young of Grosse Pointe Park, MI, to Judge Roth (Oct. 6, 1971). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 28, Correspondence).

they argued, would benefit both undeserving African Americans and privileged white suburbanites.

Mrs. Bertha Brotman was one of these Detroit residents. Brotman both emphasized her status as an autonomous, taxpaying citizen and also spoke more explicitly about race than antibusing whites like Chaisson and Ogden. In her letter, Brotman told Roth that desegregation burdened entitled working-class whites like herself. Specifically, busing would unduly harm her as a hard-working and yet less privileged Detroit: “Do you believe it is fair for those who have worked hard all their lives and never asked for public assistance even though they may have been entitled to it, to pay the heavy taxes it will take to finance bussing?” As Brotman continued, “How about people like me, who live on fixed incomes? ... I received no monetary help, even though I could easily have asked for public assistance.” Citing concerns over reverse discrimination and special privileges, Brotman asked Roth, “Ought we allow the privileges and freedoms mentioned in the Constitution to be used only for black freedoms? Have not the whites the same rights?”²²²

As with Mrs. Brotman's letter, Mr. Miles—a self-described “former klansman”—stressed in his letter to Roth that unfair advantages were being bestowed upon African Americans and suburbanites. For Miles, the wealthy, “through the fortune of intellect or the chance of family inheritance,” were able to “escape” poor school districts. Miles claimed that white families opposed to busing were not racists. Rather, their opposition was borne out of beliefs about hard work and deservingness. Yet Miles' beliefs about deservingness were explicitly raced, as shown by his characterization of whites who

²²² Letter from Mrs. Bertha Brotman of Detroit, MI, to Judge Stephen J. Roth (Sept. 28, 1971). Roth Papers, Box 11, Folder 28, Correspondence.

worked hard to escape from black areas of the city: “those whites who have scraped and saved to bring their children out of the older areas into newer schools, are now compelled to see those very same children bused right back into the atmosphere that the parents sacrificed and worked so hard, to escape; what kind of racial attitudes do you honestly believe will be engendered?” Engaging in a thin reading of colorblindness and civil rights, Miles further argued that busing represented an affront to the capacity of low-income whites to attain “equal opportunity.”²²³ Miles was concerned not with equal opportunity for black Detroiters, or the abolishment of structural inequality, but rather with the rights of working-class whites, discriminated against by politicians in favor of blacks and wealthy Detroiters. His understanding of “equal opportunity,” at least as expressed in this letter, is limited to white working-class opportunity.

A letter from Mrs. Agnes S. Noble of Detroit to Roth similarly cited intersectional discourses of race and class. Describing her ethnic Hungarian ancestry and her father’s work in the steel mills and the auto industry, Noble interestingly compared her story to that told by Rev. Albert Cleage, who she described as a “Black Militant of this city.”²²⁴ According to Noble, she had heard “time and again how [Cleage’s] father worked in a foundry of this city and was not able to rise above the level of Foreman. My father was an intelligent man and was not able to rise above the level of Laborer, despite the sweat of blood and tears in his work.”²²⁵ Implying the existence of special privileges for racial minorities, Noble seemed to indicate that black Detroiters actually had it *better* than

²²³ Letter from Mr. Miles, Howell, MI, to Judge Roth (May 6 1972). Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 4.

²²⁴ Letter from Mrs. Agnes S. Noble of Detroit to Judge Roth (June 22, 1971). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, Folder 28, Correspondence.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

whites; her father, a white man, could not do as well as a black man. Yet Noble also stressed her claims to colorblindness. “For more years than I can remember we have had black youngsters at our schools... We know lovely black people, my husband has many that work for him in hourly rated capacities, and with him on supervision.” Though she tells Roth that she does not want to move to the suburbs—the “stereotyped suburbanite never appealed to us”—Noble warns that busing will force her family to “run from the city” and “the blacks.” For Noble, white suburbanites bore some responsibility for integration, and she urged Roth to send black children “to all the elite white schools in the City and Suburbs.” While viewing busing as an unfair burden on white Detroiters like her, Noble, as with Brotman, also claimed that blacks made too many demands. It was not integration or equality that black Detroiters wanted, Noble feared. Rather, they “simply want to be the majority in every school in this city.”²²⁶

Some white antibusing Detroiters—much like Mrs. Noble—argued explicitly for the inclusion of elites (and presumably suburbanites) in any desegregation plan. For example, Detroit resident and Region Four board member Gerald J. O’Neill associated busing with an elitist liberalism, urging Roth and his “‘great’ white liberal friends” to send their own “children in the black inner City schools.” Making assumptions about Roth’s political leanings, as well as his class status, O’Neill claimed that Americans “are tired of great liberals pointing the way instead of being personally involved themselves.”²²⁷

²²⁶ Letter from Mrs. Agnes S. Noble of Detroit to Judge Roth (June 22, 1971). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, Folder 28, Correspondence.

²²⁷ Letter from Gerald J. O’Neill, Detroit MI (of Region 4 Board of Education) to Judge Stephen J. Roth (Dec. 24, 1971). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 29, correspondence. O’Neill’s assertions regarding liberalism are interesting, particularly because Roth probably would not have

An awareness of class division also featured in the arguments of busing advocates who, like busing opponents, cited suburban privilege. For example, James E. Schellenberg, a white teacher in the Detroit public school system, supported busing and condemned what he understood as busing opponents' misleading claims about protecting local control. As Schellenberg argued in a letter to Democratic Representative Martha Griffiths, which was copied to Judge Roth: "The clamor to save the 'neighborhood school' is but the most recent episode in the never ending struggle to maintain 'separate but equal' in education... Separate means unequal." Drawing explicit attention to the connections between race, class, and access to resources, and challenging conservative egalitarian articulations of choice, equality of opportunity, and merit, Schellenberg continued: "Education and opportunity are based upon white middle class-ness.... Those who cry 'Preserve the neighborhood school!' are really saying 'NIGGER, STAY IN YOUR PLACE. We are keeping education (based on our white middle classness), opportunity (based on our white middle classness), hope (based on white middle classness), self-respect (based on white middle classness) all to our selves. You ain't got it and you ain't gonna get it!'"²²⁸ Also writing to Roth in support, Richard Zamoski, a teacher at Highland Park H.S., wondered if, after Roth's interdistrict decision, "the Liberals in Oak Park and Birmingham and other precincts northward really mean equality when they speak of equality, or whether it is another instance of hypocrisy."²²⁹ Marie DePetro also

described himself as a liberal. As Paul Dimond writes, Roth was a conservative Democrat, and before *Milliken*, he had "earned the reputation of a hard-working but conservative jurist who demonstrated little sympathy for minority grievances." Dimond, 31.

²²⁸ Letter from James E. Schellenberg of Detroit, MI, to Dem. Rep. Martha Griffiths (D), District 17 (March 31, 1972), cc'd to Judge Roth. Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 1, citizen correspondence, 1972.

²²⁹ Letter from Richard Zamoski of Detroit MI, to Judge Stephen Roth (No date). Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 29, correspondence.

underlined the importance of interdistrict busing in class terms, telling Roth that a quality education required “the mixing of the upper, middle and lower classes to each other.”²³⁰

Roth's interdistrict order also found support in the editorial pages of the *Detroit Free Press*. Writing in 1972, the *Press*' Tom Wicker attacked a proposed Congressional bill, supported by President Nixon, which would have delayed court-ordered busing. As Wicker argued, the bill—which would have prohibited busing across district lines—would put “the heaviest burdens of desegregation on low-income, working-class white neighborhoods,” allowing “affluent white suburbs and neighborhoods to escape desegregation.” Politicians in Washington, Wicker continued, are crying “crocodile tears” for working-class whites, framing their opposition to busing in terms of working-class protection.²³¹

Thus, even as non-suburban white opponents of busing referenced reverse discrimination, they perhaps had more in common with supporters of an interdistrict busing remedy, like Schellenberg, Wicker, and Zamoski. Indeed, both groups were more likely than antibusing suburbanites to talk openly about race- and class-based inequalities in the city. But there were crucial differences between the two groups: supporters of Roth's order recognized the necessity of an interdistrict remedy for achieving actual desegregation; opponents of busing figured desegregation as a burden, and characterized busing as a special privilege granted to blacks at their expense.

V. *Reading Milliken at the Supreme Court*

²³⁰ Letter from Marie DePetrio (spelling?) to Judge Stephen Roth (Aug. 3, 1972). Roth Papers, Box 12, folder 2, Citizen Correspondence, 1972.

²³¹ Tom Wicker, “No Escape for Blue Collars: Nixon Policy on Busing A Ploy,” *Detroit Free Press* (Tues. Sept. 19 1972). Stephen J. Roth Papers, Box 11, folder 8, clippings 1974.

The state of Michigan was quick to appeal Roth's decision ordering interdistrict busing, and *Milliken* reached the Supreme Court in February 1974. In a 5-4 decision, the Court overturned Roth's inter-district remedy, leaving a Detroit-only plan standing.²³² Written by Justice Burger, the majority's decision contributed to the discursive construction and authorization of conservative egalitarianism. Specifically, Burger's opinion put forward a vision of colorblindness that understands race as mere skin color and frames racial segregation in the city and suburbs as the result of individual and local choice. In so doing, the Court in effect rehabilitated the de jure/de facto distinction, which Roth's decision had called into question.

The Court did not deny the presence of state action with regard to the segregation of Detroit's schools. However, Burger's opinion stated that Roth had overstepped his judicial authority in ordering suburban participation; evidence did not show, Burger claimed, "*de jure* segregated conditions" in Detroit's "outlying school districts."²³³ In Burger's understanding, even if segregation in the city of Detroit was a fact, the federal government could not and should not enter into the private issue of neighborhood choice—particularly if such an intervention was to disrupt innocent whites living in suburban neighborhoods. Juxtaposing Roth's interdistrict remedy against a conservative egalitarian reading of the requirements of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Burger wrote: "To approve the remedy ordered" by the district court "would impose on the outlying districts, not shown to have committed any constitutional violation, a wholly impermissible remedy based on a standard not hinted at in *Brown I* and *II* or any holding

²³² *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

²³³ *Milliken*, at 745 (1974).

of this Court.”²³⁴ According to Burger, this standard was not a constitutional imperative but rather a political and social desire to “produce... racial balance.”²³⁵ In his opposition to such experimentation, Burger also contributed to the association of white civil rights with populist and antistatist discourses of parental and local control, as seen in the letters written by Detroiters to Roth. As Burger wrote, Roth's interdistrict remedy threatened a “deeply rooted” and “essential” tradition of local control in education, robbing parents and their children of the freedom to choose where to live and go to school.²³⁶ If the Court let Roth's decision stand, Burger argued, then federal district courts—and not the people and their “elected representatives”—would ultimately be in charge of the nation's public schools.

Burger’s expression of local control was rooted in discourses championed by states' rights advocates, including his fellow Court Justice, Lewis F. Powell, Jr. One of Nixon’s appointees to the Supreme Court in 1971, Powell had been a leader in public education in Virginia since the 1940s, serving on the Richmond and State Boards of Education during a period when Virginia attempted “to evade the desegregation requirements of *Brown*.”²³⁷ As Kevin McMahon writes, though Powell was “never a strong voice for integration,” he was considered a moderate conservative Southerner whose busing views Nixon could be sure of—critical for the president, since school desegregation was one of his key targets in “tempering” the liberal “permissiveness” of

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Milliken* (1974), at 740.

²³⁶ *Milliken* (1974), at 741.

²³⁷ Sracic, 64.

the previous Warren Court.²³⁸ Immersed in local school politics, Powell had long feared the influence of communistic centralization in the nation's public schools. He believed that America's educational system must fiercely promote "free government" and republican values, meaning the local control of schools, and the decentralization of educational standards and authority.²³⁹ By appointing judges like Powell, and by taking a more public antibusing stance, President Nixon sought to unite "white southerners and white- mostly Catholic – ethnics living in electorally rich northern states" like Michigan, who voiced similar fears about centralization.²⁴⁰

President Nixon, like his nominees on the Court, was also a key contributor to the articulation of conservative egalitarianism, constructing a potent association between "an intrusive federal government, liberalism, and the national Democratic party"²⁴¹ which would appeal to whites who were opposed to "unelected" and "liberal" judges. In his articulation of conservative egalitarianism, Nixon hailed voters who were confused,

²³⁸ Kevin McMahon, *Nixon's Court: His Challenge to Judicial Liberalism and Its Political Consequences* (The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 160. Nixon's other target issue, his "litmus test" for judicial nominees, was their stance on "law and order." Thanks to Pamela Brandwein for pointing me in this direction.

²³⁹ Powell had clearly referenced these principles in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973). See Paul A. Sracic, *San Antonio v. Rodriguez and the Pursuit of Equal Education: The Debate over Discrimination and School Funding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 66-67. Another 5-4 decision, the Court in *San Antonio* denied the claims of Mexican American parents and children attending public schools in a poor section of the city. The parents had argued that the state's educational funding system violated the Equal Protection Clause. Noting the higher quality of schools in wealthier white suburbs, the plaintiffs argued that there was a correlation between race, "district wealth and the quality of local schools." Yet as Paul A. Sracic writes, Powell's decision upholding Texas' school funding scheme ultimately prioritized a "state's interest in local control over education" over concerns about equal protection (11, 47).

²⁴⁰ McMahon, 7, 12. And as McMahon notes, Nixon did increase his share of the vote in the Detroit metropolitan area between 1968 and 1972 (p. 238).

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 231. McMahon quotes Thomas Edsall here (*Chain Reaction*, p. 88).

angry, and worried for “the safety of their children” and their “personal liberties” after the busing decisions passed by federal judges.²⁴²

Though some had questioned the sanctity of the de jure/de facto binary, it was a critical discursive weapon for the president, who understood that busing might be a necessary remedy in those districts where “there was clear evidence of official discrimination.” Though Nixon was “willing to comply with the general dictates of liberalism’s desegregation plan for the South,” McMahon suggests, the President was less enthusiastic when it came to cities like Detroit.²⁴³ As Nixon stated in a 1971 news conference, he did “not believe that busing to *achieve racial balance* is in the interests of better education. Where it is *de jure*, we comply with the Court; where it is *de facto*, until the Court speaks, that still remains my view.”²⁴⁴ In asserting the authoritative status of the de jure/de facto binary, Nixon moved further away from Dr. King’s call to address the structural or institutional dimensions of racial inequality in cities that did not enact Jim Crow laws.

Like his Supreme Court nominees, President Nixon helped to crystallize the link between suburban innocence, local control, social experimentation, and reverse discrimination. For example, hailing antibusing whites in a 1972 address, Nixon referenced this experimentation, telling the nation that those who “insist on more busing,” even at the expense of the quality of education, were “extreme social planners.”²⁴⁵

²⁴² *Ibid*, 100, 106, 108.

²⁴³ McMahon, 83-84, 100.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 105.

²⁴⁵ Richard Nixon: “Address to the Nation on Equal Educational Opportunities and School Busing.,” March 16, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3775>. This understanding of “planning” is also found in F. A. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), where the author locates the idea of “planning” within socialist ideology and practices. Hayek criticizes the idea that

Prefiguring Burger's opinion in *Milliken*, Nixon argued that busing was simply an ideological tool—a means to “meet some social planner's concept of what is considered to be the correct racial balance or what is called ‘progressive’ social policy.”²⁴⁶ As Nixon had argued in 1970, “free, open, pluralistic society” was threatened if Americans were “required to fit our lives into prescribed places on a racial grid – whether segregated or integrated, and whether by some mathematical formula or by automatic assignment. Neither can we be free, and at the same time be denied because of race – the right to associate with our fellow citizens on a basis of human equality.”²⁴⁷ In addition, the president also publicly contrasted the principle of “local control” with federal intrusion and experimentation. Positing the neighborhood school as a bulwark against such intrusion, Nixon argued, “To the extent possible, the neighborhood school concept should be the rule.”²⁴⁸

The President's conservative egalitarian vision of racial equality was becoming associated with the Republican Party, despite the fact that some Democratic legislators had also taken public stands against busing. The increasing association of conservative egalitarianism with a particular ideology or political project is further illuminated in the *Milliken* dissent, written by Justice Thurgood Marshall, then the Court's leading liberal member. Marshall opposed Burger's thin colorblind reading of civil rights, while challenging Burger's reliance on “local control” as a justification for striking down

economies can be centrally “planned,” and he associates “planning” with the redistribution of wealth and the abandonment of liberalism.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ McMahan, 100.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Roth's inter-district order.²⁴⁹ Marshall also chastised the Court for its emphasis on "racial balance," which he argued had diverted it from a direct discussion of the tangible, constitutional violation in the case: the creation and persistence of a dual school and racial caste system.

In recognizing the structural and state-sponsored dimensions of segregation in Detroit, Marshall presented a robust discursive challenge to the *de jure/de facto* binary, pointing to the ways in which its language obscured the origins of institutionalized segregation—in the suburbs as well as in the city of Detroit. As Marshall wrote, the state's violation "was not some *de facto* racial imbalance, but rather the purposeful, intentional, massive, *de jure* segregation of the Detroit city schools," which justified "all-out desegregation."²⁵⁰ Though Marshall does not reject the use of the distinction, he does—with King—actively challenge its meaningfulness, and the belief that some forms of racial segregation arise purely by free choice and not by state action. In recognizing the state's role in sponsoring racial segregation, and creating a dual school system along racial lines, Marshall called for "actual desegregation," which necessitated an interdistrict remedy. As Marshall wrote,

The flaw of a Detroit-only decree is not that it does not reach some ideal degree of racial balance or mixing. *It simply does not promise to achieve actual desegregation at all.* It is one thing to have a system where a small number of students remain in racially identifiable schools. It is something else entirely to have a system where all students continue to attend such schools.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974), at 795-98. Indeed, Marshall pointed to Michigan's legal authority to consolidate school districts. As Marshall emphasized, Michigan's school "districts are not separate and distinct sovereign entities under Michigan law, but, rather, are 'auxiliaries of the State.'"

²⁵⁰ *Milliken* (1974), at 785, 786.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, at 803, 804.

In contrast with the majority opinion, Marshall also adopted a more robust and historical understanding of race and racial subordination. As he wrote, black students were "not only entitled to neutral nondiscriminatory treatment in the future." Rather, they were owed "what *Brown II* promised them: a school system in which all vestiges of enforced racial segregation have been eliminated."²⁵² Without such a commitment, Marshall warned, the "evil" of segregation would "be perpetuated for the future."²⁵³ By situating *Milliken* in the historical context of enforced and state-sponsored segregation, Marshall denied the conservative egalitarian attempt to treat race as mere skin color, and to ignore its institutional dimensions.

Marshall did not shy away from the political contours of the case, particularly discourses of "suburban innocence" and the perceived threat that an inter-district remedy posed to whites. Indeed, Marshall understood the power of a discourse of local control to buttress racial inequality, and he cited continued white flight as the most likely scenario of a Detroit-only plan.²⁵⁴ He added that though palpable, political and "public opposition, no matter how strident, cannot be permitted to divert this Court from the enforcement of the constitutional principles at issue in this case." Speaking directly to the beliefs and attitudes of some Detroiters who might disagree, Marshall further argued: "Today's holding, I fear, is more a reflection of a perceived public mood that we have gone far enough in enforcing the Constitution's guarantee of equal justice than it is the product of neutral principles of law."²⁵⁵ In contrast to conservative egalitarian pronouncements of colorblindness, Marshall argued that achieving true racial equality

²⁵² *Ibid*, at 799.

²⁵³ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁴ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717, at 804-05.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, at 814.

required targeting structural inequalities that had deep historical roots. Yet arguably, the tone of his dissent—"a perceived public mood that we have gone far enough"—signaled his doubt about the capacity of the nation's political institutions, and its people, to mobilize to achieve this end.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that we should understand local and national level antibusing discourses as key sites in the articulation of conservative egalitarianism. I have traced the ways in which conservative egalitarianism was constituted in political and legal discourse, at the national level as well as in the arguments of antibusing white Detroiters of various class backgrounds. In theorizing these antibusing whites' responses to Judge Roth's ruling in the *Milliken* case, I have drawn attention to the dynamics of race and class intersectionality in the political subjectivities of Detroiters. I have shown that opposition to busing was not simply a feature of conservative politics, working-class white racism, or "backlash." It was also characteristic of a purportedly non-racist or race-neutral discourse of thin colorblindness that was engaged by Republicans and Democrats alike. Finally, reading Judge Roth's *Milliken* decision, as well as the dissent of Justice Marshall, as an interrogation of the de jure/de facto distinction, I have underlined the ways in which conservative egalitarianism has obfuscated the institutional and structural causes of racial inequality.

An investigation of *Milliken's* discursive reception in Detroit can help scholars to understand how twenty-first century Americans continue to talk about, and in some cases justify, racial inequalities in education, particularly in a context defined by continued and

increasing residential segregation and the creation of charter and “magnet” schools.”²⁵⁶ Though the antibusing movement dwindled in numbers and political clout in the 1980s, conservative egalitarianism continued to shape political and legal discourse around school desegregation. Often citing discourses of local control, courts in the 1980s and 1990s also effectively ended their oversight in desegregation cases across the nation, returning control to school districts that demonstrated their “good faith” efforts at desegregation.²⁵⁷ As President Reagan’s assistant attorney general for civil rights, William Bradford, would assert, the “racial spoils system in America” must end—and busing was a critical “spoil.” For the Reagan administration, busing and other forms of so-called “forced” integration were discriminatory; in a colorblind society, integration could only occur through individuals’ “voluntary” entry into “magnet schools and curriculum-enhancement programs.”²⁵⁸ Courts have largely accepted these arguments,

²⁵⁶ By 1979, District Judge Robert DeMascio—after ordering the Detroit school board to implement “compensatory” programs to accompany busing—found that the board had “knowingly” failed to implement these orders. The court’s plans were stifled, to a great extent, by conflict between the monitoring commission and elected school board officials, and by 1984 the commission was dissolved. Susan E. Eaton *et al.*, “Still Separate, Still Unequal: The Limits of *Milliken II*’s Monetary Compensation to Segregated Schools,” in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton, Eds. (The New Press, 1996), 150-152.

²⁵⁷ Dana N. Thompson Dorsey, “Segregation 2.0: The New Generation of School Segregation in the 21st Century,” *Education and Urban Society*, 45(5): 544, 45. As Dorsey argues, the country’s black and Latino students are more segregated today than they were in the late 1960s.

²⁵⁸ Marcia G. Synnott, “Essay Review: Debating Public School Desegregation: Color-Blind or Color-Defined Assignment?” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1998): 62, 64-65; Martha Minow, “Choice or Commonality: Welfare and Schooling after the End of Welfare as We Knew It,” *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Nov. 1999): 494-96, 501. In upholding individual choice and local control, political and judicial elites continued to nourish what Martha Minow calls “skepticism of public institutions and government,” displayed in the discourses of the antibusing movement.

and as some scholars have noted, the result is an increasing “resegregation” of the nation's schools.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ According to Gary Orfield, courts justify “racial segregation [as] natural and unsolvable,” while placing the duties and responsibilities of desegregation under “local control.” Gary Orfield, “Plessy Parallels: Back to Traditional Assumptions,” in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, edited by Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (New York: The New Press, 1996), 26-27, 42.

Chapter Four:

Archie Bunker, the (Forgotten) Man In the Street: Popular Culture and "White Backlash"

“Didn’t need no welfare state,
Everybody pulled his weight.
Gee our old LaSalle ran great,
Those were the days.”

(“Those Were the Days,” lyrics by Charles Stouse and
Lee Adams)

I. *Introduction*

The American working class’ dying moment, writes the historian Jefferson Cowie, appeared in the 1970s, as rising inflation, stagnating earnings, de-industrialization, and weakening unions hit the working classes particularly hard.²⁶⁰

Interviewing white workers in the boroughs of New York City in 1969, the journalist Pete Hamill saw a similar fate for what he called the “White Lower Middle Class”: “life in New York is not much of a life” for these white men, he writes, as taxes and the cost of living steadily increase.²⁶¹

According to Cowie, the CBS sitcom “All in the Family” (AITF)— which aired from 1970 to 1979, and documented the daily life of the Bunkers, a fictional working class family living in Queens, New York—could be read as a representation of this long “dying moment.” In the words of Caroll O’Connor, who portrayed the Nixon-supporting

²⁶⁰ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (The New Press, 2010), 12.

²⁶¹ Pete Hamill, “The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class,” *New York Magazine* (April 14 1969). Online: <http://nymag.com/news/features/46801/> (Accessed: November 22nd 2012).

patriarch, Archie, one of AITF's main narratives was that "life in the United States is no longer livable for him, for Archie Bunker."²⁶² As Howard F. Stein writes of this narrative, Archie Bunker "is the dramatization of the vanishing and constricting world of *the man*, the self-made, self-reliant, self-activating frontiersman, now become captive."²⁶³ The archetype of the "self-made, self-reliant" man was also raced. Through Archie, viewers witnessed not only an interrogation of this archetype, but also what Kirsten Marthe Lentz calls "whiteness in crisis." According to Lentz, AITF's innovation resides specifically in its depiction of "lower-class whiteness" as a racial category, one that—in seeking claims to social and economic resources—is always in "conflict with other racial and ethnic groups."²⁶⁴ Indeed, for Archie, as with Pete Hamill's interviewees, daily life in the late 1960s and 1970s was a constant battle against forces that seemed to be taking from deserving, hard working and "self-activating" white men and giving to undeserving and dependent others. In Hamill's account, these blue-collar workers often explained or made meaningful this sense of social and economic precarity through a language that bears similarities to conservative egalitarianism, placing the blame on the shoulders of undeserving minority "special interests" and a "Liberal Establishment."

Insofar as Archie Bunker is depicted as assigning blame for his predicament on both racial minorities and an activist Liberal Establishment, AITF appears at first glance to provide us with a standard portrait of "white backlash," consistent with Thomas Edsall's narrative in *Chain Reaction*. Indeed, like *Chain Reaction*, AITF also presents

²⁶² Quoted in Jane Feuer, "Genre Study and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, Robert C. Allen, Ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 194.

²⁶³ Howard F. Stein, "'All in the Family' as a Mirror of Contemporary American Culture," in *Family Process*, 13 (1974): 279.

²⁶⁴ Kirsten Marthe Lentz, "Quality versus Relevance: Feminism, Race, and the Politics of the Sign in 1970s Television," *Camera Obscura*, 43, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2000): fn. 45, fn. 47.

non-Southern conflicts over race and culture as erupting across familiar ideological and partisan lines: in their political and cultural arguments, Archie—the bigoted conservative Republican—is always opposed to his daughter, Gloria, and son-in-law, Mike, two ostensibly non-racist liberal Democrats. However, though AITF in some ways mirrors a particular narrative of backlash to the Great Society, I argue that the show also does critical and constructive discursive work. In many ways, Archie is emblematic of backlash, asserting characteristically that equality is "unfair" because it undermines his white male privilege. Yet AITF *also* presents us with moments in which Archie's self-identification—his way of understanding and approaching the world—is open to reconfiguration. Specifically, AITF undermines the necessary-ness of Archie's beliefs about politics—for example, his attachment to the Republican Party—as well as his beliefs about race and class. In tending to these moments, I argue that AITF opens up space in which some of the assumptions of the backlash narrative might be challenged.

In this chapter, I read AITF as a popular site of discursive representation, construction, and interrogation that, alongside "conscious political speech," can help us to "make sense" of a particular historical and discursive context of conservative egalitarianism and "white backlash."²⁶⁵ I do so by providing a more extensive reading of several episodes of the show, and by theorizing Archie's political and racial self-identification as an engagement with two populist American signifiers: the "Forgotten Man" and the "Man in the Street." Historically, these populist identities have been deployed on behalf of widely divergent ideological and political goals. I fuse these signifiers, casting Archie as the "(Forgotten) Man in the Street," a populist identity whose

²⁶⁵ Joseph Lowndes, 141.

meanings are expressed through discourses of race, gender, and class. Though Archie's inhabiting of the (Forgotten) Man in the Street may have been familiar to a particular segment of his viewing audience—men like Hamill's interviewees in New York—I argue that we read his self-identification more critically. Never fully fixed, I argue that the (Forgotten) Man in the Street is always open to reconfiguration through political contestation. I locate this openness in various moments in AITF, and I argue that such moments can help us to contrast the backlash narrative with a more critical and contingent story, even if fictional, of political self-identification and change.

As signifiers, the Forgotten Man and the Man in the Street have been filled by images of rural America, homogeneous communities, masculinity, self-help, virtue, and dignity. Yet these signifiers have also been open to reconfiguration. For example, the conservative writer William Graham Sumner argued in the *Gilded Age* that the industrious and independent "Forgotten Man" had been abandoned by a reformist government that favored the non-contributing poor and lazy. Yet fifty years later, President Roosevelt adopted the signifier of the Forgotten Man to champion his liberal New Deal, describing it as a set of reforms that would benefit the laboring man who had been forgotten by the wealthier classes. President Nixon's reappropriation of this signifier, in which he contrasted the Forgotten Man with a Liberal Establishment, further demonstrates its malleability.

Forgotten by his government and liberal culture, I argue that Archie, the (Forgotten) Man in the Street, self-identifies as an average male citizen who has a common sense awareness of how things ought to be. Yet at home, his beliefs are challenged by Gloria and Mike; at work, women are being hired to work alongside him;

and African American and Jewish families are moving into his neighborhood. As with Hamill's interviewees, Archie seeks to defend his white privilege in what seems to be an increasingly un-navigable world—one where, as he sees it, the deck is stacked against him.

However, though Archie often claims his allegiance to President Nixon and the Republican Party, this partisan attachment often appears weak: I argue that he is more likely to identify with populist signifiers, specifically the (Forgotten) Man in the Street, than he is to identify with a political party or office-holder. Indeed, as the audience comes to find out in Season 5, Archie is not registered to vote, and therefore did not vote for Nixon in the most recent election.²⁶⁶ Moreover, though perhaps a reluctant union member and product of the New Deal and World War II era—Archie does long for the return of Herbert Hoover in the show's opening theme— Archie is often presented by AITF as navigating a tension between his animosity towards an activist welfare state and his own attachments to the New Deal's "affirmative action for whites," particularly the right to collective bargaining, and the economic benefits of union membership.²⁶⁷ As with the Detroit homeowners discussed in Chapter Two, Archie's partisan attachments often appear weaker than do his attachments to populist discourses.

In simultaneously mirroring, constructing, and challenging a transforming American social and economic landscape, AITF—and its creator, Norman Lear—revolutionized American television. As Marty Kaplan writes of AITF's ingenuity, it was a sitcom that transformed Americans' "collective image from a Norman Rockwell portrait to a Norman Lear portrait that's just as patriotic, but messier, noisier, more

²⁶⁶ "George and Archie Make a Deal," Season 5, Episode 12 (1974).

²⁶⁷ Thanks to Lisa Disch for this phrasing.

honest and that hadn't yet been depicted in prime time."²⁶⁸ Viewers responded, and AITF was the most-watched television show for five years running.²⁶⁹ AITF was popular because of its "messiness" and its recognizable contemporary political themes and characters.²⁷⁰ According to Lentz, AITF brought complex social and political issues to a changing television demographic, thereby injecting "relevance" into the sitcom genre. This discourse of "relevance" was also a discourse of representation. According to Lentz, what AITF attempted to provide was an "honest" representation of the "'real' world of political struggle."²⁷¹ Similarly, for Eric Deggans, AITF spoke to "what people were going through at that time as opposed to earlier shows, which were sort of seen like a fantasyland, like 'The Brady Bunch' or 'The Andy Griffith Show.'"²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Marty Kaplan, "Archie's America, and Ours" (Cited with permission from author)

²⁶⁹ Emily Nussbaum, "Norman Lear and the Rise of the Divided Audience," *The New Yorker* (7 April 2014). Online: http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2014/04/07/140407crat_atlarge_nussbaum (Accessed 8 April 2014).

²⁷⁰ Feuer, "Genre Study and Television," 153.

²⁷¹ Lentz, 59, 60. For Lentz, such realism was a part of a larger framework for thinking about television in the 1970s. Production companies, in providing more "quality" and "relevant" tv programming, also saw themselves as improving "the public image of the medium of television." Lentz makes an interesting argument: shows like AITF which dealt with racial issues, produced by Lear/Tandem Productions, were seen as "relevant," whereas programs that focused on women, like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, produced by MTM Enterprises (both hired by CBS), aimed for improving the "quality" of television viewing. Lentz is critical of these discourses, writing that, "'quality' and 'relevance' represented the mobilization of two contrasting discourses for talking about television." While a discourse of "quality" was attached to understandings of feminism and "improved images of womanhood," "relevance" was attached to the improvement of "racial representation." (47). Moreover, the "antiracist politics" of "relevant" programming like AITF were "characterized by a gritty realism," whereas the "feminism" of *Mary Tyler Moore* was "articulated through prevailing norms of class, sexuality, and race." (69).

²⁷² Eric Deggans, "'The Jeffersons' Left Lasting Television Legacy," *All Things Considered*, Washington, D.C.: National Public Radio (July 25 2012). As Deggans argues, and placing AITF in the context of the civil rights movement, once institutional racism was challenged, African Americans "could build businesses. They could get great jobs, and they could move into the middle and upper class in a way that they hadn't been able to do before." "The Jeffersons" (1975-1985) "talked about those elements".

Though AITF can be seen as providing an "honest" representation of American political conflict in a moment that Edsall describes as one of backlash, I argue that the show was not simply a mirror held to the American viewing public; rather it further interrogated political discourse in a way that may have spurred its audience to question rigidity and affinities across the ideological spectrum. Indeed, while AITF's structure and writing actively interrogated Archie's identity and beliefs—his pinning of blame on African Americans or women—none of its characters, including the ostensibly more racially progressive Mike, escaped critique. Further, through the Bunker family's dramatized experiences and relationships, AITF's viewers may have seen that the signifier of the (Forgotten) Man in the Street was open to disruption and reconfiguration: not necessarily attached to a particular partisan position, nor always ready and willing to assign blame to non-white and non-male others, as backlash might lead us to believe. As a popular text, AITF dramatizes this openness, as well as the possibility that Archie might be hailed by multiple political discourses in a context of ascendant conservative egalitarianism.

II. *From Social "Schemers" to the New Deal: Tracing the (Forgotten) Man in the Street*

A signifier with a diverse ideological history, the Forgotten Man was perhaps first given extensive content by William Graham Sumner. A late nineteenth century sociologist with conservative political views, Sumner preached an economic philosophy extolling the virtues of capitalism, individualism, and limited government. The Forgotten Man is the hero of Sumner's 1883 treatise, *What Social Classes Owe To Each Other*. Self-sufficient and industrious, Sumner's Forgotten Man was abandoned by his

government in a moment of progressive reform that benefited what he termed the “negligent, shiftless, inefficient, silly, and imprudent.” Sumner contrasts the independent Forgotten Man with the “man who has done nothing to raise himself above poverty,” but yet,

finds that the social doctors flock about him, bringing the capital which they have collected from the other class, and *promising him the aid of the State to give him what the other had to work for*. In all these schemes and projects the organized intervention of society through the State is either planned or hoped for, and *the State is thus made to become the protector and guardian of certain classes*.²⁷³

As Sumner describes, these “certain classes” are composed of the unproductive and irresponsible, kept afloat by the sweat and toil of independent workers and contributors. Sumner writes that we can find the Forgotten Man “hard at work tilling the soil” —he, or she (“the Forgotten Man is not infrequently a woman,” Sumner adds), is “an honest, sober, industrious citizen, unknown outside his little circle, paying his debts and his taxes, supporting the church and the school, reading his party newspaper, and cheering for his pet politician.” The “obscure” Forgotten Man and the Forgotten Woman, who mind their own business, are “threatened by every extension of the paternal theory of government.”²⁷⁴ For Sumner, government intervention is against “Nature.” Certain conditions within society—the existence of privilege and destitution, for example—cannot, and should not, be reformed.

²⁷³ William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (First published by Harper & Brothers, 1883). See especially Chapter 1, “On a New Philosophy: That Poverty is the Best Policy,” 9, “On the Case of a Certain Man Who Is Never Thought Of,” and 10, “The Case of the Forgotten Man Farther Considered.” Project Gutenberg. Online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18603/18603-h/18603-h.htm#I> (Accessed Sept. 2013).

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Though Sumner complained about the prevalence of government “schemes” to support the working classes, his Gilded Age fusion of the Forgotten Man to laissez-faire individualism did not limit its popular and egalitarian appeal. Lawrence Goodwyn’s work on the history of American populism provides a key framework for thinking about the common components of populist discourses, including the instability of the signifier of The Forgotten. Goodwyn begins his story in Sumner's era, in the economic downturns of the late nineteenth century, where, for many small landholders in rural America, “Hard work availed nothing.”²⁷⁵ Though Goodwyn does not explicitly conceptualize “populism” in his account of agrarian popular movements, he refers to both “populism” as an ideology and “Populism” as a political-social movement (for example, the “People’s Party”). Reading Goodwyn’s rich history, the following central themes of American populism arise: self-help, individual aspiration, economic fairness, independence, anti-corporatism, the “plain people,” self-respect, dignity, cooperation, democracy, and community virtue.²⁷⁶ The language of populism was thus open to political appropriation, ready to be used in the cause of both fiscal conservatism, as with Sumner, and New Deal progressivism.

E.G. Shinner’s *The Forgotten Man*, written at the outset of the New Deal (1933), envisions an American hero who aspires to these populist capacities and virtues, particularly economic fairness, self-respect, cooperation, and community. In the context of Roosevelt's "federal works" and "government programs," Shinner's Forgotten Man is the citizen who, no longer forgotten, was welcomed to share in the economic fruits of

²⁷⁵ Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), viii.

²⁷⁶ While some might easily combine individual and collective dignity, for others, the individual and the “collective” are at odds.

national production. Put differently, Shinner's account of New Deal economic redistribution, in contrast to Sumner's account of Progressivism, casts the Forgotten Man as the beneficiary, rather than forgotten victim, of government programs. As President Roosevelt told the nation in a 1932 radio address, economic recovery required a plan that would "build from the bottom up and not from the top down," and that would restore "faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid."²⁷⁷ As Shinner writes, "average men" were being hit hardest by an economic collapse caused by the business elite. The "Forgotten Man" is not a member of this elite. Rather, he is part of the "great middle class," many of whom live in "humble homes."²⁷⁸ In this moment, as we might expect from reading the work of Katznelson and other New Deal scholars, the Forgotten Man was also usually figured as a white male. Posing as a universalist project, the New Deal racialized the distinction between the independent, self-reliant, and deserving worker and the undeserving recipient of government aid. Despite his resistance to the New Deal, Archie believed himself to be this self-reliant and virtuous worker.

A desire for dignity and respect, and for the recognition of one's political and social legitimacy, was a common feature of these populist discourses.²⁷⁹ These desires also shape the signifier of the Man in the Street, the ordinary American outside of the halls of power. Archie's frequent diatribes against equality are characterized precisely by what he sees as a lack of valuation of his own identity as a working-class white man from

²⁷⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at the Dedication of the New Chemistry Building, Howard University, Washington, D.C.," (Oct. 26, 1936), The American Presidency Project. Online: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15208> (Accessed Nov. 2013); Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Forgotten Man," Radio Address, Albany, N.Y. (April 7, 1932). Online: <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932c.htm> (Accessed Sept. 2013).

²⁷⁸ E. J. Shinner, "The Forgotten Man," in *The Forgotten Man* (Patterson Publishing Co., 1983), 134-136.

²⁷⁹ Goodwyn, 294.

Queens. Of course, Archie's yearning for the recognition of the dignity of “average folk” was not new to his post-World War II generation. In a series of articles published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1921, Meredith Nicholson writes a love letter to the Man in the Street, urging “us”—city dwellers and the government, it seems—to leave Main Street alone. As Nicholson admiringly writes, average Americans, the “hicks and rubes, living far from the great centres (sic) of thought,” are not “blind nor deaf”. They are well aware of what is going on in the world around them, and they can often be found engaging in intellectual conversations without the guidance of “condescending outsiders.”²⁸⁰

Nicholson’s Man in the Street encompasses all that is “local” in America. He praises small towns and rural communities, contrasting them with urban professionals and the fast pace of city life. According to Nicholson, the citizens living on Main Street are among the country’s most optimistic, virtuous, and proud.

As demonstrated, both the Forgotten Man and the Man in the Street could conjure an image of the rugged individual, a class, or a group. For Shinner, and in a context of economic collapse, the Forgotten Man is a social and economic class, ignored by financial elites and politicians. Yet Shinner also ascribes to the Forgotten Man a keen common (and intellectual) sense of economic life, similar to the Man in the Street. For Shinner, it is the government and its officials who lack awareness of the lived realities of Main Street Americans. Furthermore, the country's elites could say little about the daily life of the “corner druggists” or the “independent grocers,” and those “small and moderate-sized businesses which have been the very backbone of all civilization from the

²⁸⁰ Meredith Nicholson, “The Man in the Street: Papers on American Topics.” (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921).

beginning of history."²⁸¹ Thus, in Shinner's presentation, the Forgotten Man and the Man in the Street—though not necessarily interchangeable—share many discursive and symbolic characteristics.

Thinking these two signifiers together, I argue that Archie Bunker occupies the position of the (Forgotten) Man in the Street within a specific historical context in which the white "common men" of Archie's generation increasingly understood themselves as forgotten. Conservative egalitarianism both addressed and helped to shape or construct these feelings of abandonment and resentment while claiming colorblindness and anti-racism. For example, in his 1968 Republican convention speech, Richard Nixon promised that he would represent "the forgotten Americans."²⁸² Though he included black Americans in this figuring, in many ways Nixon's conservative egalitarian language mirrored the philosophy of Sumner: the Americans that he spoke for were racialized contributors, those who were *not* dependent on government.²⁸³ As a discursive complex that sought to make sense of America's changing racial and economic landscape, conservative egalitarianism further located the source of blame for resource scarcity in the 1970s in racially liberal and redistributive policies. In so doing, it reconfigured the identity of the so-called "Establishment," or the enemy of the "forgotten" American. Thus, the working and middle classes no longer had corporations to fear—the enemy of the New Deal era—but rather a redistributive government.

²⁸¹ Shinner, 135.

²⁸² Nixon, quoted in Kevin J. McMahon, *Nixon's Court: His Challenge to Judicial Liberalism*, p. 2.

²⁸³ The "Man in the Street" in this conservative egalitarian configuration also stands for those American citizens who haven't been loudly protesting: the "quiet" Americans, or the so-called "Silent Majority" that Richard Nixon hailed during his own election battles (Cowie, 5, 128-29).

In the following reading of AITF, I emphasize how the character of Archie self-identifies with the fiercely independent and anxious (Forgotten) Man in the Street in the context of 1970s America and conservative egalitarianism. I underline the ways in which Archie juxtaposes his own identity with those of political liberals, whom he calls “bleeding heart liberals,” “professors,” women’s “libbers,” and “pinko commies.” However, a non-voter whose partisan connections often appear as weak, I also argue that AITF presents Archie's political identity, interests, and attachments as open to reconfiguration.

III. Archie’s perennial negotiation of the “American Dream:” Reading AITF

My reading of AITF highlights Archie’s negotiation of “whiteness in crisis” while also demonstrating the show's presentation of moments of discursive openness and reconfiguration. Specifically, I argue that AITF dramatizes the ways in which populist discourses can be appropriated by multiple political projects and ideologies. This openness occurs most frequently when Archie is conscious of his threatened economic status—for example, when he harkens back to his own father's experiences of the Great Depression. Still, it is important to underline that Archie's class-consciousness is bound to his whiteness and maleness. While he often feels his economic stability slipping away, it is a privileged white, male stability that he feels to be in crisis.²⁸⁴

For Norman Lear, Archie’s sense of both privilege and precarity was familiar. In many ways, Lear based the character of Archie on his own father, a salesman in Hartford, Connecticut. Like Archie, Lear’s father harbored racial prejudices. In fact, one of the

²⁸⁴ Cowie, 194. As Cowie reminds us, Archie has a “scant economic identity but an enormous racial one.”

lines used by Archie to describe Mike—“you’re the laziest white kid I ever saw”—came straight from Lear’s father. Yet Lear’s influences could be found beyond his own family. He knew that prejudiced, working class guys like Archie existed in his own backyard. As Lear says of Archie’s beliefs, “I think that some guy in Queens could express the same sentiments about blacks, Jews, and hippies.”²⁸⁵ The character of Archie thus existed within a particular material and historical context, one that Lear sought to represent but also to interrogate.

Archie often blames racial minorities for his forgotten status. As such, he appears as an illustrative example of white backlash. However, I argue that there are moments of openness in AITF when Archie’s political identity, and his attachment to a conservative egalitarian racial project, is presented as open to reconfiguration. Put differently, AITF presents us with moments when Archie might be hailed by differently constructed Forgotten Men.

The tension between Archie’s economic anxiety and his unshakable faith in the openness—for white men, at least—of the American Dream is explicitly on display in AITF’s 1970 debut episode. In “Meet the Bunkers,” we find Archie and the college-educated Mike fighting over the causes of the breakdown of law and order.²⁸⁶ In a typically confident fashion, Archie claims that crime is the fault of “bleedin’ hearts and weeping nellies,” soft-on-crime liberals like Mike and his daughter, Gloria. It is certainly not the fault of “proud” property owners, like him. In contrast, Mike believes that crime is largely a byproduct of structural inequality; capitalistic selfishness and racism, he argues, are to blame. “Well, let me tell you something,” Archie retorts, “if your spics and

²⁸⁵ “The Media: Family Fun,” *Newsweek* (March 15 1971).

²⁸⁶ Season I, Episode 1 (1970).

your spades want their rightful share of the American Dream, let ‘em get out there and hustle for it just like I did!” When Mike points out that Archie did not have to “hustle with black skin,” Archie responds by emphasizing his bootstrap individualism, noting that he did not need people marching on the streets for him to get his job. In referencing the civil rights struggle, Archie makes sure to underline his sense of grievance and victimhood: that *he* is the one who is being forgotten by his government and society. No one is marching in the name of Archie Bunker's civil rights. Archie's wife, Edith, humorously enters into the conversation to shed light on this supposed determination and work ethic. “No,” she says of Archie’s job, “his uncle got it for him.” As the audience roars with laughter, Archie adds that liberals like Mike should not blame hardworking white Americans for the nation’s economic and social problems. Rather, Archie pits the deserving and hard-working against the undeserving, expressing a Sumnerian faith in one's own responsibility for his or her social and economic circumstances.

Archie similarly navigates this sense of white and male victimhood in the episode “Archie’s Helping Hand.”²⁸⁷ Here, he speaks explicitly to the “unfairness” of equality, mirroring conservative egalitarian juxtapositions of equality of outcome with equality of opportunity. This episode finds Archie dealing with the news that Edith's neighborhood friend, Irene Lorenzo, has landed a job as a forklift operator at the docks where he works. Angered that a woman will be making the same wages that he makes, Archie joins forces with his union pals to start a petition to get Irene fired. Yet when Archie confronts management, one of his bosses tells him that both the company and the union benefit from having women work alongside men, since it addresses both government and

²⁸⁷ Season 5, episode 6 (1974)

corporate concerns about gender equality. As Archie laments, “Equality is unfair,” adding, “What’s the point of a man working hard all his life, trying to get someplace, if all he’s gonna do is wind up equal?” For Archie, Irene is simply a quota hire. Her presence on the docks—and the institutionalization of equality—signals a loss of his status and privilege.



3. "Archie's Helping Hand" (© Tandem Licensing Corp., 1974, 1975, renewed 2002, 2003)

The episode "The Election Story" further highlights Archie as The (Forgotten) Man in the Street, whose deservingness, individualism, and work ethic is juxtaposed to the laziness of racialized welfare dependents and the elitism of the Liberal Establishment.²⁸⁸ As Archie sees it, racial and gender equality necessitate taking from him and giving to others, whether in the workplace (as with Irene Lorenzo), or in the form of taxes targeted for welfare programs. As a Sumnerian might say, in Archie's world, the State had become the "protector and guardian" of non-white and non-male

²⁸⁸ Season 2, Episode 6 (1971)

others. The episode features Mike and Gloria volunteering on a campaign for a local progressive politician, Claire Packer. Though he is annoyed that Claire is a liberal, Archie is especially bothered by her gender: Packer is the “Queen of the liberals,” as Archie puts it. For Archie, political liberals, including feminists, are helping to “flush the U.S.” down the toilet. Moreover, women and politics “don’t mix, it’s against nature,” Archie says. When Mike asks Archie where he gets all of his prejudiced views, Archie responds as the (Forgotten) Man in the Street, comparing his life of hard work to the elitism of educated liberals. Unlike the pampered and college-educated Mike, Archie went to “the college of hard knocks... I *know* people.”

When Claire Packer visits the Bunker household, she and Archie argue immediately. Claire tells him that he sounds like a “male chauvinist,” and Archie— hilariously fusing male chauvinism with the signifier of the self-reliant man— responds, “Right, an ordinary taxpayer!” For Archie, as with the white Detroiters discussed in Chapter Two, such gendered and raced understandings of the taxpayer shape questions of deservingness: specifically, who the government is obligated to respond to and protect. When Claire asks Archie what he has against welfare, which Archie describes as “progressive, pinko welfare ideas,” Archie responds with “Everything!” As he continues, his hard earned money is going “to a bunch of families who ain’t even related to me, which they couldn’t be related to me for complexionary reasons, if you know what I mean.” For Archie, welfare is something that only non-white, non-taxpayers utilize.

Archie's beliefs about welfare and work were not uncommon. Raced constructions of economic deservingness shaped many Americans' beliefs about welfare and the so-called “underclass” in the 1970s. According to Martin Gilens, particularly after 1965 the

American media began to represent the country's impoverished as overwhelmingly black. As Gilens finds, the peak of poverty racialization occurred in the years 1972 and 1973, when "African Americans composed 76 percent of the poor people pictured in stories" about poverty, most of these stories being negative.²⁸⁹ The media's racialization of the poor corresponds with what Adolph L. Reed Jr. terms the "underclass myth." As Reed writes, this pervasive "underclass myth" joins together understandings of poverty and "anti-social behavior"—particularly criminality and welfare dependence—so as to explain inequality in cyclical and behavioral, rather than structural, terms.²⁹⁰ Explaining poverty in this way naturalizes it, evacuating economic redistribution from any discussion of antipoverty policy. According to Reed, contrasted with this "underclass" is a "working, taxpaying culture"—of which Archie Bunker most certainly identified with—that is linked to "ideological dispositions" of individualism and bootstrap initiative.²⁹¹ As Reed writes, this "working" and "taxpaying" culture is often portrayed as white, whereas blackness is explicitly linked to the "underclass" in both academic and journalistic writing. Critically, the "underclass" myth also gets its "greatest ideological boost from pure sexism." As Reed continues, the "so-called cycle of poverty" thesis "focuses on women's living and reproductive practices as the transmission belt that drives the cycle."²⁹² Thus, in the popular imagination, the primary recipients of taxpayer dollars have been undeserving women of color.

²⁸⁹ Broadly, Gilens' empirical study of Americans' perceptions of welfare and anti-policies finds that the American public has tended to view as "suspicious" the "true need of welfare recipients," and that racial difference helps to explain this. Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 68, 102; 122-23.

²⁹⁰ Adolph L. Reed, Jr., "The Underclass Myth," *The Progressive*, 55, 8 (Aug. 1991): 18-20.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Even though "The Election Story" shows Archie blaming women and minorities, there are moments of openness for Archie, in which his place within a backlash narrative appears questionable. One of these moments occurs in the aptly titled episode, "The Man in the Street."²⁹³ In this episode, Archie and his coworkers are interviewed by a CBS



4. "The Man in the Street" (©Tandem Productions, Inc., 1971, 1972)

news reporter filming a special segment on the "working man's" opinion of President Nixon's economic policies. The episode begins with an unusually elated Archie coming home from work with an inexpensive bottle of wine. As he excitedly tells the Bunker clan, tonight they will be "drinking to the man in the street." Though Archie may have identified with Nixon's "Silent Majority," tonight he will be silent no more. As he tells his family, he is going to show the people "how a *real* American feels about livin' in the good ol' U.S. of A!" "For once," he says, "the great American public's gonna get a chance to hear the opinions of *the real* common man."

²⁹³ Season 2, episode 11 (1971)

When Mike confronts Archie about what he told the CBS reporter, Archie answers by endorsing Nixon and underlining the individualistic and anti-regulatory philosophy of the Republican Party. As Archie sees it, “Mr. Nixon is preserving the spirit of competition and free enterprise.” Mike disputes Archie’s self-assured claims, instead aligning Republican priorities with those of a Corporate—and not a Liberal—Establishment. As Mike tells Archie, Nixon is not the President of the “working man,” but rather “big business.” Mike then protests Nixon’s return from China, telling Archie that the president should not have returned to the United States. Archie blows up at Mike, his wide eyes conveying a sense of both aggravation and desperation: “... he is my president,” says Archie, “*and I want him back!*”

Yet when a malfunctioning television forces the Bunkers to Kelsey’s bar to watch the evening newscast, we discover that Archie, the (Forgotten) Man In the Street, is not going to have his moment in the spotlight. Rather, his interview is hilariously preempted by a special news report in which Nixon announces his new Supreme Court nominee. “What’s he doin’ up there,” Archie exclaims, quite aggravated. “I’m supposed to be on there!” Suddenly, it appears that the President, one of Archie’s heroes, is not speaking for Archie. Rather, the audience sees a frustration rarely voiced by Archie in his frequent defenses of Nixon in front of Mike and Gloria. “He’s always on there talkin’ and making people nervous,” Archie complains. “Why’s he doin’ this to me, *I’m only tryin’ to help him!*” While subtle, this scene arguably undermines Archie’s faith in President Nixon’s representation of the “working man.” Archie discovers, in a satirical way, the distance between himself and Nixon, especially highlighted by Nixon’s pre-emption or silencing of Archie’s voice. Ultimately, Archie is primarily connected in this moment not to a



5. "The Man in the Street" (©Tandem Productions, Inc., 1971, 1972)

partisan identity, but rather to the (Forgotten) Man in the Street. “I’ll tell ya,” Archie quietly states in the episode’s last line, “Nixon’s going to open his mouth once too often, and he ain’t gonna have Archie Bunker to kick around no more.”

Similar openness is featured in the episode “Archie is Worried About His Job.”²⁹⁴ Here, Archie is consumed by job security worries in a way that emphasizes the instability of the Bunker’s working-class status in an era of deindustrialization and recession. In a middle-of-the-night conversation with Edith, the audience is transported back to Archie’s childhood during the Great Depression. Rather than engaging in a language of backlash, blaming other groups for his economic struggles, Archie ponders larger economic forces that seem to be out of his control. “I’ll never forget the way it hit my old man,” Archie quietly says to Edith, noting the Depression’s impact on his father. “There he was, a breadwinner all them years, and then, and then, just like that, with the paychecks, they stopped comin.’ Why?” While Edith tells him not to worry, Archie continues to reflect on his father’s—and now, his own—experiences. “My old man never got over it,” he tells Edith. “Took the heart right out of him... He was just about my age now.” For Archie, the (Forgotten) Man in the Street, an era of post-war boom and economic stability seems to be slipping away. He fears that, like his father, he will struggle to provide for his family. Yet, despite this moment of introspection, the episode ends with Archie learning that his foreman position has been saved. As he tells the family, “No man starves in this great country if he’s willing to go out there and work!” Once more, and despite his earlier anxiety, Archie expresses an unreflective faith in rugged individualism and the accessibility of the American Dream.

²⁹⁴ Season 1, episode 10 (1971)

AITF's viewers will eventually come to find out that Archie's relationship to race, ethnicity, class, and gender was likely shaped by his relationship with his Depression-era father. As a drunk Archie confides to a similarly inebriated Mike in the episode "Two's a Crowd,"²⁹⁵

Well, I remember one winter, during the Depression there, when we didn't have no money cuz the old man lost his job, you know he was all busted, and uh, I wore out a shoe, one shoe. So I couldn't go to school with only one shoe, see? My mother, she found a boot, so, I had a shoe on one foot there, and a boot on the other. A shoe and a boot, shoe-boot, so the kids' call me 'Shoe Bootie.'

Mike laughs, and asks Archie if all the kids made fun of him. They did, Archie responds, except for one "little black kid by the name of Winston." Stunned, Mike asks, "A black kid liked you?" Winston "beat the hell outta me," Archie answers. When Mike pushes Archie to explain why Winston beat him up, Archie hesitates, and then adds, "Well, he



6. "Two's A Crowd" (©Tandem Licensing Corp., 1977, 1978, renewed 2005)

²⁹⁵ Season 8, episode 19 (1978)

said that I said he was a nigger.” “Did you?” Mike asks. “Sure,” Archie says shamelessly, “that’s what all them people was called in them days, I mean everybody we knew called them niggers, that’s all my old man ever called him there.” As Archie continues, “What the hell am I supposed to call them, . . . a Wop? I couldn’t call them wops because wops is what we called the Dagos.” Mike asks Archie if he had ever questioned his father’s beliefs, as Mike did of his own father’s racism. Did Archie ever acknowledge that his father could be wrong? “Don’t tell me my father was wrong,” Archie says, incredulously. Without denying individual agency, choice, and transformation—and indeed, AITF often presents Archie as open to transformation—I argue that we might read this scene as a representation and critique of the ways in which systemic discourses of patriarchy and racism shape individuals’ political subjectivities. Moreover, this episode demonstrates Archie’s complicated relationship to the New Deal, encouraging the audience to think about the ways in which Archie might actually relate to Shinner’s—and not Nixon’s—Forgotten Man. Finally, in highlighting Archie’s economic anxiety, “Two’s a Crowd” complicates backlash narratives by showing us how racial conservatism was constitutive not simply of the post-civil rights and Great Society eras, but also of the New Deal.

IV. The Forgotten Men of New York City

Though fictional, Archie’s navigation of “whiteness in crisis” found resonance with many of AITF’s real life viewers—from the bustling city of New York to small rural communities on the West Coast. For example, Howard F. Stein’s comments on the constricting world of “the man” would ring true for Louie Leroy Pastega, a grocer in Klamath Falls, Oregon. As Pastega told *Life* magazine in 1971, “I wish there were more

Archie Bunkers. You just can't change their ways, that's all. Like me, they're asking me to go along with all these new ways today, but I can't see it. Me and Archie—it's too late for us." ²⁹⁶ Even those who said that they disagreed with Archie on matters of race, like Joseph Eccles of Richmond Hill Queens, found Archie's "whiteness in crisis" to be familiar. A self-described patriarch who gets his way, Eccles related to *Newsweek* in 1971 that Archie "typifies the way we think... Archie worries and talks about the same things we do."²⁹⁷

One year before Archie Bunker first appeared on America's television sets, the journalist Pete Hamill traveled to South Brooklyn and Bay Ridge, New York to interview ironworkers, carpenters, and other members of what he termed the "white working-class." According to Hamill, despite deep historic roots in the city, this class of white workers might not "make it in New York" for much longer.²⁹⁸ Though some of these Forgotten Men claimed openness to racial equality and colorblindness, many also blamed racial minorities and a "Liberal Establishment" for their economic precarity. As Hamill writes, "The working-class white man does not care about formal equality—if a black man gets a job in his union, for example— as long as equality does not mean the loss of his own job, or the small privileges and sense of self-respect that go with it."²⁹⁹

Conservative egalitarian opposition to racial "special preferences" shaped these white workers' beliefs about equality and deservingness.

²⁹⁶ Marshall Frady, "It's All in This Family, Too," *Life* (13 Dec. 1971). Reprinted in *All In The Family: A Critical Appraisal*, edited by Richard P. Adler (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 235.

²⁹⁷ "What the Neighbors Think," *Newsweek* (29 Nov. 1971). Reprinted in *All In The Family: A Critical Appraisal*, edited by Richard P. Adler (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 234.

²⁹⁸ Hamill, "The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class."

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In voicing pride in their work ethic, and their tentative support for equality of opportunity, Hamill's interviewees reference longstanding populist themes of dignity, respect, and independence. Yet they simultaneously deny these traits to African Americans, whom they characterize as undeserving welfare recipients. Some of the interviews are worth quoting at length, particularly because, at times, their language mimics the fictional voice of Archie. For example, Eddie Cush, an ironworker, tells Hamill of the stresses of taking care of his family in New York City:

I work my ass off. But I can't make it. I come home at the end of the week, I start paying the bills, I give my wife some money for food. And there's nothing left... And then I pick up a paper and read about a million people on welfare in New York or spades rioting in some college or some fat welfare bitch demanding – you know, not askin', *demanding* – a credit card at Korvette's... I *work* for a living and can't get a credit card at Korvette's... You know, you see that, and you want to go out and strangle someone.³⁰⁰

The main breadwinner in his family, Cush expresses economic anxiety through racist and misogynist constructions of the deserving and undeserving. Though he claims to work hard, Cush is still unable to make ends meet. Meanwhile, in his mind, welfare rolls are filling, minorities are rioting, and undeserving single mothers are shopping on the taxpayer's dime. Indeed, Cush references the racist trope of the "welfare queen" seven years before Ronald Reagan would campaign for his party's presidential nomination by referring to the female welfare recipient who "has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands."³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Hamill.

³⁰¹ "'Welfare Queen' Becoming Issue in Reagan Campaign," *New York Times* (Feb. 15, 1976).

In a Brooklyn bar, Hamill interviews another blue-collar patron who expresses his frustration with New York's politicians, and particularly with Mayor Lindsay, an out-of-touch "college professor" who does not understand—indeed, who has forgotten—the needs of the white working man:

Look in the papers. Look on TV. What the hell does Lindsay care about me? He don't care whether my kid has shoes, whether my boy gets a new suit at Easter, whether I got any money in the bank. None of them politicians gives a good goddam. All they worry about is the niggers. And everything is for the niggers.

For this ironworker, the city's politicians unfairly favor blacks, and they do so at the working-class' expense. Using racist slurs to depict African Americans as non-working, dependent, and undeserving of government-funded "summer camps," "playgrounds," and "nursery schools," the man continues,

I'm an ironworker, a connector; when I do go to work in the mornin', I don't even know if I'm gonna make it back. My wife is scared to death, every mornin', all day... Who feeds my wife and kid if I'm dead? Lindsay? The poverty program? You know the answer: nobody. But the niggers, they don't worry about it. They take the welfare and sit out on the stoop drinkin' cheap wine and throwin' the bottles on the street. They never gotta walk outta the house. They take the money outta my paycheck and they just turn it over to some lazy son of a bitch who won't work. I gotta carry him on *my back*.³⁰²

This white ironworker's racism is explicit, and Hamill does not shy away from acknowledging it. However, to fully understand this ironworkers' anxiety, we must also tend to the ways in which his racism is embedded in discourses of class and gender that arise in the New Deal era. As with Cush, he identifies as the sole breadwinner, a patriarch who must take care of his family in a moment where, as he sees it, the government has given up on him, the independent and self-reliant man, in order to provide for undeserving others.

³⁰² Hamill.

Some of Hamill's interviewees adopt conservative egalitarian understandings of equality and deservingness. As one bar patron tells Hamill, if blacks thought that they deserved compensation for slavery—referring to a statement attributed to Black Panther activist, Eldridge Cleaver— then so did the Irish. “Look, the English ruled Ireland for 700 years, that’s hundreds of years longer than Negroes have been slaves. Why don’t the British government compensate me? In Boston, they had signs like ‘No Irish Need Apply’ on the jobs, so why don’t the American government compensate me?”³⁰³ Though some of his interviewees, like this bar patron, demonstrate an awareness of intraracial class distinctions, the discursive force of the black-white racial difference, and signifiers of the white “hard-working” and black “undeserving,” is a pervasive feature in all of Hamill's interviews.

Though Hamill often assumes a monolithic and problematic category of the white “working class,”³⁰⁴ his interviews illuminate the ways in which race, class, and gender intersect in these men’s self-understanding of their identities. Hamill also poses a stark final question: if the working-class white man is feeling trapped and ignored, whom will he blame? The “black man,” Hamill answers, despite the fact that a majority of those receiving welfare “are women and children,” and despite the fact that more “tax dollars go to Vietnam or the planning for future wars than to Harlem or Bed-Stuy.”³⁰⁵ Ultimately, Hamill's interviews demonstrate the ways in which race functions for these Forgotten Men as an explanation for “who gets what.” As with the character of Archie,

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Hamill speaks somewhat romantically, and in gendered terms, about the virtues of the “American white working man”: “his” virtues include “loyalty, endurance, courage, among others.”

³⁰⁵ Hamill.

Hamill's interviewees use constructions of racial difference to navigate their economic anxiety in the context of increasing unemployment and deindustrialization.

V. *Laughing Together? Thinking Race and Class through the Sitcom*

Norman Lear, the creator of AITF, has gestured towards what he sees as the American Right's adept hegemonic politics. One of Lear's goals in his post-AITF career has been to challenge this hegemony, reconfiguring what he views as the social and economic policies of compassion that were initiated under the New Deal.³⁰⁶ It is interesting to puzzle through Lear's intentions for AITF— or, put differently, to think about what, if anything, he wanted the show to do. After reading fan letters over the years, Lear believes that AITF accomplished at least one thing: in depicting familiar characters and politics, AITF sparked difficult social conversations between family members. Neil Genzlinger of the *New York Times* agrees, writing, "Everybody seems to have had an Archie Bunker in his or her extended family."³⁰⁷

Of course, it is impossible to know for sure how many Archie Bunkers lived in the households of AITF's viewing audience. It is also less clear as to whether or not the show changed people's ideas or attitudes on race, or spurred family conversations about

³⁰⁶ Charlie Rose (Original airdate: Tuesday, November 14, 1995). Online: <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/6546>. Accessed: April 11th, 2011. In this interview, Lear argued that the progressive vision for America has, in marked contrast to conservatism, remained unclear and linguistically "muddled." Put differently: liberalism has unsuccessfully adapted to become common sense.

³⁰⁷ Neil Genzlinger, "It's a Real Slice of History, Meathead: 'All in the Family' in DVD Boxed Set," Television, *The New York Times* (October 26th 2012). Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/arts/television/all-in-the-family-in-dvd-boxed-set.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

race specifically.³⁰⁸ Despite this, media and culture writers have provided us with a broader, critical portrait of the show's reception in the 1970s. Such writings also engage the question of AITF's representativeness, and the ways in which it both mirrored and interrogated a particular discursive context.

In AITF's premiere week, *Newsweek's* H.B. Crowther, Jr. wrote that audiences would be viewing something quite different from the family-oriented sitcoms that they were accustomed to, including "Father Knows Best." As Crowther admiringly writes, AITF gave the American viewing audience a more realistic portrayal of working families. AITF "is the first sitcom ever to present anything even roughly resembling a flesh-and-blood American family."³⁰⁹ About two months later, *Newsweek* asked if the country was ready for AITF, a radical sitcom that did not, for example, approach "the Presidency with the unquestioning reverence of a seventh-grade civic class," but rather with terms like "Tricky Dicky."³¹⁰ Still, *Newsweek's* evaluation of the show was generally positive.

³⁰⁸ As Marty Kaplan writes, the few studies which have been done provide conflicting data. Even those studies that show that Archie was, for viewers, the most appealing character, this doesn't necessarily mean that they agreed with his prejudiced views. Ultimately, he argues, "social science isn't much help in measuring *All In The Family's* impact on" the American viewing audience's racial views. ("Archie's America, and Ours," 5-6; cited with author's permission). In the Introduction, I do cite one study by Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach. However, as the authors note, one's attitudes towards the character of Archie often depended on their already formed ideological and political convictions.

³⁰⁹ H. B. Crowther, Jr., "The Media: The Stuff of Dreams," *Newsweek* (Jan. 18 1971). Even more explicitly than Crowther, and writing four decades after the show's premiere, Kathleen Collins writes that AITF was the first U.S. television show to talk so frankly about *class*, and the ways in which class intersected with gender, race, and ethnicity. Kathleen Collins, "Citizen Bunker: Archie Bunker as Working-Class Icon," in *Blue-Collar Pop Culture: From Nascar to Jersey Shore*, Vol. II (Praeger, 2012).

³¹⁰ President Nixon and his advisors actually watched the show and discussed its broader influence. One of these conversations is captured in a May 13, 1971 recording, in which the President talks with John Ehrlichman & Bob Haldeman about a particular episode of AITF that dealt with homosexuality. Nixon proclaims his shock that a show like AITF could even be on the air, particularly because it "glorified" homosexuality. When Nixon says that he couldn't watch anymore of it, Ehrlichman responds, "Now that's real family entertainment, isn't it?" Throughout the tape, Nixon speaks a bit more favorably of Archie's character (compared to Mike, Archie's

Variety was also enthusiastic, calling AITF “the best tv comedy since the original ‘The Honeymooners,’” applauding its “audacity” and imagination, as well as its ability to lampoon both the “right and left” on the political spectrum (a “relief,” the magazine adds).³¹¹ However, the writers at *Variety* did not necessarily view the show in the way that Lear and its creators preferred. As with some of the show’s more vocal critics, *Variety* argued that the message of AITF would depend upon who is watching it: it “can make prejudice look silly or justify it, or it can serve as a lightning rod for the overt hostility of some and the repressed anger of others.” Still, *Variety* noted that AITF had found a broad class audience, composed of blue- and white-collar individuals. AITF was one of the only new television shows “of the past two seasons to provide any talk around the office or production line.”³¹² In *Variety*’s opinion, AITF thus had the capacity to bring together a diverse viewing audience.

African American audiences were probably divided on AITF, especially when it came to the character of Archie. A survey done by “Community News Service” in 1971 found a mixture of reactions amongst black media leaders, with some calling the show “racist” and “offending” to citizens’ interests, while others, like Sesame Street actress Loretta Long, claiming that it was a “realistic” portrayal of the “bigoted” attitudes of a segment of the populace. While he admired AITF, the novelist John A. Williams worried that the “average television watcher” would not be able to “separate the comedy from the seriousness of calling a black man a ‘spook’ on the public airwaves.” Similarly, Ron

“hippie son-in-law”), calling him first a “hard hat” and then “Arch.” As Haldeman says to Nixon, every week the show’s plot seeks to make Archie, the “hard hat,” look bad, and “upgrade” Mike and other liberals. Online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TivVcfSBVSM> (Accessed: November 20 2012).

³¹¹ “Television Reviews: All in the Family,” *Variety* (13 January 1971).

³¹² “Television Reviews: All in the Family,” *Variety* (20 September 1972).

Johnson, a writer at WNBC, thought that some people who watched AITF would listen to Archie's prejudiced beliefs and think, "right on." Others were optimistic about AITF's ability to bring diverse groups together. "I would love to be in a room with hard hats and liberal social scientists and committed black people during and after the program to talk it over," Charles Hobson, a producer with ABC, noted. Dr. John A. Morsell, an assistant executive director of the NAACP, believed both that AITF's humor was consciously political and that it could possibly make a real impact. It "held up to scorn prejudicial stereotypes," allowing bigots "to reexamine themselves." St. Clair Bourne, who headed a black film producing and distributing company, had perhaps the most generous words for AITF's attempts at realism, lauding it as "the greatest documentary film on America that I've seen yet."³¹³

Other media critics were not as ready to embrace a sitcom that injected racism and bigotry into American living rooms every week. As Robert Lewis Shayon argued in a 1971 issue of *Saturday Review*, the problem with a character like Archie is that he is not "self-critical." According to Shayon, Archie is "unaware of his ethnocentrism"; as a character, Archie is not as "socially useful" as he could or should be. For Shayon, the show's self-proclaimed desire to display the ugliness and futility of racism and bigotry ultimately fails—and it is the fault of Archie, who Shayon criticizes as unable to reflect on the things he says, nor learn from his mistakes. The viewing audience whom Shayon assumes are mostly liberals, like Lear, will not learn anything either.

³¹³ "Radio-Television: Blacks in the Media Divided on CBS' 'All in the Family,' Per Survey." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* 261, no. 11 (Jan 27, 1971): 26-26, 40.

Yet perhaps AITF did not necessarily intend to provide a specific political response to the social and economic problems of the 1970s.³¹⁴ Nor, as Shayon seems to assume, does it leave the liberalism(s) of its purported audience unexamined. AITF not only unsettles Archie's attachment to conservatism and the Republican Party, but it also challenges liberal discourses on race and class. One illustrative episode is "The Games Bunkers Play."³¹⁵

In this episode, the Bunkers, along with their new neighbors, the Lorenzos, and old neighbor, Lionel Jefferson, play a game called "Group Therapy." As Mike tells Archie, "Group Therapy" is a "psychological" game where you "can really learn a lot about yourself and the people you're playing it with." "Ah, the people, the people," Archie responds, "it sounds left-wing to me." Not surprisingly, Archie decides that he would rather go down to Kelsey's bar "for a couple of beers." Initially, Mike is enthusiastic about playing the game, since, as he understands, it will allow the group to be "completely open and free" with each other—and, of course, Archie will not be there.

Mike is AITF's liberal spokesman (and stereotype); he is always ready, with journalistic and academic studies in hand, to discount Archie's assumptions about race, culture, and poverty. Yet Mike also engages with other characters on the show in a similar professorial fashion. For example, when Lionel Jefferson arrives at the Bunkers for the game, Mike's first comment to him concerns race and poverty. He enthusiastically tells Lionel that he had recently read an article in *Harper's* about America's "urban tensions" and the "whole black problem." Lionel looks slightly annoyed, and responds,

³¹⁴ Philip Wander, "Counters in the Social Drama: Some Notes on 'All in the Family,'" *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 8, 3 (1974): 607.

³¹⁵ Season Four, Episode 8 (Airdate: Nov. 3rd, 1973).

“Oh really? I always thought it was a white problem.” Mike and the audience laugh, though Mike seems oblivious to Lionel’s subtle critique and lampooning of his greeting. As Lionel understands it, Mike views him as a representative of all black people. Moreover, Lionel will learn about “the black problem” from “Professor” Stivic.

The “Group Therapy” game is structured so that each player is judged on their answers to questions posed on the cards. Group members hold up a “With It” card for a truthful response, or a “Cop Out” card for what they think is an insincere response. The game starts out lightheartedly, with Edith telling the group that if she could look like anyone in the world, it would be Katherine Hepburn. When Lionel’s card asks him which member of the group he finds it hardest to be direct with, he chooses Mike, instead of Archie, whose absence is palpable throughout the episode. Mike is completely taken aback, and the tension heightens. The card’s further stipulation is to address that group member while pushing, back-to-back, against the other. With memories of Mike’s *Harper’s* reference still fresh, Lionel tells Mike that he is “always bending over backwards” for him, and that he cannot get into a good argument with him because Mike always agrees. As Lionel asks, would Mike always treat Lionel with kid gloves if he were white? For Lionel, race is something that Mike sees first and foremost. “Just once I’d like for you to talk to me like I was Lionel Jefferson and not a representative of the whole black race,” Lionel tells Mike, who responds, “C’mon Lionel, I don’t do that!” Lionel argues that “the black problem” defines too much of their personal conversations. Mike, whose discussions with Lionel throughout AITF often revolve around politics, responds, “What do you want me to talk about, the weather?” As Lionel answers to much audience laughter, “black people have weather too, y’know.”



7. "The Games Bunkers Play" (©Tandem Licensing Corp., 1973, 1974, renewed 2001, 2002)

The group believes Lionel, holding up “With It” cards, although Mike refuses to believe that his friend is telling the truth. He becomes increasingly, and hilariously, irritated with each card played. When Mike chooses a card that asks him to tell the players what constitutes his maturity, he answers that he is “open-minded” and “tolerant of the other guy’s opinions.” This response elicits a strong giggle from Gloria, who brings up Mike and Archie’s frequent fighting. Gloria argues that Mike is often as bad as

Archie in his ideological rigidity.³¹⁶ Of course, Mike is annoyed, and he compares his more liberal and “tolerant” stance with Archie’s bigotry. Nearly yelling at Gloria, Mike calls Archie a “walking monument to intolerance.” As Mike grows increasingly unwilling to listen to the others, Lionel implies that it is Mike who is actually demonstrating his immaturity. As Mike reminds Lionel, he’s not the “bigot”—it is Archie who *sees* and focuses on race, and it is Archie, not Mike, who “doesn’t want blacks in this neighborhood.” Yet this claim, about seeing race, seems in conflict with his earlier conversation with Lionel. While Mike’s colorblind liberalism might arguably be contrasted to Archie’s tendency to “see” race as constituting one’s character or prospects (recall his association between “complexion” and welfare recipients), this episode demonstrates Mike’s aptness to view himself as racially “unmarked,” and to essentialize constructions of whiteness and blackness.

The most illuminating segment of the game comes when Edith chooses a card that asks her to tell someone something that she has not been able to, but would like to. Edith hesitates—“I don’t like this one,” she says, grimacing—but she ultimately chooses Mike, telling him that she does not like the way he has “been acting so stuck up lately.” Mike is stunned. As Edith calmly explains to him, it is “mean to make fun of Archie and call him names the way you do.” Mike is dumbfounded by Edith’s complaints, wondering aloud how he is supposed to take Archie seriously with all of the “dumb stuff” he says. Mike “has a brain”: how can he *not* respond to Archie with ridicule? As Edith suggests, with audience approval, “If you was really smarter than Archie, you’d be smart enough not to

³¹⁶ For example, though Mike may have considered himself a “feminist,” his sexism is also addressed in various episodes of AITF. See “Mike and Gloria Mix It Up” (Season Four, Episode 16).

let him see that you're smarter than him." When the group holds up "With It" cards, Mike flies into a rage, throwing the board off of the table, yelling "I don't wanna play anymore," and charging up the stairs.

Though he eventually rejoins the group, Mike remains exasperated, yelling at everyone—just like Archie. Mike still cannot believe the comparisons with his father-in-law. As he sees it, his treatment of Archie is reasonable. Yet for Edith, Mike's exasperation has a different origin. As she tells Mike in front of the group, the reason Mike yells at Archie might not be because of Archie, but rather "because of *you*." Edith, always ready to tell a meandering story, begins to recount one from her childhood. As the story goes, a man saved another's life, and yet the man who was saved ultimately became angry with his hero. As Edith explains the moral of the story, "If you owe somebody an awful lot, you begin worrying that you'll never be able to pay 'em back, and that makes you resent that person even more. You see what I mean?" Here, Edith points to Archie's financial support while Mike earns his college degree. Indeed, Archie's complaints about Mike's "freeloadin'" are quite common throughout the show's run, until the couple moves to California in the eighth season.

Later, in private conversation in the kitchen, Edith responds to Mike's assertion that Archie yells at him because he hates him: because he's a "pinko commie," and because he is not able to pay Archie rent. Yet as Edith explains, Archie yells because "he's jealous" of Mike. For Edith, it's not hard to understand: "Mike, you're goin' to college and you got your whole life ahead of you. Archie had to quit school to support his family. He ain't never gonna be nothin' more than he is right now. But you, you've got a chance to be anything you want to be... Archie sees in you all the things that he can



8. "The Games Bunkers Play" (©Tandem Licensing Corp., 1973, 1974, renewed 2001, 2002)

never be.” After urging him to return to the game, Edith leaves Mike alone in the kitchen. hilariously, Archie comes into the kitchen and greets Mike with a curt, “Get *away* from me, Meathead.” “Arch, I want to tell you something,” Mike says. “Aw, *what?*” Archie exasperatedly responds. “I understand,” Mike says solemnly, hugging Archie—who looks utterly perplexed—as the audience roars with laughter.

“The Games Bunkers Play” interrogates facets of Mike’s ostensibly progressive beliefs about race, and is perhaps the most extensive episode to think critically about liberalism’s claims to colorblindness alongside—and in opposition to—conservative egalitarianism. This episode also stages the affinities between Mike and Archie when it comes to race and ideological rigidity. Of course, some in the viewing audience may have viewed this episode’s treatment of Mike as confirming conservative egalitarian and backlash claims about liberal elitism, as well as its equally unsatisfactory stance on race. In this narrative, liberals, not conservatives, are patronizing and paternalistic. According to Jonathan Rieder, the kind of liberalism that one might argue Mike stands for, “limousine liberalism,” is an ideology and policy stance of the “well-born and well-

placed.”³¹⁷ For conservative egalitarians, “liberals”—of which Mike is a popular representative—rely too heavily on the government to decide “what’s best” for individuals. Such an indictment of Great Society liberalism was a feature of Nixon’s narrative of the Left. Liberals, Nixon argued in a radio address in 1972, “believe that the only way to achieve what they consider social justice is to place power in the hands of a strong central government which will do what they think has to be done, no matter what the majority thinks.”³¹⁸ Conservative egalitarians posited liberalism as antagonistic to the vast majority of “middling Americans,”³¹⁹ the Forgotten Men or the Silent Majority, like Archie and the working class white New Yorkers interviewed by Hamill. In this narrative, these Americans struggled to maintain their vulnerable economic position without favors from liberals and activist courts.

I argue that we can read “The Games Bunkers Play” as unsettling assumptions about the superiority of liberalism’s racial and cultural politics vis-à-vis conservatism. In so doing, this episode critically demonstrates the multiple ways in which identities of race, class, and gender are constructed through political ideologies. Archie, who we come to realize loves Mike as a son, nonetheless views him as representative of the Liberal Establishment—even though it is a college education, and not wealth, that separates Mike from Archie. As a first generation college student, Mike’s education sets him on a path for the middle or upper-middle class, and the socioeconomic advantages and

³¹⁷ Jonathan Rieder, “The Rise of the ‘Silent Majority,’” in Fraser, Steve & Gerstle, Gary, Eds. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 244.

³¹⁸ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.

³¹⁹ Rieder, 244, 258.

security that go with it. For the uneducated Archie, it seems, there is nowhere to go but his blue-collar job at the docks.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that we read "All in the Family" as a popular site in which we can locate a representation, construction, and interrogation of conservative egalitarianism and "white backlash." Specifically, I argue that AITF is a valuable text through which we can understand how discourses and signifiers, like the (Forgotten) Man in the Street, are constructed through popular culture, and how these constructions may have resonated with a larger viewing audience—an audience that tuned in by the millions each week. As Edward McNulty said of AITF in 1974, the "insights into human nature in each episode ring true" for all of the show's viewers, no matter their particular political persuasions.³²⁰ AITF provided 1970s America with a popular-cultural space in which a representation of human interaction could occur. A close reading of AITF, in combination with its critical reception, may reveal something about how "whiteness in crisis" was recognized and reconfigured in the "real" world.

In 1980, Archie Bunker was able to witness the presidential election of one of his self-proclaimed heroes, Ronald Reagan. Indeed, in heated arguments with Mike in the episode "The Baby Contest," it is revealed that Archie, who does not like Gerald Ford or Jimmy Carter for President in 1976, writes in Reagan's name on the ballot.³²¹ Incredibly, Archie even predicts Reagan's 1980 election, though he mispronounces the former

³²⁰ Edward McNulty, "Television: The Gospel According to Edith Bunker," *The Christian Century*, 91, No. 12 (March 27, 1974): 346-47.

³²¹ "The Baby Contest," Season Seven (Aired: 12/11/1976).

Governor's last name. As Archie yells at Mike near the episode's end, "And you're going to get *Reegan* (sic) in 1980, wise guy!"

Things had changed for Archie by the time Reagan took his oath of office. He was no longer a "hard hat," but rather a "bona fide businessman" and entrepreneur, taking over Kelsey's Bar in Season Eight and renaming it Archie's Place.³²² Of course, Edith is anxious about Archie's plan to buy the bar, as she fears that the family will lose their safety net, and their home, if Archie quits his job and mortgages the house. But for



9. "Archie's Grand Opening" (©Tandem Licensing Corp., 1977, 1978, renewed 2005)

Archie, the risk is worth it: in his understanding, buying Kelsey's will allow him to become the Sumnerian, "self-sufficient," and no longer forgotten man. "If I can do this thing... I can be somebody," Archie tells Edith during a late-night conversation. "Oh Archie, you don't have to be somebody. I love you right now when you're nobody," Edith endearingly says of Archie's working-class status, which stirs the audience to

³²² "Archie Gets The Business Part I & II," (Aired: 10/2/1977). *Archie Bunker's Place* (1979-1983, CBS) was a spin-off of *All in the Family*.

laughter. Even Mike—who reminds Edith of their kitchen conversation in “The Games Bunkers Play”—believes that Archie will not let this chance to “make something of himself” pass by.

AITF does not portray Archie’s move from “working stiff” to entrepreneur as an easy transition. For example, Archie slips into depression later in the season, when business at the bar is slow and he fears that he will lose everything. Nonetheless, and perhaps mirroring a change in political discourse at the national level, AITF interestingly leaves its audience with an optimistic portrayal of both the "self-made, self-reliant, self-activating frontiersman" and the reach of the American Dream at the start of a new decade.

Chapter Five:

Egalitarianism and the Black "Citizen-Worker" in the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike

“Negroes are almost entirely a working people. There are pitifully few Negro millionaires, and few Negro employers. Our needs are identical with labor's needs—decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community. That is why Negroes support labor's demands and fight laws which curb labor. That is why the labor-hater and labor-baiter is virtually always a twin-headed creature spewing anti-Negro epithets from one mouth and anti-labor propaganda from the other mouth.” (Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech to AFL-CIO Convention, December 1961)³²³

I. Introduction

In the city of Memphis in 1968, black sanitation workers went on strike for higher wages, safer working conditions, and the right to collective bargaining.³²⁴ Asserting their dignity as equal workers and citizens—declared forcefully in the signs they held, which read, “I AM A Man”—the workers contested what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in a 1961 speech to the AFL-CIO, called the “twin-headed creature” of racism and anti-unionism. Though the sanitation workers' struggle took place in the anti-union South, their "civil

³²³ Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech to AFL-CIO Convention, December 1961. Quoted in Steven C. Pitts, “Organize... to Improve the Quality of Jobs in the Black Community.” *A Report on Jobs and Activism in the African American Community*. UC-Berkeley Center for Labor Research & Education, May 2004 (My emphasis). Online:

http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/blackworkers/organize_blackworkers04.pdf

³²⁴ Black workers made up 1,300 of the city's 1,600 total sanitation workers. Fred Lacey, “Memphis Workers Fight: The City Sanitation Workers' Strike” (New England Free Press). Originally appeared in *PL*, the national magazine of the Progressive Labor Party (Dec. 1968, Brooklyn, N.Y.). Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

rights unionism"³²⁵ had national implications. Through their contestation of a paternalistic racial order in Memphis, the sanitation workers also formulated discursive alternatives to the conservative egalitarian fusion of racial and fiscal conservatism common to anti-civil rights arguments in both the anti-union South and in the more heavily unionized neighborhoods of the North.

Historians of the Memphis strike have emphasized the ways in which it fused the goals of the labor and civil rights movements.³²⁶ These scholars have also documented the discourses of the strike's opponents, specifically the arguments of white Memphians who associated the sanitation workers— and “agitating” national labor representatives— with ideologies disruptive of American democracy and capitalism. Illustrative here is Richard Lentz's study of Memphis' major newspapers, and their framing of the strike as

³²⁵ Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). In his account of African American tobacco workers' union activism in 1940s Winston-Salem, Korstad writes that such "race-inflected 'civic unionism,' what he calls "civil rights unionism," fused "class consciousness with race solidarity and looked to cross-class institutions such as the black church as a key base of support." Korstad argues that this kind of unionism collapsed by the 1960s, adding that the "key institutions" of 1960s civil rights activism "were not trade unions but the black church and independent protest organizations." Civil rights activists, Korstad claims, were "hamstrung by the institutional and cultural rifts between the civil rights and labor movements and by divisions between the have and have-nots within the working class." (11-12). Korstad concludes that "unions in the postwar period often stood in opposition to the civil rights and women's movements," and that civil rights became equated with simply an "attack on Jim Crow and not" on a more pervasive system of "racial capitalism" (416-17). The Memphis sanitation workers' strike challenges this conclusion. In Memphis, sanitation workers and civil rights activists fused class- and race-based concerns, and they received the support of institutions like the black Yet, in Memphis, the black church, black businesses, and the black middle class, as well as powerful national unions, including the UAW and their leader, Walter Reuther all came together to support the striking sanitation workers in their fight for collective bargaining rights. Moreover, as I argue in this chapter, Dr. King viewed the sanitation workers' strike as a challenge to *both* Jim Crow and what Korstad calls "racial capitalism." I thus read the Memphis strike of 1968 as a part of, or a continuation of, a long tradition of "civil rights unionism."

³²⁶ Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike, and Martin Luther King* (Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989), 16; Michael Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

communistic and threatening to the city's public good.³²⁷ This scholarship is an invaluable resource for uncovering the language of the Memphis strike, within both black and white communities. However, historians have not provided a uniquely theoretical-discursive account of the strike, one that contrasts the discourses of the sanitation workers' movement with longstanding raced discourses of American citizenship, as well as with a developing conservative egalitarianism, a discursive complex that fuses fiscal and racial conservatism in the name of equality and fairness.

In this chapter, I situate the Memphis sanitation workers' strike within this theoretical and historical context. I theorize the strike as a "counterpublic," thus understanding the black workers as a "subordinated social group" that both created and circulated various "counter discourses" within a dominant public realm.³²⁸ Theorizing the sanitation workers' strike as a counterpublic brings into focus their demands that went beyond higher wages and better working conditions, and also included the recognition of their individual and collective dignity as workers and as human beings. This framing also allows me to acknowledge not only the strikers themselves, but also the multiple actors—including Memphis citizens, civil rights and labor leaders—who contributed to discourses associated with the strike;³²⁹ reading the strike as a counterpublic allows me to

³²⁷ Richard Lentz, "Sixty-Five Days in Memphis: A Study of Culture, Symbols, and the Press." *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* (Columbia, S.C., 1986). Printed in: *Journalism Monographs* (Austin, Tex.), no. 98.

³²⁸ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990): 68. As Fraser writes, while counterpublics are "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment," they are also sites or "training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics." See also Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 23-24.

³²⁹ I acknowledge what Nikhil Pal Singh calls the "specific importance of black intellectuals to the constitution of a black counter-public sphere." As Singh writes, the "public is less a concrete aggregation of persons than an ethical ideal and symbolic construct." Intellectual leaders have

understand it as a discursive phenomenon rather than solely as a labor action. Specifically, I argue that by understanding this movement as a counterpublic, we can uncover the ways in which the strike contested New Deal discursive formations that were to become resources for conservative egalitarianism. As a counterpublic, I read the Memphis sanitation workers strike as activating key discursive-political challenges to a fusion of racial and fiscal conservatism, a fusion not unique to Jim Crow, but also characteristic of the racial projects of the New Deal and conservative egalitarianism. I argue that the workers' counterpublic articulates an egalitarianism that can provide an alternative to conservative egalitarian claims to equality and civil rights.

First, I read the strike as an explicit challenge to what David Roediger refers to as the “iconography, public discourse, and historical writing” about American workers and unions that has naturalized them as white and male. As Roediger writes of the American labor movement, the “privileges” of white workers in the United States have gone “un(re)marked,” since many blacks were excluded from the New Deal’s promise of collective bargaining and the benefits and securities of union membership.³³⁰ Richly encapsulated in their call to action, “I AM A Man,” the black sanitation workers challenged this naturalization and its material effects. They actively claimed the right, as what I call “black citizen-workers,” to unionize in a predominantly black occupation.³³¹

been “among the primary producers of” public discourses that come to shape “social and political struggles.” Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 69.

³³⁰ David Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (University of California Press, 2002), 180-81.

³³¹ I borrow the concept of the “citizen worker” from David Montgomery. As he writes in the context of post-revolutionary white male enfranchisement in the United States, the “archetypal citizen of classical republicanism, the ‘accomplished’ man who commanded property and arms, had no greater claim to guide the polity than the less eminent male whose labors contributed to its material welfare.” David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United*

In their demand to be seen as equal citizen-workers, the black sanitation workers claimed the capacity to take care of their families, and to earn a living and fair wage.

In so doing, I argue that the workers' counterpublic also challenged the exclusionary racial projects of the New Deal, and the discursive formations that supported these exclusions. The workers' movement countered paternalistic discourses dominant within Memphis' white establishment, which posited the sanitation workers as subordinate and dependent, and their strike as communistic and disruptive of social and economic order. As discussed in Chapter Two, such discourses also characterized New Deal era fusions of white supremacy, anti-unionism, and anticommunism in opposition to civil rights. Such fusions were familiar in a labor city of "industrial democracy" like Detroit, where, despite the institutional presence and influence of ostensibly progressive unions, black workers had to fight against redbaiting and racial paternalism.³³²

Associations between opposition to civil rights and opposition to black labor were not particular to Memphis or to its historical moment. As such, I argue that the workers' counterpublic provides discursive resources for challenging fusions of racial and fiscal conservatism in neighborhoods, workplaces, and cities outside of the South.

Second, I argue that the workers' counterpublic, which included Dr. King and other civil rights and labor leaders, articulated a more substantive and historical

States with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.

³³² In their study of the UAW in Detroit in the 1930s and 1940s, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick describe the complex relationship between Henry Ford and what he often termed, as if he were a guardian, "his" black workers. Ford prided himself on hiring blacks, though he strongly resisted unionization attempts by *any* workers; he particularly feared that black workers would be lured to organize through communist ideology. National Negro Congress President A. Philip Randolph saw Ford's actions and rhetoric as a strategy to divide white and black workers. He described Ford in 1937 as "the good, rich white man," who couldn't be trusted. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 11-14, 49.

conceptualization of race and racial equality that could be used to challenge conservative egalitarianism's claims to the mantle of equality and civil rights. Drawing on discursive resources in the political-ethical thought of Dr. King, the sanitation workers' egalitarianism located race structurally, institutionally, and historically. In refusing to see race as mere skin color, I argue that the workers' counterpublic—like Justice Thurgood Marshall in his *Milliken* dissent—thus challenges conservative egalitarianism's ostensibly colorblind abstraction of the individual from structure and history.³³³

Five months after the sanitation workers won union recognition in Memphis, Richard Nixon elaborated on this vision of colorblindness in his presidential nomination acceptance speech. As Nixon told an audience of "forgotten Americans," African Americans, as much as white Americans, did not want "more government programs which perpetuate dependency."³³⁴ After constructing a link between government and dependence, and drawing an implicit contrast between contributing "forgotten Americans" and dependent "Others," Nixon contrasted equality of opportunity with equality of outcome, claiming that African Americans sought the chance, through independence and merit, "to have a piece of the action in the exciting ventures of private enterprise." As Nixon continued, racial "reconciliation" would come not through positive government action—which could address historically rooted structural racial

³³³ Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 23-24; Fraser, 67-68; Reva B. Siegel, "The Racial Rhetorics of Colorblind Constitutionalism: The Case of *Hopwood v. Texas*." *Race and Representation: Affirmative Action* (Zone Books, 1998); Julie Novkov, "Toward a Legal Genealogy of Colorblindness," Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 10-12, 2007).

³³⁴ Richard Nixon, Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida (8 Aug. 1968). The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968> (Accessed June 22 2014).

inequalities—but rather from "the hearts of people."³³⁵ By taking race out of institutional analysis—indeed, locating it in "hearts and minds"—Nixon's statement of conservative egalitarian colorblindness effectively ruled out institutional and structural remedies for addressing racial inequality: remedies like collective bargaining rights, which the government had guaranteed for white workers but did not ensure for African Americans. By contrast, Dr. King located civil rights remedies institutionally. In Memphis, he framed the workers' counterpublic as a movement that could help to advance broad-based "economic rights," rights that would finally give concreteness to equality as it was promised in the Civil Rights Acts.

The Memphis sanitation workers' counterpublic can thus be read as constructing an alternative vision of egalitarianism that can be used to challenge conservative egalitarian claims to the mantle of equality and civil rights. The sanitation workers' movement articulated a vision of equality in which race is understood as a structural, institutional, and historical phenomenon. Their egalitarianism was not grounded on a race-neutral or abstracted individual; rather, their egalitarianism was community-oriented, with the capacity to build solidarities across lines of class, occupation, and gender. The sanitation workers' strike moved beyond the particulars of unionization in a sanitation department in order to engage women and members of the black middle-class who identified with the strikers' plight and cause *as* black men and women. In so doing, the Memphis counterpublic advanced a vision of what Richard Lentz calls the black "Everyman"³³⁶ (and, I would add, "Everywoman"), a figure that both challenged the

³³⁵ Richard Nixon, Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach.

³³⁶ Lentz, 19.

naturalization of labor as white, and built a structurally and historically informed understanding of race into its depiction of citizenship. Tending to this complex negotiation—of the individual and the community, and of race, class, and gender identities—I argue that the Memphis sanitation workers' discursive legacy remains critical for the pursuit of racial and economic equality in the twenty-first century, particularly as conservative egalitarianism remains, for some Americans, a compelling discursive frame through which to understand equality and civil rights.

II. Race, the "Citizen-Worker," and Equality After the New Deal

The rallying cry of the Memphis sanitation workers' counterpublic, "I AM A Man," represented the workers' frustrations not only with deprivation, but also with the lack of dignity that resulted from being seen as second-class citizens and worthy of only a substandard living. "I AM A Man" spoke to the workers' desires both to take care of their families and to be seen by all of Memphis as citizen-workers equal in dignity to their white peers. In this, "I AM A Man" constituted an explicit challenge to longstanding raced discourses of American citizenship and labor. As I argued in Chapter Two, these discourses—including raced beliefs about deservingness, work ethic, and capacity for contributing citizenship—characterized the pre-conservative egalitarian racial projects of the New Deal.

Conceptions and practices of American democratic citizenship have often naturalized the citizen as white (and male), and have historically depended upon the construction and subordination of a non-white Other.³³⁷ Whereas whiteness has signaled

³³⁷ Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xvii,

belonging and self-mastery—that is, the capacity to control one’s own life and opportunities—constructions of blackness have denied these capacities.³³⁸ Defenders of slavery fused blackness to an incapacity for freedom; paternalistic Southern whites believed that they were the proper guardians of blacks, and that whites would have to teach independence to former slaves.³³⁹ However, though they undergirded the South's "peculiar" racial order, these raced constructions of citizenship have not been particular to the institution of slavery or Jim Crow. They have also been constitutive of understandings of liberty amongst nineteenth century opponents of slavery. For example, the pre-Civil War “free-soil, free labor” movement of moderate Republicans argued that Southern slavery was threatening first and foremost to white citizen-workers, and not to enslaved blacks. The free-soilers' concern was that the expansion of slavery into “free” states would force whites into factory “wage slavery,” thus robbing them of political independence.³⁴⁰ As Eric Foner reminds us, concerns for enslaved blacks were nearly absent in free-soil debates. Rather, for many free-soilers, the white race would be

42-43. Citing the sociologist Pierre van den Berghe, Olson writes that democracy in the United States was a “herrenvolk” regime: it was “democratic for the master race but tyrannical for subordinate groups.” See also Barbara J. Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review*, I, 181 (May/June 1990). Fields argues that the idea of “race” – of blackness and whiteness – was an ideological construction, created in order to *justify* the exclusion of so-called “natural” and “God-given” rights and liberties in a republican polity. Slavery was defined and associated with “blackness,” and with the everyday experiences of seeing black people subordinated.

³³⁸ Marek Steedman, “Walk With Me in White: Autonomy in a *Herrenvolk* Democracy.” *Du Bois Review*, 8:2 (2011): 329, 347, 333.

³³⁹ Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 122. As W.E.B. Du Bois cites one Mississippi planter, “Our negroes... have to learn that freedom and independence are different things. A man may be free and yet not independent.”

³⁴⁰ The “character” necessary for citizenship and “free government,” free-soilers believed, would be threatened. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1970).

"degraded" by the presence in the workplace of blackness, which signaled enslavement and dependence.³⁴¹

American unions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century provided workers with economic protections and negotiating power, affording them the resources to guard against such "wage slavery." However, as black citizens increasingly mobilized to join unions during this time period, they were met with assertions of the exclusive whiteness of the citizen-worker. For example, Samuel Gompers argued in 1898 that blacks were characterized by an "abandoned and reckless disposition" that made them unsuitable for union membership. Specifically, Gompers wrote that blacks lacked "patriotism, sympathy, sacrifice, etc., which are peculiar to most of the Caucasian race, and which alone make an organization of the character and complexity of the modern trade union possible."³⁴² Such views were consequential: if blacks were incapable of exercising the political, economic, and moral powers required for union activism, they could be—and should be—excluded from the benefits of union membership.

Beliefs about blacks' incapacity for worker-citizenship—and about the "peculiar" deservingness and capacities of white workers—persisted into the New Deal and World War II era, where, like their nineteenth-century counterparts in the "free soil" movement,

³⁴¹ Foner (1970), 296-97.

³⁴² Gompers added that blacks were "the happiest and most contented individual imaginable," and probably wouldn't even be motivated to join unions. His statement—which naturalized supposed black antipathy toward union organizing—also echoed a common belief amongst whites that corporate management could easily manipulate black workers. Herbert Hill, "Black Labor and Affirmative Action: An Historical Perspective," in *The Question of Discrimination: Racial Inequality in the U.S. Labor Market*, Shulman & Darity, Jr., eds. (Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 203. As Philip S. Foner writes, despite his calls for racial unity for the purposes of labor strength, Gompers was "a bigot," believing whites to be superior to blacks, equating blacks with "scabs," and fomenting "race hatred against Chinese" immigrant workers. Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981* (New York: International Publishers, 1981), 75-76.

some white workers viewed blacks as a "degrading" presence in the workplace and in the union.³⁴³ Moreover, despite the progressiveness of the Roosevelt administration, New Deal Democrats did not actively encourage organized labor to adopt more racially inclusive platforms and practices. Indeed, W.E.B. Du Bois noted that the National Recovery Administration actually "re-inforced" the "sinister power" of the "American Federation of Labor," an organization that did not "wish to organize Negroes. They keep Negroes out of every single organization where they can."³⁴⁴ Many labor unions adopted segregationist practices that allowed for "discriminatory provisions for job assignment, seniority, and promotion in union contracts."³⁴⁵ At the same time, union leadership described the protection of seniority as a colorblind policy, even though they consciously excluded black members from such benefits.³⁴⁶

Critically, ostensibly racially progressive unions prefigured the thin colorblindness that would become characteristic of conservative egalitarianism. The leadership of these unions characterized their opposition to federal legislation that sought to eradicate racial discrimination as "privileging" certain racial minorities, and hence discriminating against whites. For example, Victor Reuther of the United Auto Workers (UAW) attacked what would later be labeled "affirmative action" in the context of busing, jobs, and education. Equating the creation of a "Minorities Department" in the

³⁴³ For example, see Kevin Boyle, "There are no Union Sorrows that the Union Can't Heal': The Struggle for Racial Equality in the United Automobile Workers, 1940-1960," in *Labor History*, 36:1 (1995): 5-23. Boyle acknowledges that while black auto workers made significant gains during World War II, including possibilities for promotion, most unions reinstated racially discriminatory practices after the war (8-10).

³⁴⁴ Michael Hiltzik, *The New Deal: A Modern History* (Free Press, 2011), 319.

³⁴⁵ Hill, "Black Labor and Affirmative Action: An Historical Perspective," 191. See also Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, 187.

³⁴⁶ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), 211.

UAW with "Jim Crow in reverse," Reuther said to a UAW convention in 1943 that the union must not "establish the practice of giving special privileges to special groups, because that is a Jim Crow privilege, and will... kick in the teeth the very people it is trying to help. If there is a special post for Negroes, then in all justice there should be a post at large for the Catholics, the women, the Jews, the Poles and the rest."³⁴⁷ Given these words, it is not surprising that black civil rights leaders were suspicious of the promise of labor for achieving racial equality.³⁴⁸ Indeed, as Nelson Lichtenstein writes, though "racial progressives dominated the *public* discourse" around the UAW, "hidden just below simmered a vast cauldron of prejudice, resentment, and belief in the racial hierarchy of Jim Crow America."³⁴⁹

Despite this difficult history, some black labor and civil rights leaders had long attempted to bridge the divide between white and black labor. For example, National Negro Congress President A. Philip Randolph viewed labor as a promising partner for the civil rights movement, recognizing the practice of using black workers as strikebreakers as part of a strategy to divide white and black workers, and urging biracial solidarity so as to "build industrial democracy in America." Setting forth a stark choice for black workers, Randolph argued in the late 1930s that blacks must eventually "decide between organized labor and organized capital."³⁵⁰ T. Arnold Hill of the National Urban League also hailed an alliance of black and white workers, calling on those "white labor leaders who are intelligent enough to realize the necessity for cooperation." To secure their own

³⁴⁷ Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, 210-11.

³⁴⁸ Hill, "Black Labor and Affirmative Action: An Historical Perspective," 191, 216.

³⁴⁹ Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, 211.

³⁵⁰ Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 11-14, 49.

rights, Hill wrote, "Negroes must secure the organized cooperation of white workers with black workers in the interest of all labor."³⁵¹

Following in this political tradition, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s continued to negotiate the relationship between race and organized labor. While interrogating the right to unionize as a white privilege, or what Ira Katznelson would later call a form of "affirmative action for whites," civil rights leaders also hailed a mutually beneficial relationship between the two movements. Nearly a decade before Memphis, Dr. King argued that civil rights and labor shared common enemies, namely an alliance of conservative business interests and white supremacists. This enemy, King said, resented "our will to organize, so that we may guarantee that humanity will prevail and equality will be exacted."³⁵² In a speech to a mostly white United Auto Workers (UAW) crowd in Detroit in 1961, King underlined the ways in which opponents of labor and civil rights attacked both movements as communistic. Unions in the 1930s sought recognition, King reminded the crowd, but came up against:

powerful forces which said to you the same words we as Negroes hear now: 'Never... You are not ready... You are really seeking to change our form of society... You are Reds.... You are trouble-makers.... You are stirring up discontent and discord where none exists.... You are interfering with our property rights.... You are captives of sinister elements who would exploit you.'³⁵³

King's words would be familiar in Memphis, where the white establishment similarly associated civil rights and labor with communism in their demonization of the strike. For

³⁵¹ T. Arnold Hill, "The Plight of the Negro Industrial Worker," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan. 1936): 46-47. Dr. King had also worked with unions in Montgomery, Alabama as early as 1955; he was particularly supportive of unions that "had significant black membership and supported civil rights." Michael K. Honey, *All Labor Has Dignity: Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited and Introduced by Michael K. Honey (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), xxvi.

³⁵² Speech at AFL-CIO Fourth Constitutional Convention (Miami Beach, Florida, December 11, 1961), in Michael K. Honey, *All Labor Has Dignity*, 37.

³⁵³ Speech at UAW, Detroit, MI (April 27, 1961), in Honey, *All Labor Has Dignity*, 27.

example, an editorial in the *Commercial Appeal*, a white publication in Memphis, equated the strike's leadership with the "Viet Cong and Hanoi,"³⁵⁴ while Memphis City Councilman Bob James associated the strike with a "world-wide Communist conspiracy," a revolutionary attempt like those "in Cuba and China."³⁵⁵ As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, these accusations were not unique to Memphis in 1968; fusions of communism—understood as foreign and interventionist—with civil rights characterized the racial conservatism of some white Detroiters in the context of both housing and busing.

Accusations of communist affiliation and interference went hand-in-hand with the pervasive paternalism of Southern society, in which whites understood blacks as in need of white guidance and guardianship.³⁵⁶ In this context, white characterizations of the strike as communistic—under the control of a "worldwide Communist conspiracy," in Councilman James' words—can be read as a denial of the workers' independent agency. Anti-strike discourses were shaped by a "plantation mentality," as the *New York Times* reported, whereby whites believed it necessary to educate and protect African Americans, who lacked the capacity for self-mastery.³⁵⁷ This "plantation mentality," which mirrored earlier assertions of black incapacity for full citizenship, was explicit in the comments of

³⁵⁴ Lentz, 9.

³⁵⁵ Beifuss, 152.

³⁵⁶ Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 124. Though rooted in the Southern legacy of slavery, paternalist discourses were engaged by non-southerners, including conservative intellectual and fervent anti-communist, William F. Buckley, Jr. Writing in the *National Review* in 1957, Buckley argued that whites were still an "advanced" race, and had to take the steps necessary to preserve their culture in the South. As he writes, this would require educating "backward" blacks to become politically and culturally mature. White elites, he furthered, must "equip the Negro – and a great many Whites – to cast an enlightened and responsible vote." William F. Buckley, Jr., "Why the South Must Prevail," *National Review* (Aug. 24 1957). Reprinted in Ronald Story & Bruce Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 52-54.

³⁵⁷ Sylvan Fox, "Memphis is Beset by Racial Tension," *New York Times* (March 18 1968), p. 28.

the President of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce, whose words echoed those of Gompers seventy years earlier. As the President of the Chamber stated in the context of the sanitation strike, "It's going to take maybe forty years before we can make any real progress. You can't take these Negro people and make the kind of citizens out of them you'd like."³⁵⁸ Similarly, in the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. King in Memphis in April of 1968, a white businessman, Thomas O'Ryan, told an assembly of white and black Memphians that blacks' inclusion in the polity was not automatic; rather, O'Ryan said that they should first "behave" themselves. According to *Los Angeles Times*, O'Ryan urged blacks to "get educated to justify sharing in the privileges of being Memphians."³⁵⁹ For O'Ryan, citizenship for black Memphians was a privilege rather than a right—and a right that whites could choose to either grant or withhold. Paternalism was especially associated with Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb, who sternly opposed the strike. As one unnamed AFSCME union official said of Loeb, he “wants [the workers] to continue in dependency. It’s a strange social system he is trying to preserve.”³⁶⁰ For black Memphians, and even some white members of the city council, Mayor Loeb's refusal to recognize the workers' demands was emblematic of racial paternalism. As council member Lewis Donelson remembers, Loeb typified “the plantation psychology,” the idea that blacks “are the white man’s responsibility and we have to look out for them.”³⁶¹ Baxton Bryant, Executive Director of the Tennessee Council on Humane Relations, remembered Loeb similarly, as a man who “never could accept the idea that the

³⁵⁸ Beifuss, 247.

³⁵⁹ Burke, Vincent J., "Speakers in Memphis Praise, Condemn City," *Los Angeles Times* (8 April 1968), p. 30.

³⁶⁰ J. Edwin Stanfield. *In Memphis: More Than a Garbage Strike* (Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Regional Council, 1968), 33.

³⁶¹ *At the River I Stand*.

[workers] wanted the union," refusing to recognize the sanitation workers as citizen-workers capable of advancing their own interests.³⁶² As strike supporter Herbert Reaves put it more starkly in a letter to the *Tri-State Defender*, "Loeb leadeth us back to slavery."³⁶³

The workers' declaration, "I AM A Man," explicitly countered this paternalism. In promising to educate and take care of the black workers, white elites claimed to be protecting them from disruptive and communistic labor influences. Yet, as Lentz writes, in the eyes of the sanitation workers and their supporters, "protection" was merely another way of denigrating them as "child-like" and "incapable of conducting their own affairs."³⁶⁴ "I AM A Man" contrasted starkly with a caricature of the workers as "child-like," dependent, and politically and economically immature. Striker O.Z. Evers' passionate call for recognition at a city council meeting—"You will recognize me, I am a citizen"—strikingly illuminates the sanitation workers' rejection of paternalism and their declarations of equal worker-citizenship.³⁶⁵

In urging the black workers to disavow unionization, and to go back on the job, the city's white elites promised to provide them with economic security. Yet the sanitation workers did not accept the city's outreach, particularly Mayor Loeb's offer to provide the strikers with food stamps so that, as the white Memphis papers often emphasized, the workers and their families would not starve.³⁶⁶ In opposition to this paternalism, the sanitation workers' counterpublic emphasized economic independence

³⁶² Marshall and Van Adams, "The Memphis Public Works Employees Strike," 89

³⁶³ Herbert Reaves, "The 23rd Slum," Letters to the Editor, *Tri-State Defender* (Mar. 23, 1968), p. 6.

³⁶⁴ Lentz, 8.

³⁶⁵ Beifuss, 78-79.

³⁶⁶ Lentz, 12.

and self-reliance. As NAACP Memphis head Jesse Turner argued, while the “white man... will tell you he will give the Negro the shirt off his back,” the sanitation worker was demanding to earn “a decent living so he can buy his own shirt.”³⁶⁷ In his speech to the striking workers on March 18th, Dr. King addressed this determination. He urged the workers not to abandon their struggle, even as most were undergoing economic hardship: “Don’t let anybody tell you to go back on your job and paternalistically say, now, ‘You’re my man, and I’m going to do the right thing for you if you’ll just come back on the job.’ Don’t go back on the job until the demands are met.”³⁶⁸ As with Jesse Turner, King urged the strikers not to be tempted into relying on the “goodwill” of others, but rather to assert their capacities for independent worker-citizenship in opposition to discourses that denied these capacities.

In their assertion “I AM A Man,” the Memphis sanitation workers’ counterpublic challenged pre-conservative egalitarian raced discourses of labor and citizenship that had roots in the labor movement and in the New Deal. Contesting deeply rooted beliefs about black incapacity for worker-citizenship, the sanitation workers claimed the right and the capacity to organize as capable and dignified men. As former sanitation worker Taylor Rogers remembered of the strike, the workers were challenging the belief that they could not be self-reliant. As Rogers emphasized, the workers sought unionization so that someone or something could, as he said, “represent us, so that we could have some say

³⁶⁷ Pearlstine and Maxwell, “Critics Say the City King Died in Clings to Old Racial Outlook.”

³⁶⁸ “Martin Luther King, Jr. addresses strikers in Memphis, Tenn., March 18, 1968,” AFT: A Union of Professionals. Accessed January 16, 2013.
<http://www.aft.org/yourwork/tools4teachers/bhm/mlkpeech031868.cfm>

about our hours and working conditions.”³⁶⁹ The right to collective bargaining—long denied to them as black workers—would give them the power to control their own economic lives.

III. *The Memphis Counterpublic's Egalitarianism*

In Memphis, labor unrest on the part of black workers was not always framed as part of the civil rights movement. However, the deaths of Echol Cole and Robert Walker in a garbage truck accident in February 1968 horrifyingly underscored both the lack of safety regulations in the sanitation department and the treatment of black workers as less than full citizens of Memphis.³⁷⁰ As Norman Pearlstine of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, the workers and their supporters were not simply striking for higher wages or better working conditions; rather, in their assertion, "I AM A Man," they were constructing a counterpublic that challenged racial subordination and the discourses that justified it. As Pearlstine wrote, the strike was "an all-out assault by Negroes on the political, social, and economic customs of this Deep-South city.”³⁷¹

In the following subsections, I theorize the sanitation workers' counterpublic and its discursive challenge to racial inequality in Memphis and beyond. I argue that the

³⁶⁹ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 294, 296 (my emphasis).

³⁷⁰ Attempting to keep warm in the back of their truck, and dressed in substandard clothing, Cole and Walker were crushed to death when their truck malfunctioned. While the tragedy hastened the workers' resolve and helped to galvanize the larger black community, the strike was not without precedent. T.O. Jones, himself a sanitation worker, organized his peers in the early 1960s. They were given a charter, Local 1733, by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in 1964, though the city of Memphis refused to grant them recognition. For an in-depth chronology of the strike, see "1968 AFSCME Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike Chronology," AFSCME, Online: <http://www.afscme.org/union/history/mlk/1968-afscme-memphis-sanitation-workers-strike-chronology> (Accessed: February 2013).

³⁷¹ Norman Pearlstine, "Garbage Strike Piles Up Negro Unity," *Wall Street Journal* (March 8, 1968), p. 10.

workers' counterpublic can help us to conceptualize a substantive understanding of race and racial egalitarianism: one that countered white supremacy and anti-unionism in Memphis, but which could also be used to challenge conservative egalitarianism's claims to equality and civil rights. As I read the workers' egalitarianism, it is predicated not on a racially unmarked and abstracted individual, but rather on what Dr. King referred to as collective and mutual responsibility. Critically, this egalitarianism located race historically and structurally, thus pointing to the necessity of positive government action for achieving racial equality. Whereas conservative egalitarianism relies on ostensibly colorblind appeals to work ethic, merit, and equality of opportunity, the egalitarianism of the workers' counterpublic emphasizes the need for structural and institutional remedies to target inequalities with roots in slavery, Jim Crow, and the New Deal. Furthermore, I show how this racially substantive and community-oriented egalitarianism has the capacity to hail alliances across class and gender divides, as it did in Memphis. In their movement for racial equality, the sanitation workers' strike mobilized not only working-class black men, but also black women and members of the black middle-class. Indeed, the striking black sanitation worker became a recognizable "Everyman,"³⁷² and potentially "Everywoman," in Memphis. The signifier of the dignified and hardworking black "Everyman" countered the naturalization of worker-citizenship as white; it demonstrated the significance of the "blackness" of the "Everyman"—not because blackness rendered him incapable of exercising independence, agency, and self-reliance, but rather because it illuminated the structural and historical exclusions that impeded his full enjoyment of citizenship rights. This positive egalitarian vision resonated with the

³⁷² Lentz, 19.

wider black community in Memphis, and as King argued, it would also resonate with working men and women across the nation.

i. Dignity, Community, and Structure

I argue that the Memphis sanitation workers' counterpublic challenged a conceptualization of race in which its historical, structural, and institutional dimensions is ignored; this conceptualization of race would feature in Nixon's August 1968 convention speech, as noted earlier. In putting forward this challenge, the movement illuminated the links between individual dignity, collective action, and history, in contrast to Nixon's—and conservative egalitarianism's—positing of an autonomous, race-neutral individual that is abstracted from community and historical context.³⁷³ Dr. King's active support for and involvement in the sanitation workers' strike illuminates the ways in which the workers challenged the myth of racially "unmarked" autonomy, a myth that undergirds conservative egalitarian discourses of colorblindness and equality of opportunity.

This myth characterized Council member Bob James' belief that the proper solution for the black sanitation workers—who in his words were "unfit" for the workforce—was not unionization, but rather "a slow assimilation." As James further argued, black workers should disavow unionism so as to have "the opportunity to get jobs on merit."³⁷⁴ In contrast with Councilman James' insistence that the black sanitation workers rise up through a purportedly colorblind meritocracy, King's March 18th speech

³⁷³ See also Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions*, 13; David Carroll Cochran, *The Color of Freedom: Race and Contemporary American Liberalism* (State University of New York Press, 1999), 19-20. As Cochran writes, liberal individualism ignores "the profound importance of culture, of membership in cultural groups, and of the influence these factors have within the institutions, practices, and meanings of civil society." Though Cochran is careful to emphasize that colorblind liberalism is "marked by deep internal divisions between left and right interpretations," he maintains that it is an inadequate theory, insofar as it fails to recognize the discriminatory social and economic structures that have undergirded liberal citizenship.

³⁷⁴ Beifuss, 152.

in Memphis to a crowd of 10,000 emphasized the ways in which racial inequalities were institutionalized in the United States, particularly in the racial projects of the New Deal. For example, King's speech acknowledged the "vast unemployment and underemployment in the black community." Yet he emphasized that because it was *black* poverty, white society characterized it merely as a "social problem": something that positive government intervention could not address. King contrasted the so-called "social problem" of black poverty with the affirmative steps taken in the New Deal to target "vast unemployment and underemployment in the white community," and he explicitly called for economic redistribution to alleviate the gap. In contrast to conservative egalitarianism's association of government action—including the creation of a robust welfare state—with dependence, King framed such action as a facilitator of racial and economic justice and independence. Noting that America's poor were "making wages so low that they can not begin to function in the mainstream of the economic life of our nation," King said that the country must use its "vast resources of wealth to end poverty, to make it possible for all of God's children to have the basic necessities of life..." Later in his speech, King equated this redistribution with the signing of a check. As he told the crowd in Memphis, America had given "the black man a bad check that's been bouncing all around. We are going to demand our check, to say to this nation, 'We know that that check shouldn't have bounced because you have the resources in the federal treasury,' which were being "unjustly" spent on the war in Vietnam."³⁷⁵

³⁷⁵ "Martin Luther King, Jr. addresses strikers in Memphis, Tenn., March 18, 1968." AFT: A Union of Professionals. Online: <http://www.aft.org/yourwork/tools4teachers/bhm/mlkpeech031868.cfm> (Accessed 20 July 2014). King's critique of institutionalized racism, and his call for government action to address racial and economic inequality, was also a feature of Black Nationalism and what calls a "radical

In addition to framing inequality in historical and institutional terms, King's March 18th speech also called on the black community to enact a "general work stoppage" in the city, drawing attention to the importance of collective and cross-class action.³⁷⁶ Indeed, he understood the important role that the black middle-class could play in building black economic independence and in putting pressure on the city's white elite. On April 3, the night before his murder in Memphis, King called once again for such collective action. In a speech to a crowd at Mason Temple, King said that African Americans must "Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal." Emphasizing their power as a black community, and not simply as a group of individuals, King continued: "Now, we are poor people, individually, we are poor when you compare us with white society in America." However, as King further argued, "collectively, that means all of us together, collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world..." Through economic boycotts of white businesses that discriminated against blacks in hiring, King believed that black Memphians could "begin the process of building a greater economic base" in their community.³⁷⁷ In his call for collective economic action, King was asking all of black Memphis to support the strikers, and to see the sanitation workers' cause as their own. Critically, this independent "economic base" was, in King's understanding, not necessarily a part of a racially unmarked arena of what

egalitarianism" and "disillusioned liberalism. In contrast with conservative egalitarianism, these traditions posit that true equality necessitates positive government action to discipline, for example, "employment, real estate, loan, and retail markets." As Dawson is keen to emphasize, this faith in a proactive state results not simply from experiences of Jim Crow discrimination and violence, but also from a positive belief in community, and in the "collective responsibility for our fellow citizens." Dawson (2001), 17-21, 238-240, 243-44, 266.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Speech at Mason Temple, Memphis, TN (April 3 1968). Online: <http://www.afscme.org/union/history/mlk/ive-been-to-the-mountaintop-by-dr-martin-luther-king-jr> (Accessed Jan 2013).

Nixon would call the "ventures of private enterprise"; rather, it would be an example of economic solidarity within the black community. As King continued, "We've got to stay together and maintain unity... Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together."³⁷⁸ In this emphasis on unity, King highlighted the black counterpublic's refiguring of autonomy, in which the independence and dignity of the individual and the independence and dignity of the community are mutually constitutive.³⁷⁹

I argue that we should read King's contribution to the Memphis counterpublic through the lens of his political-ethical thought, which underlined the constitutive relationship between individual human dignity, community, and economic structure. For King, the God-given dignity of the human being was found not solely in individual morality or excellence; rather, it was constituted in relationships with others.³⁸⁰ This ethics of community—what Robert E. Birt calls the “essential normative value in King’s ethical thought”—described a “mutually cooperative and voluntary venture of man to assume a semblance of responsibility for his brother.”³⁸¹ Community was a relationship: a practice of fellow-nurturing through which individuals could achieve freedom and

³⁷⁸ King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

³⁷⁹ King's criticisms of liberal capitalism—as a philosophy and practice that supported racism and economic exploitation—encouraged his opponents to accuse him of being a communist. However, though he incorporated aspects of what Michael Dawson calls the “Black Marxist” tradition into his political thought, King often repudiated communism. Dawson (2001), 18.

³⁸⁰ As King argued, an individual could not be a “self without other selves. I cannot reach fulfillment without thou.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, James Melvin Washington, Ed. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 122; See also Robert E. Birt, “King’s Radical Vision of Community,” *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*. Robert E. Birt, Ed. (Lexington Books, 2012), 157-58; C. Anthony Hunt, “Martin Luther King: Resistance, Nonviolence and Community,” *Black Leaders and Ideologies in the South: Resistance and Nonviolence*. Preston King & Walter Earl Fluker, Eds. (Routledge, 2005).

³⁸¹ Birt, 160.

dignity. Dignity was not possible without the recognition that one was indeed a “somebody,” rather than a “nobody,” an individual rather than an “It.”³⁸² King reflected on this ethic at a speech in Tennessee in 1957, pointing to the ways in which institutionalized racism had sought to deny blacks both autonomy and the capacity to constitute relationships of mutual responsibility. Under slavery and Jim Crow, King argued, African Americans were not seen as dignified individuals, but rather as “cogs” “in a vast plantation machine.”³⁸³

In challenging the notion of a racially unmarked and abstracted individual—a conceptualization of race that undergirds conservative egalitarianism, especially in its emphasis on colorblind merit and equality of opportunity—the workers' counterpublic drew attention to systemic and institutionalized forces of racial and economic inequality. Though they were on strike for collective bargaining rights in a particular occupation, and in a particular city, the workers' movement could be read as a national call to advance broad-based “economic rights” that would finally give concreteness to racial equality, as it was promised in the Civil Rights Acts.³⁸⁴ These economic rights may have looked something like President Roosevelt's proposed 1944 “Economic Bill of Rights,” which called for affirmative action to give each American the right to adequate health care, housing, education, employment, and, finally, a “living wage.” Indeed, the egalitarianism

³⁸² Birt, 162.

³⁸³ Speech at Highlander Folk School, Monteagle, Tennessee [September 2, 1957], in Honey, *All Labor Has Dignity*, 9. As Robert E. Birt writes, King believed that Americans could “transcend” racism only if they transformed the capitalist “socioeconomic structure,” as well as those values that place “making a living” over “making a life.” As King believed, American racism did not begin as merely personal or even societal prejudice; rather, as an ideological system, white supremacy gave “moral sanction” to slavery as a “profitable system.” “King’s Radical Vision of Community,” 163, 165.

³⁸⁴ Birt, 166, 168.

advanced by the sanitation workers' counterpublic would have extended the New Deal to fully include African Americans.³⁸⁵

ii. *Standing As (and for) the Black "Everyman" (and "Everywoman")*

As noted above, the Memphis sanitation workers' counterpublic appealed to cross-class solidarity among the city's black community. The movement was not defined, nor made meaningful, by racially "unmarked" individuals seeking economic benefits. Rather, the workers' fight for racial equality was a collective and race-conscious endeavor: not simply a labor strike for individual material gain, the workers' counterpublic was inclusive of black men and women in the working- and middle-classes who recognized in the workers' strike as a movement for racial equality.

Civil rights and labor leaders' assertions of cross-class solidarity in Memphis' black community were significant. Middle class blacks had not always been willing to support labor strikes; many viewed national unions as prone to racism, and labor as unattached to the larger civil rights movement.³⁸⁶ However, public discourse on the relationship between labor and civil rights in Memphis had transformed by the late 1960s. For example, in a February 1968 poll conducted by the *Tri-State Defender*, eighty-eight percent of respondents said that the sanitation strike was a "race issue."³⁸⁷ Jesse Turner, president of the Memphis NAACP branch, told the sanitation workers that the strike was

³⁸⁵ Birt, 172. While he believed that a redistribution of political and economic power would be difficult, we should not assume that King was an anti-capitalist. In fact, as Birt writes, King was "sympathetic to the idea" of "democratic socialism," which he addressed in a 1966 meeting of the SCLC. While social democratic regimes, like those found in Western Europe, seek to reform capitalism, they do not seek its transcendence or abolishment. Rather, such regimes combine liberal values, like individualism, with regulated markets and expanded social welfare programs.

³⁸⁶ Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 110

³⁸⁷ "Striking Sanitary Workers Ask For Fair Deal," *Tri-State Defender* (Sat. Feb. 24, 1968, p. 9)

not solely about union recognition, but was also "a racial matter and we were going to tackle it as such."³⁸⁸ Similarly, for Reverend James Lawson, a politically active minister in Memphis and strong supporter of the sanitation workers, the strike was an explicit challenge to racial discrimination. Lawson circulated a narrative of the strike as a fight against racism as much as anti-unionism. As Lawson argued, the city's ordering of the sanitation workers back to the job—treating them as if they were not “men”—revealed the white establishment's “racist point of view.”³⁹¹ Memphis Reverend Henry Starks similarly described the strike as a challenge to institutionalized white supremacy that would impact all of black Memphis, not simply working-class union members. As Starks noted, the whole community had “come face to face with an economic tradition, a racial tradition, a Southern tradition,”³⁹² all of which, for Starks, were linked. Though Memphis' black middle class may not initially have been an engaged supporter of labor, they understood the "Southern tradition," just as they understood the experience of being treated as second-class citizens, economically and socially.

The participation of black Memphians from all classes was critical for the strike's success. As civil rights leader and King confidant Bayard Rustin noted, the sanitation workers would ultimately win union recognition because of the strike's inclusivity: “because the black people in this community and the trade unions stand together, man to man.”³⁹³ King also hailed cross-class solidarity. As he told the crowd gathered at Mason Temple on April 3, "the question before you tonight" is "Not, 'If I stop to help the

³⁸⁸ Beifuss, 48-49.

³⁹¹ AFSCME, Martin Luther King Documentary, "'I am a Man;' Memphis Sanitation Strike." Online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1xHuYyp4eI>.

³⁹² Beifuss, *At the River I Stand*, 102.

³⁹³ *At the River I Stand*, DVD, Directed by David Appleby, Allison Graham and Steven Ross (1993, California Newsreel).

sanitation workers, what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor," but rather, "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" In Rustin and King's emphasis on mutual responsibility within black community, the workers' counterpublic not only challenged a dominant discourse of paternalism in Memphis' white community, but they also asserted the independence of the black community as a whole.

Enacting mutual responsibility across lines of class and occupation necessitated mutual recognition: black Memphians needed to recognize in the sanitation workers' strike common identities and a common struggle. In Memphis, the sanitation worker became an "Everyman," a figure that was familiar to black Memphians of all socioeconomic classes.³⁹⁵ As a signifier that encapsulated multiple identities—husband, father, and citizen-worker—the "Everyman" symbolized the black community's collective desire for full and dignified citizenship. As a minister with the Community on the Move for Equality (COME) noted of the commonality that the language of the "Everyman" implied, "Everyone could identify with the garbage man," since "He's got the job nobody wants; he's low on the ladder, and he's so terribly underpaid and abused' ... it just makes everything so clear cut."³⁹⁶ Memphis attorney Walter Bailey similarly referenced a kind "Everyman" in his comments on the strike, telling the *Wall Street Journal* that all black Memphians identified with the "garbage man" because, as non-whites, garbage jobs are "always open to us."³⁹⁷ As "Everymen," the sanitation workers demonstrated the institutionalized exclusions that potentially affected all of black

³⁹⁵ Lentz, 19.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ Norman Pearlstine, "Garbage Strike Piles Up Negro Unity," *Wall Street Journal* (March 8, 1968), p. 10.

Memphis, as Bailey emphasizes. Never simply an expression of a working-class consciousness, the sanitation workers' counterpublic mobilized black Memphians across class lines in the cause of full citizenship.

As "Everymen" challenging racial paternalism and subordination, the sanitation workers expressed a gendered assertion of racial dignity, one that can be read as countering dominant racist discourses of black masculinity. This is important to underline, as the sanitation workers' counterpublic was constituted in a city and a society in which black men were frequently infantilized. As worker Taylor Rogers recalled, while "I Am A Man meant freedom," it also reflected the workers' capacities as grown men against paternalism. "I AM A Man" countered the widespread belief that black men could not—or would not—act as responsible citizens. As Rogers said, "All we wanted was some decent working conditions and a decent salary. And be treated like men, not boys."⁴⁰¹ Jerry Wurf, then president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, also emphasized manhood and its relationship to the strike. As he told the sanitation workers, they must not "forget our struggle to be men, our struggle to stop being 'boys.'" As Wurf continued, until the strikers received "justice and decency and morality," the workers must not "go back to work!"⁴⁰² Reverend Jackson similarly linked manhood to economic independence when describing the workers' counterpublic, arguing that they did not need a white politician, a "Great White Father" like Loeb, to give them their rights. Jackson urged the strikers to assert their manhood and worker-citizenship, rather than accept paternalistic promises: "I Am A Man, this is what I've

⁴⁰¹ Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 211.

⁴⁰² Beifuss, 342-43.

decided I want for my family, and as a man I have the right to make that decision.”⁴⁰³

Writing in the *Tri-State Defender* in April 1968, editorialist Nat D. Williams framed the strike as an explicit challenge to the denial of black manhood. Describing the heightened police presence in the city during the strike, Williams wrote: “‘Hey there boy, where you going?’ Those were the curfew catch words in Memphis last week, and they set a black man so accosted way back more than 10 feet; cause we have been battling to become men a long time.”⁴⁰⁴ Though oppositional discourses framed the strike as an externally led agitation, for Williams, the strikers were “men who know they want and need something... even if they don’t have the education and experience to express themselves in pretty words and correct grammer (sic).”⁴⁰⁵

While the strikers asserted their “manhood,” their counterpublic should not necessarily be read as reinforcing “male domination.”⁴⁰⁶ In many ways, the movement illuminated the subordination of black women, as well as black men.⁴⁰⁷ In a speech to the striking workers on March 18, King spoke to this subordination, and focused particularly on what he characterized as black women's servitude “in white ladies’ kitchens.”⁴⁰⁸ According to Steve Estes, though King may have accepted a “patriarchal ordering of the black family,” the sanitation workers’ “struggle for manhood... resists a simple black and

⁴⁰³ Beifuss, 326.

⁴⁰⁴ Nat D. Williams, “A Point of View,” *Tri-State Defender* (Sat. April 20 1968), 5.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰⁶ In her study on post-emancipation Black Richmond, Elsa Barkley Brown reminds us of the tension inherent in gendered discourses of black masculinity. While discourses of “manhood could keep the concern with violence against women in the public discussion,”—and indeed, Brown quotes the Rev. Anthony Binga, who would define “being a man” as anathema to violence against women—it could also *silence* public discussions of intraracial domestic abuse, for fear of substantiating already circulating racist discourses about “the incivility of black men.” Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere,” 140.

⁴⁰⁷ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 287-88.

⁴⁰⁸ “Martin Luther King, Jr. addresses strikers in Memphis, Tenn., March 18, 1968.”

white model of gender identity”); rather, within the strikers' counterpublic we might read multiple “meanings for manhood and womanhood.”⁴⁰⁹ Similarly, as Laurie B. Green argues, the workers' slogan, “I AM A Man,” was not necessarily “masculinist” or “hypersexual,” but rather “publicly articulated long-standing critiques of racial servitude, dependency, and dehumanization.”⁴¹⁰ As Green further emphasizes, black women did much to shape and extend the meanings of equality and citizenship in the strike, and “claimed identities of themselves as equals, not subordinates, of black men.”⁴¹¹ Black women participated in the strike—and contributed to the discourses of the counterpublic—in a variety of ways. Wives, mothers, and children of the striking workers marched, attended mass meetings, organized fundraising and boycott drives, and attended city council meetings.⁴¹² As organizer Bill Lucy remembers, the workers’ wives “were stronger or as strong as the men were,” and they played a significant role in urging their husbands to remain on strike until their union was recognized.⁴¹³ Emphasizing her belief in the necessity of mutual responsibility, Hazel McGhee, a black laundry worker who was also on strike, urged her husband, a sanitation worker, “Stand up and be man. If you can be strong, I can be strong.”⁴¹⁴ In this sense, the counterpublic might also be read as illuminating and challenging both the raced and gendered nature of the signifier of the citizen-worker. Indeed, at the time of the sanitation strike, black women were also engaged in union organizing, including Ortha B. Strong Jones, a nurse who was inspired

⁴⁰⁹ Steve Estes, *I Am A Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 132, 139-140.

⁴¹⁰ Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 287.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴¹² Beifuss, 104.

⁴¹³ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 281

⁴¹⁴ Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 213.

by the strikers. As Jones noted of the strike's reach, “We felt like we could say we am a woman,” just as the workers were arguing to be treated like men.⁴¹⁵ Like their male counterparts, McGhee and Jones understood themselves as equally capable and dignified citizen-workers.

As participants in the sanitation workers' movement, black women not only supported their male relatives—they also challenged their own subordination within a white supremacist system, demanding statuses long denied to them as women and as black citizen-workers.⁴¹⁶ As one elderly woman at a march noted, though she was not a family member of a sanitation worker, she identified with their plight. She was “a church member and a friend... I been there,” she said, adding, “And I’ve been too poor and hungry to go to work when I had it.”⁴¹⁷ Thus, for the black women participating in this labor struggle, gender identity did not foreclose the possibility of mutual recognition; rather, they understood their own struggles for economic and racial dignity as an important component of the sanitation workers' movement. In joining the sanitation workers, black women in Memphis helped to put forward a robust egalitarianism, demonstrating not only cross-class solidarity, but also the potential gender inclusiveness of the workers' counterpublic. The Memphis sanitation workers' strike should thus be read as a community-based and community-oriented movement, one in which black

⁴¹⁵ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 287.

⁴¹⁶ As Nell Painter writes, though the question of “*Ain't I a woman?*” was never actually spoken by the 19th century abolitionist Sojourner Truth, her “persona” and activism has long asserted “that women who had been enslaved and whose children had been sold be included in the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘the Negro.’” Nell Painter, “Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth’s Knowing and Becoming Known,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sep., 1994): 464. Thanks to Lisa Disch for suggesting this reading.

⁴¹⁷ Stanfield, 15.

Memphians identified not with a racially unmarked and abstracted individual, but rather with the sanitation worker as a black "Everyman" and, potentially, "Everywoman."

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in reading the Memphis sanitation workers' strike as a counterpublic, we can uncover a rich discursive fusion of racial and economic equality, and a powerful challenge to conservative egalitarian fusions of racial and fiscal conservatism. Specifically, I have argued that the sanitation workers' enactment of the "black citizen-worker" countered discourses of black undeservingness and incapacity for full citizenship that characterized both the racial projects of the New Deal and conservative egalitarianism. In these discourses, black social and economic empowerment appears as a form of unearned privilege. By contrast, in asserting their manhood, the Memphis sanitation workers positioned themselves as husbands, fathers, and equally deserving and self-reliant citizen-workers. Moreover, as both dignified individuals and as a community of mutual responsibility, the workers' counterpublic—which included the workers themselves, as well as their supporters in the civil rights movement—articulated a substantive understanding of race and racial equality: one that takes account of structural and historical exclusions, as opposed to a conservative egalitarian conceptualization of race in which race is figured simply as skin color. In their illumination of historical and contemporary institutionalized racial exclusions, King and the workers presented a robust case for the necessity and the justice of economic redistribution and reform for addressing racial inequality. Finally, the sanitation workers' egalitarianism appealed not only to working-class black men, but also to black women

and members of the black middle-class. The workers and their supporters constructed solidarities across divisions of class and gender, demonstrating the ways in which their movement for union recognition was also a challenge to systemic racial discrimination and inequality.

The Memphis sanitation workers' demonstration of the interrelationship between the individual and the community—and of the relationship between racial and economic equality—continues to resonate in American life, forty-five years after they achieved union recognition. In March 2013, former Memphis sanitation workers Alvin Turner and Baxter Leach traveled to New York City to motivate a group of the city's fast-food service employees seeking higher wages and union organization.⁴¹⁸ Cities across the country have since seen thousands of fast food employees walk off the job in protest of low wages.⁴¹⁹ Reminiscent of the sanitation workers' movement, fast food workers' strikes have become broad-based movements, receiving the support not only of national unions, like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), but also of civil rights groups and religious leaders.⁴²⁰ Turner and Leach's New York visit was particularly symbolic, and politically powerful. “The same fight that we fought in 1968,” Turner

⁴¹⁸ Julie Turkewitz, “Fast-Food Union Organizers Get Some Historical Perspective,” City Room, *The New York Times* (March 29 2013). Online: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/29/fast-food-union-organizers-get-some-historical-perspective/> (Accessed: April 3 2013).

⁴¹⁹ Alan Feuer, “Life on \$7.25 an Hour: Older Workers Are Increasingly Entering Fast-Food Industry,” *New York Times* (Nov. 28, 2013). Accessed December 11, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/nyregion/older-workers-are-increasingly-entering-fast-food-industry.html>. Statistics cited in the *New York Times* article are from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), “Slow Progress for Fast-Food Workers,” by John Schmitt and Janelle Jones (Aug. 6, 2013). <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/cepr-blog/slow-progress-for-fast-food-workers>

⁴²⁰ Steven Greenhouse, “Drive to Unionize Fast-Food Workers Opens in N.Y.,” *The New York Times* (November 28 2012). Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/nyregion/drive-to-unionize-fast-food-workers-opens-in-ny.html>

argued, “we are fighting today.”⁴²¹ Indeed, Memphis’ legacy resonates deeply with the fast food workers, many of whom have adopted the sanitation workers’ slogan, “I Am A Man.” They have also reconfigured this slogan to recognize racial, gender, and ethnic differences. For example, “I Am,” “I Am A Woman,” and “Yo Soy Una Mujer” signs could be seen amongst “I Am A Man” signs at walkout and rally in New York City.⁴²² Like the sanitation workers, these fast food workers’ demonstration of the citizen-worker is one that takes account of, rather than ignores, identities of race, ethnicity, and gender.

By identifying with the Memphis sanitation workers, the fast-food movement is referencing its discursive legacy in a moment when conservative egalitarian challenges to collective bargaining are increasing across the country, in both states that have historically been anti-union and states like Michigan with strong labor histories. The discourses of so-called “Right-to-Work” campaigns in states like Michigan and Wisconsin—which have successfully passed legislation that prohibits employers from requiring, as a condition of employment, that individuals join a union or pay union dues and fees—are in many ways (re)presentations of conservative egalitarianism. Specifically, anti-union activists speak frequently of the individual worker’s right to “worker choice” or “worker freedom,” voluntariness, “freedom to work,” “forced unionism,” fairness, and liberty—also longstanding discursive components of conservative egalitarian arguments against affirmative action, which conservative egalitarianism figures as an example of inequality. Though anti-union organizations

⁴²¹ Turkewitz.

⁴²² Katie J.M. Baker, “The NYC Fast Food Strike Matters for Women,” Jezebel, Online: <http://jezebel.com/5993682/the-nyc-fast-food-strike-matters-for-women> (Accessed Aug. 2, 2013); Trina Tocco, Twitter, April 4, 2013, 8:27AM. Accessed August 2, 2013. <https://twitter.com/trinatocco/status/319773268729020416/photo/1>

and activists do not necessarily mobilize anti-civil rights arguments—nor is race always explicit in their arguments— some anti-union campaigns have evoked race by conjuring images of majority African American Detroit's post-industrial "urban blight," which anti-union forces posit as the result of an alliance between "Big Labor" and "Big Government." Characterizing unions as "job killers," proponents of "worker freedom" cast "Big Labor" as against the public good, and unions as "privileged" institutions that ultimately silence the "opinions of free men and women" who "choose" not to join a union.⁴²³

Turning to these fast-food strikes may show us how Memphis can serve as what David Roediger calls a "usable past" for understanding contemporary moments.⁴²⁴ Can we responsibly place the Memphis sanitation workers' story—their language, and their institutions—in our own moment, taking care to highlight the historical, geographic, and institutional differences between their movement and the movements of twenty-first century citizen-workers? As citizens debate the legal and moral merits of conservative egalitarian "Right-to-Work" laws, and as unions struggle to organize in southern

⁴²³ For an example of "Right-to-Work" discourses, see Matthew Benzmilller and Taylor Richards, "Students for Liberty: UAW: Bad for liberty—bad for Tennessee," *Times Free Press* (14 July 2013). Online: <http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2013/jul/14/uaw-bad-liberty-bad-tennessee/?opinion> (Accessed 20 May 2014); Lawson Bader, "Big Labor's Privileged Position," Competitive Enterprise Institute (21 April 2014). Online: <http://cei.org/op-eds-articles/big-labors-privileged-position> (Accessed 20 May 2014); F. Vincent Vernuccio, "A Worker's Guide to Right-to-Work," Mackinac Center for Public Policy (18 Nov. 2013). Online: <http://www.mackinac.org/19376> (Accessed 20 May 2014). For an example of the association of unionism with "urban blight" in Detroit, see the "Save Chatanooga!" posted on workplacechoice.org, a website run by the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a non-profit public policy think tank "dedicated to advancing the principles of limited government, free enterprise, and individual liberty." Online: <http://workplacechoice.org/save-chattanooga/> (Accessed 20 May 2014).

⁴²⁴ Roediger, 190.

industries as well as low-wage, service-based sectors of the economy, I argue that Memphis' discursive legacy is increasingly pertinent.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁵ For example, see the failed attempt by the UAW to organize at automotive plants in right-to-work states, including Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion: Conservative Egalitarianism in the Twenty-First Century

The story of "white backlash," which seeks to explain conservative Republican ascendance in the 1960s, has remained influential in the popular American political imagination. According to Thomas Edsall's popular backlash account, the Republican Party was able to build a new electoral coalition of working- and middle-class whites with a traditional business constituency by championing the civil rights of white Americans against minority "special preferences" and "reverse discrimination." Appropriating discourses of equality, Republicans successfully characterized as inequalitarian both the Democratic Party and racial liberalism or progressivism, thus stealing away the white working-class from the Democratic New Deal coalition.

Counter-backlash stories have challenged this popular narrative in three key ways. First, they have interrogated the backlash story's periodization, emphasizing the ways in which political and ideological development in the late 1960s and 1970s can be traced to the New Deal era. Second, and relatedly, they have underlined the ways in which "white backlash" misleadingly focuses on *conservative* realignment, thus missing the racial conservatism of liberalism and the Democratic Party. Third, these scholars have pointed to a problematic backlash assumption: they have assumed that the subjects of the New Right, and their political interests, existed prior to a process of political construction.

Scholars interrogating backlash argue that we need to focus on the interactions between language, politics, and policies when analyzing political development and change. Meanings of whiteness and blackness do not pre-exist political conflict; rather, they are constructed through such conflict.

Though political theorists have done much work to analyze how race is constructed, few have done so alongside an interrogation of narratives of "white backlash." By placing an analysis of discourse at the center of an investigation of political continuity and change, this dissertation has addressed and enriched research questions posed by scholars in the fields of contemporary political theory and American politics. In this dissertation I have sought to tell a more contextual story of the development of conservative egalitarianism through a close reading of the language(s) and practices of some American citizens, from Detroit to Memphis, and beyond. Particularly, I have theorized the ways in which individuals and groups create racial identities or subjectivities, and how these are constructed through discourses of class, gender, ethnicity, and place.

I do not claim to provide an "origins" story, one that would somehow posit the discursive beginnings of conservative egalitarianism. Indeed, in tracing conservative egalitarianism's ideological components and populist signifiers, one could arguably reach back to the Reconstruction era, and to an 1866 Democratic Party campaign pamphlet that targeted the Freedman's Bureau as "An agency to keep the Negro in idleness at the expense of the white man." The Democratic Party held out a stark choice for voters in that election, fusing support for civil rights to the denial of white rights and freedom. Depicting a cartoonish freedman lazing around, while whites engaged in strenuous labor,

the broadside reads, "Support Congress & You Support the Negro, Sustain the President & You Protect the White Man."⁴²⁶ Associating a white racial identity with a taxpayer status and blackness with dependence, the caption of the Democratic broadside further stated that the white man had to "work to keep his children and pay his taxes," while the federal Freedman's Bureau had "cost the Tax Payers of the Nation."⁴²⁷ If we continue to look backwards for evidence of pre-conservative egalitarian discourses, we might also be struck by the words of Democratic Representative Henry D. McHenry of Kentucky. As Carol Horton writes, McHenry believed that federal laws prohibiting racial discrimination would establish what contemporaries refer to as reverse discrimination. As McHenry argued in congressional debate over the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the "object" of the Civil Rights bill "in fact makes a discrimination against the white man on account of his color."⁴²⁸ Nearly one hundred years before conservative egalitarian pronouncements of colorblindness, politicians targeted civil rights legislation as a form of discrimination against whites.

Looking forward, twenty-first century American attitudes towards racial equality continue to be shaped by conservative egalitarianism. As discussed in Chapter Five, contemporary "Right-to-Work" anti-union discourses are arguably (re)presentations of conservative egalitarianism, particularly as they proclaim "worker choice" and opposition to "Big Labor," as well as in their not-so-subtle associations between unionism, race, and "urban blight." A conservative egalitarian language of reverse discrimination and "racial

⁴²⁶ "Democratic Broadside, from Pennsylvania's Congressional and gubernatorial campaign of 1866," in Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (Harper & Row, 1990).

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.

preferences" has also been prominent in contemporary anti-affirmative action arguments. Forty years after *Milliken v. Bradley*, Michigan remains a site of contestation over affirmative action and racial equality in education. One of the most active and vocal critics of affirmative action is Jennifer Gratz, who grew up in the suburbs of Detroit in the 1980s.⁴²⁹ By briefly looking to Gratz and her peers' political and legal activism, we can see how conservative egalitarianism continues to shape some Americans' thinking about the meaning of equality and civil rights.

Jennifer Gratz had long dreamed of attending the University of Michigan. When, as a teenager, she "heard rumors that the University of Michigan treated people differently based on race," she thought it was "crazy." She was "humiliated" when she was denied acceptance to the University in 1995, and she blamed it on the school's undergraduate affirmative action policy. Under that policy, known as the "points system," the University gave qualified applicants designated as "underrepresented minorities" an additional "20 points of the 100 needed to guarantee admission."⁴³⁰ In Gratz's understanding, she was denied acceptance because of this policy—in her words, the applications of "less-qualified nonwhite classmates" were preferred over her own.⁴³¹ Politically energized by her experience, Gratz joined forces with the Center for Individual Rights (CIR), a "nonprofit public interest law firm dedicated to the defense of individual liberties against the increasingly aggressive and unchecked authority of federal and state

⁴²⁹ White women were also the lead plaintiffs in major affirmative action cases in the 1990s and early 2000, including *Hopwood v. Texas*, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996), *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003), and *Gratz*.

⁴³⁰ *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 244 (2003).

⁴³¹ James Taranto, "The Woman Who Fought Racial Preference," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2013. Online: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323419604578570041957165544> (Accessed June 6, 2014).

governments."⁴³² Angered over her own experiences with "unchecked authority," Gratz was one of the lead plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed by CIR in 1997 which challenged the University of Michigan's use of "racial preferences" in undergraduate admissions. Mirroring Justice Burger's language in the 1974 *Milliken* decision, Gratz and CIR argued that the University's use of racial preferences for "diversity" was simply a form of politically motivated "racial balancing."⁴³³ According to CIR, racial preferences in college admissions placed skin color above merit, thus violating "the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment." After years of appeals, Gratz and CIR gained a victory when the Supreme Court, in an opinion written by Chief Justice Rehnquist, declared in 2003 that Michigan's affirmative action policy for undergraduate admissions was unconstitutional.⁴³⁴

Ten years after winning her case, Gratz continues to champion a conservative egalitarian reading of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Speaking to black students' concerns that the University of Michigan does little on matters of "minority enrollment and diversity," Gratz has responded that they simply

⁴³² The Center for Individual Rights, "CIR's mission: fighting for individual rights." Online: http://www.cir-usa.org/mission_new.html (Accessed June 6, 2014).

⁴³³ In *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978), the Supreme Court argued that the "goal of achieving a diverse student body is sufficiently compelling to justify consideration of race in admissions decisions under some circumstances." As Justice Powell wrote, while it was "evident that the Davis special admissions program involves the use of an explicit racial classification never before countenanced by this Court," affirmative action policies that considered "race or ethnic background" as "simply one element -- to be weighed fairly against other elements -- in the selection process" were constitutionally admissible. *Bakke*, 438 U.S. at 318-19.

⁴³⁴ *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 244 (2003). In another affirmative action decision handed down that day, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the Court decided that the Michigan Law School's "race-conscious admissions policy" was constitutional. As the Court argued, the law school did not impose racial quotas but rather utilized "a flexible assessment of applicants' talents, experiences, and potential to contribute to the learning of those around them." Race was only one factor contributing to such diversity, and as such, the admissions policy did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

"want special treatment and separate treatment based on their race."⁴³⁵ In her understanding, black students at Michigan are not making claims in defense of their civil rights; rather, they are seeking unfair and unearned advantages over deserving and colorblind whites. In her role as founder of the anti-affirmative action XIV Foundation, which the organization's website says is "Named after the 14th Amendment," Gratz fights on behalf of what she understands to be a proper interpretation of civil rights.⁴³⁶ Speaking to its commitment to colorblindness and opposition to reverse discrimination, the XIV Foundation states that, "For decades, politicians and activists have advanced a destructive narrative on race that permeates all aspects of our politics and culture... that society cannot be equal unless certain minorities are given preferential treatment because of their race."⁴³⁷ On the XIV website, Gratz also appropriates Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Dream" speech, noting that an increasingly colorblind younger generation are "embracing MLK's colorblind dream — equal treatment for all."⁴³⁸

Significantly, Gratz was one of the main organizers behind an anti-affirmative action ballot initiative in Michigan, and in 2006, voters in that state went to the polls and passed, by a margin of 58% to 42%, Proposition 2. Known as the "Michigan Civil Rights Initiative" (MCRI), Proposition 2 amended the state constitution to ban affirmative action. MCRI is effectively a conservative egalitarian law. It declares that both the state of Michigan and its public colleges and universities "shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color,

⁴³⁵ Ann Zaniwski, "Jennifer Gratz, others knock Black Student Union's demands at University of Michigan," *The Detroit Free Press*, Jan. 22, 2014. Online: <http://www.freep.com/article/20140121/NEWS05/301210133/Jennifer-Gratz-Black-Student-Union-affirmative-action> (Accessed June 6, 2014).

⁴³⁶ The XIV Foundation. Online: <http://www.xivfoundation.org>

⁴³⁷ The XIV Foundation. Online: http://www.xivfoundation.org/?page_id=5

⁴³⁸ The XIV Foundation. Online: http://www.xivfoundation.org/?page_id=6

ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting."⁴³⁹ In adopting a language similar to that of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the MCRI explicitly appropriates its authority, authorizing a thin interpretation of colorblindness that removes from view the persistent effects of racial inequality and discrimination, and how these often structure an individual's educational opportunities beginning in childhood.

Seven other states have affirmative action bans similar to the MCRI, and anti-affirmative action activists have been encouraged by the Supreme Court's April 2014 decision upholding the Michigan ban.⁴⁴⁰ The aptly named Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO), a "conservative think tank devoted to issues of race and ethnicity" that works towards a "colorblind society," is one organization seeking to shape public discourse on affirmative action and build momentum for further legal action.⁴⁴¹ Speaking on PBS Newshour one day after the Supreme Court's decision, CEO's Roger Clegg celebrated the decision as a step towards the eradication of "more racial discrimination" of the "politically correct" kind. As Clegg argued, the use of racial preferences in education is both politically motivated and unconstitutional: it treats individuals differently "on the basis of skin color and what country their ancestors came from."⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ "Ending racial double standards," The Center for Individual Rights. Online: <http://www.cir-usa.org/cases/michigan.html> (Accessed June 6, 2014). See also "Proposal 2 Approved Ballot Wording," The Leadership Conference. Online: http://www.civilrights.org/equalopportunity/michigan/proposal_text.html (Accessed June 6, 2014).

⁴⁴⁰ *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action* (April 22, 2014).

⁴⁴¹ CEO Staff, Mission Statement, The Center for Equal Opportunity. Online: <http://www.ceousa.org/about-ceo/mission> (Accessed June 6, 2014).

⁴⁴² PBS Newshour, "How should colleges ensure diversity?" Airdate: April 23, 2014. Transcript Online: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/colleges-ensure-diversity/>

As Clegg continued, the stated goal of affirmative action to increase diversity is "not worth the price of racial discrimination" against whites. Offering a thin colorblind reading of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Clegg argued that the Constitution effectively bans affirmative action, adding that Congress should "go back and clarify that." In contrast, Dennis Parker of the American Civil Liberties Union, arguing on the same program, provided a thicker understanding of colorblindness and equality. As Parker emphasized, race is bound up with history; affirmative action, he added, is intended to address the nation's history of enslavement, segregation, and discrimination. Race thus "goes far beyond just the color of your skin. It deals with opportunities you have. It deals with barriers you have faced. And it's unrealistic to say that you can deal with discrimination by pretending that it doesn't exist."⁴⁴³

While Parker's understanding of race emphasizes its persistent institutional and material dimensions—much like the understanding of race provided by Dr. King and Justice Marshall in his *Milliken* dissent—some Americans believe that racial discrimination does not exist to the extent that it once did. Moreover, the ideology and policy goals of organizations like CRI and the CEO are not necessarily particular to libertarian or conservative institutions. Indeed, opposition to affirmative action is broad and spans partisan divisions. While Democrats in the age of the "Great Recession" have made some electoral gains among white voters outside of the South, Thomas Edsall—now a frequent columnist in the *New York Times*— underlines continued white

⁴⁴³ PBS Newshour, "How should colleges ensure diversity?" Airdate: April 23, 2014. Transcript Online: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/colleges-ensure-diversity/>

opposition to so-called "racial preferences" in college admission and hiring.⁴⁴⁴ Pointing to a 2012 study completed by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), Edsall writes that in both the North and South, a majority of working-class whites believe, in the PRRI's language, "that discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities."⁴⁴⁵ Even some liberal and progressive voices have called for alternatives to race-based preferences in higher education, though they explain that doing so would necessitate "addressing deeply rooted inequalities." That is, a reformed affirmative action would take into account class- as well as race-based inequality.⁴⁴⁶ And it seems that a majority of Americans who oppose affirmative action would support "preferences for low-income" or "economically disadvantaged students" students.⁴⁴⁷ However, despite this formal support for class-based affirmative action, some commentators have cautioned against privileging class over race when discussing alternative remedies.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁴ Thomas B. Edsall, "How Democrats Can Compete for the White Working Class," Opinionator, *The New York Times* (11 March 2014). <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/12/opinion/edsall-how-democrats-can-compete-for-the-white-working-class.html?hp&rref=opinion> (Accessed 15 April 2014). The PRRI study can be found at <http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/WWC-Report-For-Web-Final.pdf> (Accessed June 27 2014).

⁴⁴⁵ Edsall, "How Democrats Can Compete for the White Working Class."

⁴⁴⁶ Richard D. Kahlenberg, "A Better Affirmative Action: State Universities that Created Alternatives to Racial Preferences," A Century Foundation Report, p. 2. Online: <http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-abaa.pdf> (Accessed June 27 2014). Cited in David Leonhardt, "The Liberals Against Affirmative Action," *The New York Times* (March 9 2013). Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/sunday-review/the-liberals-against-affirmative-action.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed June 27 2014).

⁴⁴⁷ Kahlenberg, 6.

⁴⁴⁸ As discussed in Chapter Three, racial segregation in housing and education persists in twenty-first century America; and as Chapter Two demonstrated, this segregation is not merely a problem of class. As Julianne Hing writes of the problems of purely class-based affirmative action, even "When controlled for income, K-12 students of color still lag behind their white peers in academic achievement, as well as in their admission rates to selective colleges." Racial segregation in housing isolates poor children of color from better-performing schools, which ultimately negatively affects their chances of going to college. Julianne Hing, "Class-based

More than twenty years after the publication of *Chain Reaction*, Thomas Edsall continues to write about the country's fraught relationship to race, rights, and taxes in the *Times*, though he no longer uses the concept of conservative egalitarianism to describe topics on American politics which range from affirmative action to the viability of philosophical liberalism⁴⁴⁹ and the persistent electoral puzzle of the "white working class."⁴⁵⁰ Nor does Edsall use the phrase when claiming that an ingrained belief in an "ethos of self-reliance and individual responsibility" remains persistent in American culture.⁴⁵¹ However, reading Edsall's columns, it is clear that he believes that conservative egalitarianism—a fusion of fiscal and racial conservatism that champions merit and colorblindness—continues to influence American politics and discourse.

Describing this widespread belief in "self-reliance," "individual responsibility," and limited government, Edsall writes that in America, "support for economic redistribution has been the exception, not the rule," and he points to the Great Depression and the New Deal as the exception. According to Edsall, the "increased economic

college admissions are no magic wand for keeping schools diverse," *The Guardian* (April 23 2014). Online: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/23/class-based-college-admissions-affirmative-action-race> (Accessed June 27 2014). See also Valerie Strauss, "Why we still need affirmative action for African Americans in college admissions," *The Washington Post* (3 July 2014). Online:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/07/03/why-we-still-need-affirmative-action-for-african-americans-in-college-admissions/>; Sherrilyn A. Ifill, "Race vs. Class: The False Dichotomy," *The New York Times* (13 June 2013). Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/14/opinion/race-vs-class-the-false-dichotomy.html>

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas B. Edsall, "Now What, Liberalism?" Opinionator, *The New York Times* (Jan. 16 2013). Online: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/16/now-what-liberalism/?ref=thomasbedsall&pagewanted> (Accessed Jan. 20 2014).

⁴⁵⁰ Thomas B. Edsall, "White Working Chaos," Campaign Stops, *The New York Times* (June 25, 2012). Online: <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/white-working-chaos/?ref=thomasbedsall&pagewanted> (Accessed Jan. 20 2014).

⁴⁵¹ Thomas B. Edsall, "Does Rising Inequality Make Us Hardhearted?" Opinionator, *The New York Times* (Dec. 10, 2013). Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/11/opinion/does-rising-inequality-make-us-hardhearted.html> (Accessed Jan. 7 2014).

inequality" following the 2008 recession has coincided not with a greater willingness to support greater economic redistribution, but rather with an increasingly fiscally conservative public. As Edsall says of the American ideological mind, though they "are notoriously conflicted in their ideological outlook," over the last twenty years "overall support for liberal, pro-government initiatives has declined." These trends are undoubtedly shaped by race. For example, the opposite opinion holds true for "black and Hispanic voters," who are more likely than whites to back pro-government, pro-redistributive initiatives of the kind that "economic liberals" have proposed.⁴⁵²

Edsall identifies President Obama as one of these economic liberals, a "pro-government" politician seeking to alter the public's racialized perceptions of poverty and inequality. As discussed in Chapter Five, these perceptions are largely shaped by a persistent "underclass myth" that explains poverty by racializing and naturalizing it. As Edsall quotes the president, "'We've got to move beyond the false notion that [inequality] is an issue exclusively of minority concern.'" However, to move beyond this "false notion," the country also has to reject conservative egalitarianism: "a politics," Obama says, "that suggests any effort to address [inequality] in a meaningful way somehow pits the interests of a deserving middle class against those of an undeserving poor in search of handouts."⁴⁵³

According to Edsall, the president remains in a discursive bind, despite his attempts to move beyond conservative egalitarianism. As Edsall writes, when Obama

⁴⁵² Thomas B. Edsall, "Does Rising Inequality Make Us Hardhearted?" When describing Americans' beliefs about the causes of poverty, Edsall notes that most self-described Republicans blame "lack of effort," while most self-described Democrats blame "circumstances." The split is even amongst whites, and most blacks and Hispanics say that one's circumstances cause poverty.

⁴⁵³ Edsall, "Does Rising Inequality Make Us Hardhearted?"

uses "broad terms with liberal ideological connotations like 'inequality,' 'more widely shared' growth and 'decreased mobility,'" he is more likely to come up against stiff public opposition. This may be the case if we believe that the United States is moving more towards a more robust fiscal conservatism, as Edsall projects. As Edsall continues, a more successful rhetorical and policy strategy would embrace a limited "practical liberalism," composed of colorblind "specifics in non-ideological terms" that could appeal to class-based concerns, including "raising the minimum wage, raising tax rates on unearned income, job training, early education." Perhaps affirmative action policies geared towards low-income students would fit this "practical liberalism." Indeed, as a 1997 *New York Times* piece on affirmative action states, the policy's future is dependent on its language —that is, on the ways in which it is "framed": as either a means to address structural racial discrimination and inequality, or as a form of "special preferences" or quotas.⁴⁵⁴ This linguistic effectively represents a contrast between thick and thin visions of colorblindness and equality.

Regardless of his call for a "non-ideological" politics, it seems that for Edsall, the conservative egalitarian project has embedded itself in American institutions and ideologies. Indeed, in his understanding, any hopes for major social and economic redistribution, along the lines of the New Deal, have dimmed. As Edsall claims,

⁴⁵⁴ Sam Howe Verhovek, "The 1997 Elections: Affirmative Action; Referendum in Houston Shows Complexity of Preferences Issue," *New York Times* (6 Nov. 1997). Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/06/us/1997-elections-affirmative-action-referendum-houston-shows-complexity.html>. Cited in Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 261. According to Anderson, while debates around affirmative action in the 1960s "centered on colorblind merit versus racial and sexual preferences to make up for past discrimination," the Reagan era ushered in a new more "simplistic" discourse that contrasted "quotas" and "fairness," "special preferences" and "individual merit." As Anderson further argues, it was this discourse of quotas in the 1980s that "contributed to declining public support for affirmative action programs." (216, my emphasis).

substantive "economic justice" in practice "would require a major upheaval, the likes of which we have not seen for some time."⁴⁵⁵

Though left unsaid by Edsall, I argue that such an upheaval would require major transformations in the ways in which Americans signify equality, as well as race and racial identity. It would require discursive engagement with the country's public memory of racial inequality, one that is sensitive to the intersectional dynamics of race, class, and gender. Put differently, it would necessitate a discursive and symbolic intervention into the ways in which Americans understand and remember slavery, Jim Crow, and the racial exclusions of the New Deal's extension of economic opportunity. Of course, in a country deeply marked by what Thomas McCarthy calls a "diversity of 'subject positions,'"⁴⁵⁶ these remembrances will be politically contested. Noting a lack of "widespread public familiarity with the causal background to contemporary racial problems," McCarthy argues that "a serious upgrading of public memory" on race must call explicit attention to the role of government, as discussed in Chapter Two, in creating and maintaining racial injustice.⁴⁵⁷

I argue that such an "upgrading" necessitates a discursive and symbolic challenge to conservative egalitarianism, and the ways in which it is circulated by activists like Gratz. The Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968, and its influence on the discourses of contemporary labor and civil rights struggles, is one example of such a challenge. In any form of political contestation, signs—like the "citizen-worker," the

⁴⁵⁵ Edsall, "Does Rising Inequality Make Us Hardhearted?"

⁴⁵⁶ Thomas McCarthy, "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery," *Political Theory*, 30, 5 (Oct. 2002): 628. McCarthy cited in Andrew Valls, "Racial Justice, Acknowledgement, and Collective Memory," Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Seattle, Washington (April 17-19, 2014).

⁴⁵⁷ McCarthy, 641.

taxpayer and homeowner, or the "Forgotten Man"—matter: they illuminate the micro-level, discursive processes through which racial inequality is legitimated and challenged. A discursive intervention in this field of contestation must include a recasting of equality and civil rights, as well as the relationship between the individual and the community, and the role and purpose of government. In the contemporary political context of attacks “on egalitarian policies and ideas,” including affirmative action, as well as thin colorblind “liberal accommodations declaring or exhorting to the ‘declining significance of race,’”⁴⁵⁸ this dissertation points us in new theoretical and methodological directions for understanding how racial meaning is created and sustained: in our daily conversations, in our culture, and in our institutions of power.

⁴⁵⁸ Adolph Reed, Jr. “Response to Eric Arnesen,” Whiteness and United States History: An Assessment, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 60 (Fall 2001): 74-75.

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