

# **HEGELIAN POLITICAL HERITAGE IN THE UNITED STATES**

*How Hegel's Political Theory Influenced the Transformation  
of American Freedom and the State in the Twentieth Century*

SENIOR HONORS THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the philosophic and political challenge offered by mid-twentieth century progressivism and liberalism to the prevailing Lockean tradition of individualism and limited government in America. I examine the impact of G. W. F. Hegel's political philosophy — especially his notions of positive liberty and the positive state — on John Dewey, Herbert Croly, and other founding philosophers of the American progressive movement. I explore how this new vision of political development informed the transformational state building efforts and social policies of the New Deal and post-war Liberal Consensus. I show that that despite progressive liberalism's own internal contradictions and powerful conservative opposition, this new governing philosophy established a political heritage, state structures, and policies that survive today.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### The Crisis of Modernity

A free man, wrote English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 *Leviathan*, is “he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindred to doe what he has a will to.”<sup>1</sup> This definition of freedom, which — in the tradition of Oxford political philosopher Isaiah Berlin — will be referred to as negative liberty, sparked throughout Europe a redefinition of proper human interaction, political and civil rights, and society at large. The Enlightenment in Europe brought a new dawn for human freedom, releasing millions from bondage under absolutist monarchs and opening the door to new forms of government, economic development, commerce, science, and philosophy. Pushing back against centuries of subjugation and vassalage, liberal economists judged the rational individual to be motivated purely by self-interest, and in philosophy writers described the ideal government as that which protected the free citizen, but did nothing more. The new governments founded on these ideals were liberal and affirmed that no individual was superior to another in right. Capitalists and industrialists sought to grow the wealth of their nations from the fruits of human labor and ingenuity, the removal of barriers and restraints on commerce, and the seemingly inexhaustible natural resources of Europe and the New World. The key to growth, many argued, was privatization, and as industry consumed urban centers with the rise of factories, private agriculture displaced the free commons of the countryside across Europe. This was not without consequences. At the advent of this industrial age, European society confronted a crisis at the heart of modern life, one intricately linked to the concept of self-oriented negative liberty central to classical liberalism. The Age of Enlightenment had ushered in an era of free thought, technological development, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI.II

wealth. However, with amenity and prosperity came class division and an altogether new form of industrial dependence, an amplified form of beggar destitution divorced from the subsistence poverty of the feudal past. Liberalism, it appeared, was making human society more atomic and less equal, despite its initial advances from under the chains of monarchy and despotism.

### **Political Society Perilously Incomplete**

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, political thinkers including Jean-Jacques Rousseau in France and Thomas Paine in the United States noted that political societies based solely on negative liberty remained perilously incomplete.<sup>2</sup> It was G. W. F. Hegel, however, who offered a uniquely incisive contemporary critique of the crisis of modernity and perhaps the most complete remedy to the problem through the reformulation of the liberal principle of freedom and concept of the state.

Hegel was born in 1770 in Stuttgart, and as valedictorian of his *gymnasium* he went on to train in the Tübingen Seminary where he bunked with eventual philosophers of romanticism and idealism Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schelling. From 1801 to 1807, Hegel lectured on philosophy and metaphysics at Jena, during which time he witnessed Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion and capture of that city in a crushing defeat of the Prussian professional military at the hands of the French Emperor's citizen army.<sup>3</sup> The encounter with Napoleon left a permanent mark on Hegel and his philosophy. He understood and noted the historical importance of the Emperor's conquest of Europe in the continent's modernization.<sup>4</sup> As the principal philosopher of German Idealism, learning from the German Enlightenment traditions of Immanuel Kant and

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<sup>2</sup> Rousseau noted in his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* that unrestrained enlightenment will atomize and lower human kind. Paine noted in *Common Sense* that while the government's aim is protection, what it is protecting is a positive political society.

<sup>3</sup> Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 3

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 62

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Hegel developed a complex system of philosophy treating politics, the individual, religion, metaphysics, history, and what he called *spirit*. It was in Berlin, upon assuming the Chair of Philosophy left vacant by Fichte's 1814 death, that Hegel developed his lectures *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. In what became one of his most important works, the philosopher took note of the atomization occurring within liberal society and the deleterious effects of the resulting economic dependency. "When the activity of civil society is unrestricted, it is occupied internally with *expanding its population and industry*," and as a result the dependent classes created through the specialization of work and division of labor are left unable "to feel and enjoy the wider freedoms, and particularly the spiritual advantages, of civil society."<sup>5</sup> Unable to feed, clothe, or house their people despite rapidly growing industry and national wealth, liberal governments had left society to fend for itself with no checks on the accumulation of wealth by private citizens. Negative liberty without its reciprocal was eating modernity from the inside, and Hegel argued that as a result the "important question of how poverty can be remedied is one which agitates and torments modern societies especially."<sup>6</sup> By promoting human freedom as defined by Hobbes and the state as protector of private commercial rights as the highest goods, liberalism had left the door open for instability, decay and *rabble*, Hegel observed.

### **Hegel's Rabble**

Critical to the self-defeating character of a liberalism founded upon negative liberty were the divergent needs and wills exhibited by free individuals in opposition to those of the social whole. Like his liberal contemporaries, Hegel believed freedom to be the highest good, and he, too, believed the ultimate purpose of political society to be the promotion of freedom. In this thesis,

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<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §243

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, §244

as in the scholarship, Hegel's concept of freedom will be referred to as positive liberty, recognizing the positive needs and capacities of the individual and contrasting its method and goal to those of negative liberty.

In classical liberalism freedom wholly consisted of the notion of "negative freedom," defined succinctly by Berlin in *Four Essays on Liberty* as that freedom which "consists in not being prevented from choosing as I do by other men," and of being free "to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity."<sup>7</sup> This type of liberty was that which Hobbes and foundational liberal thinker John Locke promoted in their political theories. "So far as a man had a power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a man *free*," Locke wrote.<sup>8</sup> This liberty, noted Berlin, results not in a self-conscious mastery of one's self, but a simple drive to be free of the yoke of others. Duty to the state is seen as coercive, arbitrary, and unfree. Negative liberty gives the citizen no fidelity to his fellow man, and only a pure subjective concern for his own wellbeing.

Unlike his contemporaries, Hegel did not view the liberation of human spirit as liberation from restraints upon will, but viewed human freedom as a reciprocal moment composed of "complete interpenetration," that is total harmony between the subjective individual will and the universal.<sup>9</sup> This reciprocity between state and citizen in the concept of right was what Hegel termed "the Idea," and this concept of the reciprocal constitution is the foundation to Hegel's remedy for the crisis of modern life.<sup>10</sup> This is expressed later in *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel reiterated that "everything depends on the unity of the universal and the particular within the state."<sup>11</sup> Centering his philosophy on this grand concept of right allowed Hegel to consider

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<sup>7</sup> Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, 122-131

<sup>8</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 108

<sup>9</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §1

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, §261 A

society as one cohesive unit composed of the harmonic relationship between individuals and their governing structures, to offer a new concept of freedom, and to recast the state as the social entity embodying the Idea.

Liberal governments and societies, Hegel noted of his time, failed to generate within themselves this reciprocity through the neglect of positive liberty, and as a result fell into positions of massive inequality. The dependent industrial poor could not maintain any dignity in their standards of living, their agency and capacity to self-help removed completely by modern society. “When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living,” Hegel wrote, “that feeling of right, integrity, and honor which comes from supporting oneself by one’s own activity and work is lost.”<sup>12</sup> When this happens, “This leads to the creation of a *rabble*.”<sup>13</sup> Here Hegel observed concisely through economics the crisis of modernity which demanded his reciprocal constitution as a remedy. Later in *Philosophy of Right* Hegel explained the Idea in its components, and proposed a method for creating and maintaining unity between the subjective individual and the universal state through educated patriotic individuals, purposeful government, and the mediation of civil organizations.

### **Concrete Freedom**

In Hegel’s model, the state itself stands as the “actuality of concrete freedom” — the actualization of the Idea in its components.<sup>14</sup> As custodian of the universal will of the people, it is essential, Hegel emphasized, that in the constitution of the state “the law of reason should merge with the law of particular freedom, and that [the] particular end should become identical with the universal.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, §244

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, §260

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, §265 A

In the liberal state the particular end was not identical with the universal. In fact the particular end, concerned solely with the acquisition of property and capital, paid no heed to the end of the universal social whole, ultimately leaving the state morally isolated from the body of the people, incapable of finding a value in its existence worth defending from acquisition by another liberal, negative liberty-oriented state. In the liberal model Hegel identified the failure of the state to fulfill the “system of needs.”<sup>16</sup> While the liberal state provides the citizen with a certain “protection for his person and property,” it fails in “consideration for his particular welfare, satisfaction of his substantial essence, and the consciousness and self-awareness of being a member of a whole.”<sup>17</sup> The state must, Hegel argued, take responsibility for the welfare of the people, for without a happy populace the state gives the individual nothing of spiritual substance worth fighting for. Succinctly, “it has often been said that the end of the state is the happiness of its citizens. This is certainly true, for if their welfare is deficient, if their subjective ends are not satisfied, and if they do not find that the state as such is the means to this satisfaction, the state itself stands on insecure footing.”<sup>18</sup>

There are universal needs in a community which are more than the sum of individual needs, those being the defense of the community as a body and the protection of the spiritual entity as a whole, but Hegel emphasized the deep importance of the state as a provider, for he recognized the power of subjectivity to undo imperfectly constructed unity. Without the satisfaction of subjective needs, of individual welfare, not only will citizens have no incentive to defend the state as an abstract entity at the cost of their lives, but there will be no serious, substantial state worth defending. “The state is an organism... the development of the Idea and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, §188

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, §261

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, §265 A

its differences. . . . If [the particular and universal] diverge and the different aspects break free, the unity which the constitution produces is no longer established,” Hegel wrote of the state.<sup>19</sup>

Through this model of the state, a body fusing and uniting the universal and subjective wills, Hegel recast what in classical liberalism was a hollow and self-defeating organism into an embodied, spiritual, meaningful entity with purpose, place, and dignity. Necessary to Hegel’s understanding of the state and to its constitution, was a reformulation of freedom from negative liberty to positive liberty. The subjective, negative approach to what it means to be free as articulated by Hobbes and Locke and explained by Berlin is incompatible with the Hegelian model of the state as the Idea. Hegel, in his argument for a more complete constitution, proposed a reciprocal model of freedom compatible with a universal, welfare-oriented state.

### **The Conditions for Such Freedom**

In modernity, civil society — what Hegel defined as the realm of activity above the family and below the state — is no longer solely familial or provincial, but holistic. “Civil society tears the individual away from family ties, alienates members of the family from one another, and recognizes them as self-sufficient persons,” Hegel wrote in *Philosophy of Right*, explaining how society “substitutes its own soil for the external inorganic nature and paternal soil from which the individual gained his livelihood.”<sup>20</sup> By making demands upon social structures, civil society has both familial claims and duties upon the individual, and vice versa. It is positive freedom which enables the individual to make claims of right upon society — a concept for Hegel wherein civil society is a nurturing force and a provider as the family would be, within which the citizen has the freedom to become their own master in a fundamentally self-conscious manner. “Thus,”

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, §269 A

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, §238

Hegel continued, “the individual becomes a *son of civil society*, which has as many claims upon him as he has rights in relation to it.”<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the negative freedom, Hegel’s “concrete” positive freedom permits the individual not simply freedom from constraint, but freedom to actualize the self through reciprocal right and duty with the social whole. “The state is the actuality of concrete freedom,” Hegel wrote, “but concrete freedom requires that personal individuality and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition of their right* for itself, and that they should... *pass over* of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and... knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest as their own.”<sup>22</sup> Previously, I quoted Hegel’s list of the physical and spiritual benefits a citizen receives from membership in civil society and a state. Omitting a crucial part, I emphasized the welfare responsibilities of the state, but the concept would be incomplete without noting the reciprocity on the part of the citizen required to achieve this outcome, the balance of right and duty between individual and state. The full passage comes at the end of §261 of *Philosophy of Right*:

The abstract aspect of duty consists simply in disregarding and excluding particular interests as an inessential and even unworthy moment. But if we consider [the Idea] we can see that the moment of particularity is also essential, and that its satisfaction is therefore entirely necessary; in the process of fulfilling his duty, the individual must somehow attain his own interest and satisfaction or settle his own account, and from his situation within the state, a right must accrue to him whereby the universal cause becomes *his own particular cause*. Particular interests should certainly not be set aside, let alone suppressed; on the contrary, they should be harmonized with the universal, so that both they themselves and the universal are preserved. The individual, whose duties give him the status of subject, finds that, in fulfilling his duties as a citizen, he gains protection for his person and property, consideration for his particular welfare, satisfaction of his substantial essence, and the consciousness and self-awareness of being a member of a whole. And through his performance of his duties and tasks undertaken on behalf of the state, the state itself is preserved and secured.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, §260

In so many words Hegel identifies, in opposition to Hobbes and Locke, that what is to be free is to self-actualize one's reality of subjective particular interests, and only within the context of the state is this self-actualization possible in the modern age. That anarchy would be no solution for bodily security liberalism correctly observes, but spiritual security, too, is enhanced by proper membership in a reciprocally constituted social body. Hegel's philosophy of freedom is one in harmony with the "Idea" at the root of his reasoning, and a concept of positive freedom is truly necessary for the actualization of such a constitutional notion. Without subjective actualization, both material and spiritual, the state would have no purpose. As he reiterates in the addition just several lines later, "everything depends on the unity of the universal and the particular within the state."<sup>23</sup> And, "the determinations of the will of the individual acquire an objective existence through the state, and it is only through the state that they attain their truth and actualization."<sup>24</sup>

### **Hegel's Method**

Having identified the two core reformulations of modernity in Hegel's thought, the turn to positive freedom and the recasting of the state, it is necessary to examine his proposed method. The clear and enumerated goal of the constitutional state for Hegel was the unification of subjective satisfaction and actualization with universal ends — those holistic community needs such as the public defense.

To achieve this unity, the philosopher proposed mediating organizations: corporations. Put simply, Hegelian corporations are neither medieval guilds nor the loose civil associations emphasized by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, but divisions of civil society where "work" is "divided into different branches according to its particular nature."<sup>25</sup> Though

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, §261 A

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, §251

similar to a guild in that it is tied to a trade or type of work, and may “admit members in accordance with their objective qualification of skill,” the corporation does not end at the commercial protection of a group of associated particular individuals, but in a “concrete” expression of a universal end, “no wider in scope than the end inherent in the trade.”<sup>26</sup>

The corporation is the modern replacement and augment for the family, in many ways, Hegel wrote, and it is responsible for maintaining the welfare of its members, educating them in trade and citizenship, and ensuring their ability to self-actualize as subjective individuals. In this way, the corporation is not simply a protective trade association, but a community within which the individual discovers “their essential self-consciousness in social institutions as that *universal* aspect of their particular interests which has being in itself, and [obtains] through these institutions an occupation and activity directed towards a universal end within a corporation.”<sup>27</sup> As a mediating entity, the corporation places the subjective within the context of the universal, albeit a smaller universal unity than that expressed by the state, and inculcates in the individual an appreciation for this larger spiritual unity.

Further, corporations in Hegel’s Idea are mechanically mediating, too. Not only abstract engines pulling individuality and universality together, corporations are politically responsible in the state. “These institutions together form the *constitution*... and they are therefore the firm foundation of the state and of the trust and disposition of individuals toward it,” Hegel wrote.<sup>28</sup> The corporation is a political entity within Hegel’s constitution of the state, an interest group responsible for elevating the particular to the height of state decision making.

Hegelian corporations in concept are thus responsible in one direction for the spiritual and material translation of the particular into the universal, that is elevating the needs of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, §251 & §252

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, §264

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, §265

individuals to the notice of the state within the context of the association, and in another direction are spiritually responsible for the provision of conditions for the self-actualization of its members, and for bringing the universal down to the level of the individual both as a spiritual patriotic concept and as material welfare. The corporation was for Hegel the vehicle for spiritual and material unity, reciprocity, and mediation between the ends of the universal and the ends of the subjective.

Believing the liberal order deficient in this specific element, Hegel made a point of highlighting the imperfection of agglomerated particularity as was seen in emergent democracies, constitutional monarchies, and republics of the day. Without activation of the spiritual whole, participatory government would fail as the particular would be interested only in the particular. This, Hegel warned, was a core flaw in the supposed universality of enlightened liberal principles; a constitution must be spiritually constructed from the fabric of the state, not replicated from a theoretically universal model. Giving the example of Spain under the Napoleonic constitution, Hegel wrote that the Spanish “rejected it as something alien, because they were not sufficiently cultivated. The constitution of a nation must embody the nation’s feeling for its rights and present condition; otherwise it will have no meaning or value.”<sup>29</sup>

In dissecting his contemporary political situation Hegel concluded that modes of state and notions of freedom were deficient in their execution and definition, and proposed a more harmonious, idealist constitutional model, which he termed the Idea. Through the self-actualization of the individual, the self-conscious civil society, the provision of welfare, corporate associations, and the unity of particular and universal ends, Hegel saw a path toward the amelioration of the crisis of modernity. He saw a path toward the elimination of industrial poverty, that indignant condition he presciently claimed would cause rabble and spiritual dissent

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, §274 A

within the state. Through harmony Hegel envisioned a dignified, secure, and positively free modern state.

### **Hegel's Influence in America**

Hegel's ideas and theory in *Philosophy of Right* decisively influenced the development of subsequent political and philosophical traditions, not just in Europe, but in America, notably the logical historicism and social theory of the St. Louis Hegelians, the pragmatic pluralism of John Dewey, the national education, unity, and promise of Herbert Croly, and as a result the progressive movement in twentieth century America more broadly. Titans of progressive thinking and action in America were directly influenced by Hegel's political theory, particularly his *Philosophy of Right*, and through their social, political, and academic work sought to redefine freedom in the United States as positive and recast the state as reciprocal. In this thesis I will turn to Hegel's model of the constitutional state in analyzing the rise and fall of progressive thought and governance in the United States of America throughout the twentieth century

Though at the time of Hegel's writing the American situation differed substantially from that of Europe, the Hegelian current made a substantial impact upon progressive development and the formation of an actualized, self-conscious state in America in the twentieth century. Hegel notes in the *Philosophy of History* that "North America will be comparable with Europe only after the immeasurable space which that country presents to its inhabitants shall begun to be occupied, and the members of the political body shall have begun to be pressed back on each other."<sup>30</sup> Guarded by the Atlantic ocean from the weaponized, industrial nations of Europe, the United States contended with politically and militarily weak colonies and native nations on the American continent, and had no need for a standing army for many years. Poverty was

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<sup>30</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 86

ameliorated as soon as it arose by dispersing excess population into the vast and fertile western reserve. Spared for a century from the crisis of modernity, American civilization had no need for corporatism or the development of a serious welfare state until the closing of the western frontier.

It is from this point that I analyze the progress and development of the American state in Hegelian terms, and examine the impact of Hegel's thought on that development through the twentieth century progressive movement. Progressive, in this thesis, refers to the body of political thought and governance emphasizing positive liberty and right rather than the negative. Though the St. Louis Hegelians, explicit in their goal to bring Hegel to America in the mid-to-late the nineteenth century, viewed their own moment as "world-historical" and their own city as an American Jena, it is with the closing of the frontier, the rise of John Dewey as a great American philosopher, and the publication of *The Promise of American Life* by Herbert Croly in 1909 that I begin my analysis of the progressive movement in the United States.<sup>31</sup> I mention the St. Louis Movement only as it pertains to Dewey and Croly, setting the stage not for making America Hegelian, but for making Hegel American.

In this thesis I will trace the influence of Hegel through his first advocates and the foundation of the progressive movement to the establishment of a durable Hegelian heritage in the American liberal state. The St. Louis Movement poured the foundation for Dewey and Croly through their promotion of Hegel in the Harvard curriculum and as gatekeepers and editors for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Dewey and Croly, respectively, took from Hegel different principal elements, the first being a pragmatic pluralism and recognition of the diverse subjectivity to be promoted within a state, and the second being the national promise resulting from a unity, education, and public consciousness which values the entire community. Hegelian principles, made American by pragmatic pluralism and national democracy, developed in

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<sup>31</sup> Good, "A 'World-Historical Idea,'" 453

progressive politics through Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom and Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism. Following the emergence of a truly national crisis during the Great Depression, these American Hegelian currents of pragmatic pluralism and national unity fused under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. The new progressive liberalism that emerged, defined by national experimentation, was crucial in recasting the role of the state as a reciprocal institution and reformulating freedom in America as positive. The progressivism which grew from Dewey and Croly's Americanization of Hegel came to an apogee during the Liberal Consensus. Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson sought to extend the principle of positive freedom to all in the state. Facing racial tensions which traced their roots to America's founding and the reality that poverty was not solely an issue of economics, but of justice, progressivism during the Liberal Consensus strained against entrenched and unequal institutions, and over time the tightly-bound strands of pluralism and national unity came loose. With the election of Richard Nixon, progressivism as a governing philosophy in the United States was in retreat, but it had left its mark. How did Hegel's political theory come to influence the redefinition of government and freedom in America through the progressive movement, and what led to its unravelling? Was the redefinition of freedom and recasting of the state in America successful, even as progressives fell from power? In the following chapters I will strive to answer these questions as I chart the line of philosophical intent, influence, and meaning through America's twentieth century progressive movement and governing liberal order.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Crumbling of the Jeffersonian Order

#### American Jena

Though the St. Louis Philosophical Society was active “from approximately 1858 to 1880,” well before the closing of the western frontier, the work of William Harris, Henry Brokmeyer, Denton Snider, and George Howison in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and at The Concord School of Philosophy, Washington University at St. Louis, and Harvard University laid the necessary Hegelian foundations upon which John Dewey and Herbert Croly constructed their distinctly American philosophies of pragmatic pluralism and active national unity.<sup>32</sup>

Brokmeyer, a German immigrant well-read in Hegel and dedicated to translating his *Logic* into English, met Harris, a St. Louis schoolteacher and eventual United States Commissioner on Education, in 1858. The two worked together to build the St. Louis Literary and Philosophical Society, a collection of reading groups dedicated to Hegel and other idealist philosophers that was part of a wider St. Louis Movement among intellectuals, artists, and educators.<sup>33</sup> St. Louis in the middle of the nineteenth century was at the edge of the West, connecting the intellectual, industrious East with the individualist, free-spirited frontier. Missouri, a Union slave state, was an important theater for the Civil War and its citizens were fiercely divided over issues of civil and natural rights. Both Brokmeyer and Harris served the Union in the war, and reigniting their association following the conflict, they founded the St. Louis Philosophical Society in 1866. Along with other members of the Society including the group’s self-described historian Snider, they began publishing the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, the first English-language journal in the United States dedicated to philosophy

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 447

<sup>33</sup> Jensen and Kaag, “The American Reception of Hegel (1830–1930),” 7

“without a specific theological agenda.”<sup>34</sup> There was, however, an agenda, and that was the dissemination of Hegelian thought in the American intellectual sphere.

Brokmeyer, Harris and Snider saw the critical position of St. Louis in the Civil War and on the American Frontier as “world-historical;” they likened their experiences during the war to Hegel’s time in Jena during the Napoleonic conquest, observing the transformation of America from *these* United States to *the* United States.<sup>35</sup> The St. Louis Hegelians took to heart Hegel’s words in his *Philosophy of History* that “America is therefore the land of the future, where in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World’s History shall reveal itself,” though political theorist and Hegel scholar George Armstrong Kelly later noted this interpretation “takes an unwarranted liberty with Hegel’s text.”<sup>36</sup> They believed the future had come, and with it the responsibility to educate American society on their World-Historical duty. Though Brokmeyer was infatuated with *Logic*, the group read many of Hegel’s works, including *The Philosophy of History* and *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel, the society believed, offered unique solutions to a changing America on the brink of taking its place in world-history. The St. Louis Hegelians focused on the national idea, appropriating “Hegel’s thought to make sense of their experience [in the Civil War] and to develop a philosophy which would temper the ‘adamant individualism’ of the antebellum period and promote gradual reform of social institutions.”<sup>37</sup> Education, they believed, needed to be more rigorous in order to generate social unity among Americans. The subjects of positive liberty, social and ethical pluralism, the importance of national education in patriotism and national unification, and the unity between the subjective and objective wills in society were crucial to the St. Louis Hegelians’ understanding of Hegel and their mission to

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<sup>34</sup> Good, “A ‘World-Historical Idea,’” 447-448

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 453

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 86; Kelly, “Hegel’s America,” 3

<sup>37</sup> Good, “A ‘World-Historical Idea,’” 448

bring his philosophy to American higher education and society. On the issue of slavery, notably, the St Louis Hegelians, with the exception of the racist Brokmeyer, subscribed to Hegel's theory of positive liberty and believed that the absence of restraints and oppression alone would not create conditions of freedom between the races in America, a prescient notion which would be taken up by later pluralists in the progressive tradition.<sup>38</sup> The same subjects, as a result of their advocacy, became core elements of Dewey's lifelong experimental pragmatism and Croly's New Nationalism.

The *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* became the "mouthpiece for Classical American pragmatism," John Kaag and Kipton Jensen wrote, and "Harris, as editor of the journal, was the gatekeeper of professional philosophy in the United States and demanded that contributing authors come to terms with Hegel."<sup>39</sup> One of the authors who contributed to the *Journal* was John Dewey. Though he credits much of his Hegelianism to his studies under George Morris at Johns Hopkins, Dewey acknowledged that he was "ignorant of Hegel" when corresponding with Harris.<sup>40</sup> He was required to become familiar with Hegel as a result, and Harris even advised Dewey on the pursuit of graduate studies in philosophy.<sup>41</sup> The *Journal* and Harris's editorial purview made an impact not only on Dewey, but on philosophy and education across the nation. The periodical was read widely in the East, including by leading transcendentalists Amos Bronson Alcott and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The St. Louis Hegelians, particularly Harris and Snider, made a "a profound impression" upon Alcott and Emerson, and the two made multiple visits to the St. Louis Philosophical Society in the 1860s, with Emerson coming to speak to the group "on three separate

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 451

<sup>39</sup> Jensen and Kaag, "The American Reception of Hegel (1830–1930)," 10

<sup>40</sup> Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 383

<sup>41</sup> Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 383

occasions.”<sup>42</sup> In his historical essay “The West Moves East” Snider describes the eventual breakup of the St. Louis Hegelians, with Brokmeyer’s retreat into the wilderness for a hunter’s life, and Harris’s move to the Concord School of Philosophy in Concord, Massachusetts, run by Alcott.<sup>43</sup> Snider, too, moved to Concord, and from 1879 to 1888 the two Hegelians introduced the eastern intellectual elite to the study of Hegel, particularly *The Philosophy of History* and *Philosophy of Right*. Being “most attracted to Hegel’s thought as a philosophy of cultural and national unification,” the St. Louis Hegelians brought a “rigor” to philosophy first in the West, then in the East, that they “found lacking among eastern intellectuals.”<sup>44</sup> Educators from Harvard and other eastern schools frequented the Concord School, including Hegelian educator and philosopher George Howison, a friend of Harris’ and member of the St. Louis Philosophical Society.

Howison left his post as a Professor of Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis in 1872 to accept a professorship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In St. Louis, as in his previous post at the University of California at Berkeley, Howison brought German idealist rigor to the philosophy curriculum. Later, a frequent visitor to the Concord School and acquaintance of Alcott and Emerson, he was elected as an overseer at Harvard, where Herbert Croly enrolled as a student in 1886 and 1895.<sup>45</sup> Once there, Kaag and Jenson wrote, Howison “ensured that Hegel would have a serious hearing at the University.”<sup>46</sup>

The St. Louis Hegelians — particularly Brokmeyer, Harris, Snider, and Howison — brought a rigor and focus to American philosophy curricula in the East and the West, and dedicated themselves to introducing American thinkers to the social and political theory of

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<sup>42</sup> Good, “A ‘World-Historical Idea,’” 448-449

<sup>43</sup> Snider, “The West Moves East,” 345

<sup>44</sup> Good, “A ‘World-Historical Idea,’” 449-450

<sup>45</sup> Croly took leave from Harvard temporarily to care for his ailing father.

<sup>46</sup> Jensen and Kaag, “The American Reception of Hegel (1830–1930),” 11

Hegel, emphasizing national unity and philosophy, world-history as Hegel saw it, pluralism, pragmatism, education, and ultimately positive liberty. Though not truly members of the progressive movement which emerged in the twentieth century, the St. Louis Hegelians meet this thesis' definition of progressive as theorists dedicated to positive right, and their influence upon the work and education of Dewey and Croly, who more than any other American philosophers of their age adapted Hegelian thinking to the politics and society of the United States at the dawn of the progressive era, is undeniable.

Facing a Lockean tradition of individualism and negative freedom defended by an intentionally deadlocked federal government, Dewey and Croly took different philosophical paths to bring positive freedom to the state and break the stranglehold of federal inaction. Dewey looked to the roots of the nation, and pluralism; Croly sought to make one branch of the federal government stronger, and bring national change from above. Their respective roles and philosophical tactics in the movement that recast the state and reformulated the meaning of freedom in America will be turned to next.

### **Pragmatism and Pluralism**

Born in Burlington, Vermont in 1859, Dewey lived for almost a century through the Civil War to the Cold War, dying in New York City in 1952. Committed to “democracy as a way of life,” the most cited American philosopher in the twentieth century, and the cofounder of the pragmatist movement, Dewey was undeniably influential, during his life penning dozens of books and hundreds of articles.<sup>47</sup> Studying philosophy as an undergraduate at the University of Vermont, Dewey went on to study Hegel under George Morris at Johns Hopkins before embarking on an

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<sup>47</sup> Stuhr, “Dewey’s Pragmatic Politics: Power, Limits, and Realism About Democracy as a Way of Life;” Fesmire, *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey*; Gouinlock, “John Dewey: American Philosopher and Educator.”

academic career of his own.<sup>48</sup> “The ’eighties and ’nineties were a time of new ferment in English thought; the reaction against atomic individualism and sensationalistic empiricism was in full swing,” Dewey wrote in his 1930 autobiographical essay “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” in which he discussed his original infatuation with the Hegelian system, and his eventual drift from it.<sup>49</sup> “It was impossible that a young impressionable student, unacquainted with any system of thought that satisfied his head and heart, should not have been deeply affected” by Hegel, he wrote, but though Hegel “supplied a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving,” Dewey found himself over the next fifteen years becoming disenchanted with a “form” and “schematism” which seemed increasingly “artificial.”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Dewey wrote, “Hegel has left a permanent deposit on my thinking,” and “were it possible for me to be a devotee of any system, I still should believe that there is greater richness and greater variety of insight in Hegel than in any other single systematic philosopher.”<sup>51</sup> Dewey acknowledged in Hegel a *meaning* that would not ultimately be replaced in his thought by any other philosopher. Ultimately, perhaps as a result of the passing away of the frontier and the new dawn of industry in America, the unity Dewey craved would be found in pragmatism, a field of philosophy he helped develop, and in the idea that things “are contingent, unstable, temporal, and, thus, temporary.”<sup>52</sup> “The only thing permanent, for pragmatists,” Dewey scholar John Stuhr wrote, “is impermanence.”<sup>53</sup>

This conviction, fused with the “far reaching integration” of Hegel, was crucial to Dewey’s philosophical synthesis. Dewey’s democratic pragmatism emphasized participation, reciprocity, positive right, and education. Unlike the St. Louis Hegelians, Dewey’s primary

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<sup>48</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 384

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 385

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 385-387

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 387

<sup>52</sup> Stuhr, “Dewey’s Pragmatic Politics: Power, Limits, and Realism About Democracy as a Way of Life.”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

contribution to American philosophy was not to be a direct application of Hegel's system to the American experience, but instead an Americanization of Hegel's thought as relevant to the mounting crisis of modernity emerging in the twentieth century. Such new norms, he believed, demanded experimentation. "His commitment to experimental inquiry and his commitment to democratic culture mutually implicate one another," Stuhr wrote, and as Dewey developed his philosophy, democracy was necessarily "first and foremost a way of life."<sup>54</sup>

Democracy as a way of life, for Dewey, was a method of addressing the impermanence he accepted as a tenet of pragmatism — a good necessary for philosophical and political experimentalism, and an ethical necessity to value the reciprocal, positive right of the individual to have a hand in the goings-on of the state. As Hegel wrote that the "state is not a work of art; it exists in the world, and hence in the sphere of arbitrariness, contingency, and error," and that the "state is the sole precondition of the attainment of particular ends and welfare," so Dewey believed no one permanent model of law and institutions could govern a people given the impermanence and contingency of temporal existence.<sup>55</sup> Constant reciprocity and interchange was necessary. Hegel wrote that the universal and particular must be activated in each other for the constitution of the state to attain its full development, to overcome inevitable contingent situations, and to guarantee right and freedom to the citizens. Hegel proposed the corporation as the political and ethical method to achieve this unity and reciprocity. Dewey synthesized his similar position in 1927, writing:

From the standpoint of the individual, it [the idea of democracy] consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §258 A & §261 A

potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. . . . Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. . . . Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by [all], there is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.<sup>56</sup>

This way of thinking pervades Dewey's writings, Stuhr noted.<sup>57</sup> The link between democratic mores, democratic politics, democratic education, and democratic communities is strong. What Dewey calls democratic is quite Hegelian, and quite pluralistic. Writing that education "sees the positive element in everything" when it comes to the patriotic state, Dewey, like Hegel, understood there to be a strong "link between sound democracy and sound education."<sup>58</sup> That link in Dewey's thinking recognizes the same concept as Hegel's passing over of "personal individuality" into the "interest of the universal."<sup>59</sup> The first of two principles drawn from this, Dewey wrote, was "the opportunity, the right and the duty of every individual to form some conviction and to express some conviction regarding his own place in the social order, and the relations of that social order to his own welfare."<sup>60</sup>

Though some took Hegel's writings on education, participation, and national patriotism to mean the need for a homogeneous social body, Dewey instead integrated the uniquely American theory of cultural pluralism into his body of work — perhaps noting Hegel's commitment to tolerance — recognizing the importance of cultural conflict to create unity and describing himself in 1937 as a pluralist.<sup>61</sup> Thus Dewey's second principle integrates with Hegel

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<sup>56</sup> Stuhr, "Dewey's Pragmatic Politics: Power, Limits, and Realism About Democracy as a Way of Life."

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 299

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 298

<sup>59</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §260

<sup>60</sup> Stuhr, "Dewey's Pragmatic Politics: Power, Limits, and Realism About Democracy as a Way of Life."

<sup>61</sup> Eisele, "Dewey's Concept of Cultural Pluralism," 151; Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270

the American concept of natural political equality: “the fact that each individual counts as one and one only on an equality with others, so that the final social will comes about as the cooperative expression of the ideas of many people.” Emphasizing these concepts of pragmatic democracy and cultural pluralism together, Christopher Eisele noted in *Education Theory* in 1983, Dewey “believed cultural pluralism was a necessary condition for America to fulfil its promise.”<sup>62</sup> Dewey believed the pluralist right to disagree and think freely so important to democratic fulfillment that he aided in the work that would lead to the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1920.<sup>63</sup>

Like the progressives who would follow, Dewey believed positive liberty and right to be the proper alternative to the negative individualism prevalent in America. He took from Hegel the feeling, rather than the form, of his philosophy. A democratic society, he argued, would promote the positive, self-affirming principle in both the individual and in government. Because “anti-democratic habits of individuals are the result of anti-democratic education,” Stuhr wrote, Dewey believed a positive “democratic way of life requires a democratic conception of education — and institutions, practices, and policies that serve and advance this conception.”<sup>64</sup> He envisioned an active government, engaged in the needs and wills of a diverse group of citizens all united not by one culture, but by one conviction: a democratic promise.

Dewey lived through Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, the New Nationalism and New Freedom, the New Era, the New Deal, and into the Cold War and Liberal Consensus. His work on education, democracy, and pluralism was profoundly impactful, and he was read by social workers, academics, and politicians consistently for over half a century. His pragmatism was an influence on the political and legal work of Louis Brandeis, Woodrow Wilson, George Norris,

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<sup>62</sup> Eisele, “Dewey’s Concept of Cultural Pluralism,” 156

<sup>63</sup> Gibbon, “John Dewey: Portrait of a Progressive Thinker.”

<sup>64</sup> Stuhr, “Dewey’s Pragmatic Politics: Power, Limits, and Realism About Democracy as a Way of Life.”

Rexford Tugwell, Adolf Berle, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman. He influenced collectivists, planners, pragmatists, and liberals. Dewey's pragmatic pluralism, then, was one current present at the beginning of an age of redefinition, an age wherein the role of the state in society was recast and the meaning of freedom in America was radically reformulated. I turn next to the work of Dewey's contemporary and the source of the other current, Croly.

### **Hegelian Democratic Federalism**

“If I were attempting anything like an appraisal of Herbert Croly I should say, I think, that he was the first important political philosopher who appeared in America in the twentieth century,” wrote journalist Walter Lippmann in a 1930 article for *The New Republic*, the progressive publication cofounded by Croly nearly twenty years earlier.<sup>65</sup> Lippmann was referring not only to the impact of *The New Republic*, which had over the course of its life thus far become a mouthpiece of the progressive movement, but also to the synthetic work of political philosophy Croly published in 1909, *The Promise of American Life*. Less prolific than Dewey, and shorter lived — he died in 1930, Lippman's appraisal appearing shortly after his death — Croly was no less influential at the beginning of the progressive era. Croly, too, recognized a seismic shift occurring in America with the “close of our pioneer period” and the dawn of a “new industrialized and commercial age,” as Dewey put it.<sup>66</sup> Educated at Harvard under a transcendentalist, pragmatist, and Hegelian curriculum, Croly was particularly fascinated and concerned with the dawn of this new era.

Focusing on the need for national unity, patriotism, and education to fulfill the promise of freedom and self-actualization synonymous with America, Croly emphasized pluralism less than

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<sup>65</sup> Lippmann, “Notes for a Biography.”

<sup>66</sup> Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” 384

Dewey, and what he termed a New Nationalism, or a “New National Democracy,” more.<sup>67</sup> Crystallizing more than many others of his time the sense of newness pervading America at the turn of the century and the need to reevaluate core governing principles, Croly opened *Promise* with a question. “Americans talk of their country as a Land of Promise,” Croly wrote, but “how will this promise be fulfilled?... Will it fulfill itself, or does it imply certain responsibilities?”<sup>68</sup> In answering such a question, Croly’s synthesis turned upon a sharp comparison and integration of the Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian traditions in America, a strong democratic culture, and an active presidency which in many ways served the purpose in American society that Hegel’s corporate groups would in his ideal constitution, that of generating reciprocity and activating the universal in the particular citizen. Here I examine Croly’s role in synthesizing American traditions of federalism and democracy with Hegel’s political thought, formulating a renewed American political formula in Hegelian democratic federalism.

“Croly’s *Promise* was written at a time when ‘the social problem’ was making its first hard impact on our politics,” Samuel Beer wrote in his “Liberalism and the National Idea,” and crucial to Croly’s remedy to the crisis of modernity America faced was his understanding of the “two-fold nature of American liberalism” in his interpretation of American political history.<sup>69</sup> Placing emerging struggles within the framework of diverging strains of American constitutional tradition, Croly provided Hegelian answers to pressing questions of national purpose and “fruitful liberty” while staying true to the American principle of democratic self-government.<sup>70</sup> A Jeffersonian tradition and a Hamiltonian tradition animated American political development, Croly wrote. Jefferson, in the tradition of Locke, argued for an established a strong legacy of

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<sup>67</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 68

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>69</sup> Beer, “Liberalism and the National Idea,” 71

<sup>70</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 42

individualism and negative freedom in the United States. Hamilton's advocacy of federalism, unity, and national economy established the seed of a political tradition of positive freedom, which Croly and other later progressives would tap into when wedding Hegel to the American state. The "enduring tension between 'the principle of nationality' and 'the principle of democracy,'" Beer noted, was core to Croly's understanding of contemporary issues of inequity, loss of national purpose, and stagnating opportunity.<sup>71</sup> This can be seen in Croly's assertion that the "first phase of American history was characterized by the conflict between the Federalists and the Republicans."<sup>72</sup> Republican, Lockean principles, with the legacy of Thomas Jefferson and subsequently Andrew Jackson, ultimately won the first victory, Croly notes, leading to almost a century of an individualist, atomist, Jeffersonian democratic order.

Neither group was completely right in their assertion of a perfect American vision and promise. Each held ideas key to unlocking the promise of freedom and actualization in America. The insight of the early Federalists, Croly wrote, was to "anticipate the kind of government their country needed."<sup>73</sup> Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and their contemporaries in the Federalist movement believed that the essential condition for "fruitful liberty" — positive freedom — was an "efficient central government. They knew no government could be efficient unless its powers equaled its responsibilities."<sup>74</sup> Hamilton realized that "diversified activity and a well-rounded social and economic life brings with it national balance and security," and within the context of his education in European philosophy and Hegelian idealism, Croly notes "no fault" with the "implications of Hamilton's Federalism."<sup>75</sup> Much as Hegel wrote that the "individual attains his right only by becoming the citizen of a good state," and that a "human

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<sup>71</sup> Beer, "Liberalism and the National Idea," 71

<sup>72</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 64

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 43

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 42

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 48-89; Noble, "Herbert Croly and American Progressive Thought," 541

being has rights so far as he has duties, and duties so far as he has rights,” Croly emphasizes the necessity of the national idea put forward by the early Federalists in achieving individual actualization.

Jeffersonian democracy, on the other hand, emphasized participation at a local level and largely negative right when it came to the scope of national government. Liberty to Jefferson was the freedom to do what one would do as long as it did not infringe on the liberty of others, exactly the sort of liberty denied the American colonists under English rule. Croly saw in Jefferson’s legacy the atomization of the body politic, rather than its unification, through the principles of localized democracy and negative liberty. It was a two-pronged tradition which resulted in a national party, and Jefferson’s, an “anti-national or ‘provincial’ party [which tended] to be ‘democratic.’”<sup>76</sup> Democratic principles alone left Americans with a system of “vigorous, licensed, and purified selfishness” and “collective responsibility” that lacked “intellectual integrity” and denied the citizen political actualization and a totality of rights while affording him the full account of negative freedom.<sup>77</sup> Provincialism gave rise to issues of right including slavery, and issues of institutional weakness, including in finance, commerce, and education.

Observing the longstanding issues which arose from a division between negative liberty and individualism on one hand and the national idea and positive actualization on the other, Croly recognized the imperative to unite the divergent American traditions of Jefferson and Hamilton and develop an active principle of national democracy.

“Croly's thinking, far more than the ideas of most progressives [of his time], was heavily influenced by European patterns,” historian Eric Goldman wrote in his 1952 history of the progressive movement, *Rendezvous with Destiny*.<sup>78</sup> He is right, not just for noting Croly’s

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<sup>76</sup> Beer, “Liberalism and the National Idea,” 72

<sup>77</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §153 & §155; Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 60-62

<sup>78</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 192

background studying and applying German philosophic patterns and traditions, but because the particular form of Federalist-Democratic unity Croly suggests in a New Nationalism is one which meets the demands for the energetic, reciprocal, national, and free state Hegel outlines in *Philosophy of Right*.

Uniting these strands in government and institutions, Croly took a different approach from Hegel. Constructing massive social organizations, or corporations, was not a viable solution to issues of reciprocity between universal and individual in the United States. To deal with “the social problem” Croly turned to Theodore Roosevelt and the Republican party to generate “vigorous national action,” and mobilize the population of the United States around their national promise and purpose.<sup>79</sup> “What Mr. Roosevelt really did was to revive the Hamiltonian ideal of constructive national legislation,” Croly wrote in *Promise*, and “the whole tendency of his programme is to give a democratic meaning and purpose to the Hamiltonian tradition and method.”<sup>80</sup> The presidency was to be the institution providing a direct relationship between the people and the state. Ultimately it would be the Democratic Party which took up the banner of progressive nationalization, the mandate of the democratic public embodied in the mobilizing force of Franklin Roosevelt. The idea of “using the authority of the national government to deal with problems that had previously been left to state or local government, or had not been dealt with at all,” and to place the mandate of the will of the people in the one office elected by all, the Presidency, was a core redefinition of government in Croly’s work.<sup>81</sup>

The essence of Croly’s landmark *The Promise of American Life* was the demand for national unity empowered by both democratic and federalist principles. The presidency, serving as the engine to elevate the particular will to the universal and communicate the universal to the

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<sup>79</sup> Beer, “Liberalism and the National Idea,” 75

<sup>80</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 207-208

<sup>81</sup> Beer, “Liberalism and the National Idea,” 75

particular individual, would unite these divergent American traditions in a Hegelian form: a Hegelian Democratic Federalism. Thinkers, journalists, economists, planners, and politicians who followed would lean into this idea of national democracy, especially Theodore Roosevelt who avidly subscribed to Croly's message, adopting the phrase "the New Nationalism" and bearing the standard of the Progressive Party in the 1912 presidential election. Like Dewey, Croly brought Hegelian thinking to an interpretation of American political life, extracting from that philosopher's work not a system, but a feeling. Where Dewey emphasized pluralism, Croly in turn emphasized the national idea. Croly's impact was not limited to *The Promise of American Life*, for together with Lippmann and other early progressives, he advanced the narrative of divergent political traditions and a need for a new, active and national democratic order in *The New Republic*. The magazine was widely read by academics, lawyers and politicians like Tugwell, Brandeis, Berle, Wilson, Norris and both Roosevelts. The following two decades after the publication of *Promise* were characterized by a political effort within the progressive movement not only to redefine the state as reciprocal and freedom as positive, but to unite in action the two distinctive Hegelian prongs of progressive theory put forth by Dewey and Croly.

### **First Attempts**

Facing growing poles of poverty and concentrated wealth, the election of 1912 was a referendum on the future, at the time embodied by a the contest between former president and Progressive Party candidate Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism, the ethos and name drawn straight from *The Promise of American Life*, and academic-turned politician Woodrow Wilson's pragmatic, democratic New Freedom. Aiming to synthesize the pragmatic pluralism of Dewey and the national democracy of Croly, Wilson, advised closely by Boston lawyer, political theorist and eventual Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, sought to solve social issues by using federal

authority to empower individual and local democracy.<sup>82</sup> Monopoly was the issue of the day, prior to the First World War, and New Freedom was heavy on the socioeconomic implications of federal intervention. Wilson declared in the United States “a new social age, a new era of human relationships,” and “a new economic society,” which would “overcome and destroy [the] far-reaching system of monopoly” and rescue, rather than harm, “the business of this country.”<sup>83</sup>

At the time of the election, Croly backed Roosevelt, believing New Freedom too weak and subnational a solution to the pressing problems of the age, writing that Wilson’s program was “a revival of Jeffersonian individualism,” ignorant of the national purpose embodied by Hamilton and indiscriminate in its atomizing individualism.<sup>84</sup> This assessment, however, was premature. Upon taking office, Wilson made evident he was much less of a simple Jeffersonian Democrat than he had led people to believe, in fact understanding as Hegel did that social welfare and individual rights were “two dimensions” of the same liberty.<sup>85</sup>

His beliefs on national constitutional government were robust, Blake Emerson wrote in “The Democratic Reconstruction of the Hegelian State in American Progressive Political Thought.” During his years as a practicing academic, Wilson described a “constitutional government” as “one whose powers have been adapted to the interests of the people and to the maintenance of individual liberty.”<sup>86</sup> This evaluation of the role of liberty in politics informed Wilson’s administration before and during the First World War, and by 1916, Wilson had won the support of both Croly and Lippman in addition to Dewey and Brandeis for his progressive platform. Historian Arthur Schlesinger quoted Lippmann writing at the time that the Democratic party under Wilson was the “only party which at this moment is national in scope, liberal in

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<sup>82</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 28

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 27

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 32

<sup>85</sup> Emerson, “The Democratic Reconstruction of the Hegelian State in American Progressive Political Thought.” 561

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 561

purpose, and effective in action,” the key components of unity between Dewey’s pragmatic pluralism and Croly’s president-led active national democracy.<sup>87</sup> This was the first bold attempt by a presidential administration to recast the role of the state and the meaning of liberty in America in response to the crisis of modernity.

New Freedom began more Deweyan than Crolyan, but the First World War changed that. At the inception of the administration, Wilson, Brandeis and their allies openly lauded the positive role of government in the actualization of human freedom, yet this was largely restricted to the breakup of monopolies and the empowerment of the *inherent* capacities of the individual in somewhat of a renewed Jeffersonian tradition, much as Croly had charged. Advised by Brandeis, Wilson aimed to encourage competition and innovation in every sector, believing, as Brandeis suggested, that where monopoly was necessary, it should be “owned by the people and not the capitalists.”<sup>88</sup>

Regulation of business was progressivism’s first serious foray into the construction of a positive state to complement positive liberty. The Wilson administration adopted the notion of “positive obligation to the poor,” acknowledging the dispiriting effects of unregulated civil society and establishing in 1914 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), a supervisory body endowed with regulatory power.<sup>89</sup> Where Presidents Roosevelt and Taft had unevenly applied the whip of the Sherman Antitrust Act to the conglomerates and interstate business entities gobbling up American industry, the Wilson administration sought to take a truly systemic approach, ultimately ceding to forms of preferential regulation — such as farm assistance — that stood against the equalitarian ethos of Jeffersonian democratic rugged individualism. In form, the

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<sup>87</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 35

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 31

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 34

constitution of the state remained largely protectorate, with the exception of rare necessary intervention.

The lack of national direction, however, proved unworkable in war. The First World War provided the perfect opportunity for progressives to prove the value of efficient central government once and for all, and this Schlesinger noted, in part drove the nationalizing of the New Freedom which so pleased Croly and Lippmann. “War completed Wilson’s conversion” to New Nationalism, Schlesinger wrote, because to “meet the needs of the war, central direction of the economy proved necessary.”<sup>90</sup> Dewey only reluctantly supported the war, hesitant largely for ethical reasons, though ultimately he concluded the Wilson years and the national contingency of war had successfully undermined the philosophical place of private property in the administration of freedom, and this was a positive development.<sup>91</sup> During the conflict, Wilson was obligated to nationalize economic and social operations — harsh censorship, racism, and social control brought on by national social doctrine prompted Dewey to engage even more in the activism which would lead to the formation of the New York City Teachers Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the ACLU.<sup>92</sup>

For a moment it appeared that the universal had subsumed the particular, for as Hegel noted a century before, there is a necessity in war for the state to assume “absolute power over everything individual and particular, over life, property, and [individual] rights.”<sup>93</sup> Wilson’s administration was distinct from the traditional, accepted model of the presidency as a quiet check on the legislature. Contrasting with tradition, Wilson was a mobilizer, a model which would be expanded upon a decade-and-a-half later. He centralized power in the national

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 37

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 39

<sup>92</sup> Gibbon, “John Dewey: Portrait of a Progressive Thinker.”

<sup>93</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §323

executive during the war, centering American power in the presidency and mobilizing the populace in a way reminiscent of Croly's vision both at home in speeches which took America out of isolation and abroad in dictating modes of world peace with his Fourteen Points.

Washington became the throughpoint for food, industry, and finance in the United States, and through a plethora of organizing boards, regulatory bodies, and procedural committees the Wilson administration controlled, planned, and managed everything from the price of sugar to the issue of private capital. At the end of the war Bernard Baruch, Wilson's advisor and the Chairman of the War Industries Board, contemplated more permanent unity between government and business. In a true Hegelian mold, Baruch suggested "trade associations" which would operate in peacetime as they had in war; thereby the industry of the nation would be coordinated for the national purpose.<sup>94</sup> In wartime, national associations of industry were responsible for their member organizations, much as sector-specific corporations divided "according to [the] particular nature" of work are in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.<sup>95</sup> Baruch hoped to continue a system where all "conflicting efforts" were "synchronized for the totality of social needs," but Croly's contemporary and *New Republic* cofounder Walter Weyl was wrong along with Baruch when declaring "What we have learned in war... we shall hardly forget in peace."<sup>96</sup>

War demands this national unity, and it is a well-organized state which is prepared for war well in advance. The attempt at an organized freedom and universal actualization Dewey, Croly, and their contemporaries saw under Wilson was but an expression of the contradiction of right and duty: "security cannot be achieved by the sacrifice of what is supposed to be *secured*," Hegel explained.<sup>97</sup> With the end of the war, "selfishness returned," and so dawned the New Era.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 38

<sup>95</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §251

<sup>96</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 38-39

<sup>97</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §324

<sup>98</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 42

Croly successfully fused the Hegelian strain to Federalism, but Wilson’s administration had failed to fuse the Hegelian principle of reciprocity to the engine of government. Partly from exhaustion, and partly due to American constitutional structure, Hegelian progressives fell from power in 1920, and many of the changes instituted by Wilson, including the mobilizing force of the presidential office, were abandoned in the decade to come. Writing on the fusion of the Hegelian state and the American political tradition, Emerson wrote that in America:

political control could not be equated with legislative control. For the American president was a democratically elected official whose claim to speak on behalf of the people competed with that of Congress. Whereas Hegel’s chief executive was a passive monarch who merely said yes and dotted the i, the American president was a publicly accountable official with a national electoral constituency. How was this political aspect of the executive branch to comport with the administrative implementation of legislation?<sup>99</sup>

The first attempt at reformulating American freedom and recasting the role of the state in a Deweyan-Crolyan synthesis of pragmatic pluralism and national democracy came to a close at the dawn of the New Era. Progressives had the opportunity in the Wilson years to recast the institutions of government to meet the needs of an American-Hegelian form of liberty, and to articulate a positive state. Their endeavors to do so with positive national economic planning, a powerful and active executive, and a commitment to pluralist democratic ideals, though impermanent, laid the political foundations for the eventual success of the New Deal, and proved that with correct organization positive national purpose and government can be fused to the American principle of liberty.

Future national leaders found their place within the New Freedom, and the field of social work arose — within which Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Hopkins, Frances Perkins and others would trial and perfect on a human scale the progressive Hegelian thinking of Dewey and Croly.

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<sup>99</sup> Emerson, “The Democratic Reconstruction of the Hegelian State in American Progressive Political Thought.” 569

From these theories and syntheses arose practical applications in American politics, centering on the subjects of economic planning and social experimentation. “The liberal synthesis was becoming clear,” Schlesinger wrote.<sup>100</sup> The Hegelian philosophy of the reciprocal state, positive freedom, and individual actualization had made its mark on the American political mind, and the first formidable cracks had emerged in the dominant Jeffersonian order.

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<sup>100</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 139

## CHAPTER 3

### The Hegelian Constitutional Order of the New Deal

#### The Sentiment of the State

With the election of Warren Harding in 1920, Hegelian ideas in America were relegated to the heads of intellectuals, and Jeffersonian principles once again prevailed in Washington. Harding, and his successor Calvin Coolidge, were preferential to business and hostile to the ideas of a mobilizing presidency and an active, unifying national government. They believed in an almost utopian vision of capitalism, and not only deferred to business leaders, but invited them to join in policymaking. The New Era brought retrenchment of the old modes of negative freedom, and with the return of individualism emerged an inversion of the Hegelian fusion of business and government, and the birth of an anti-progressive intermixture of capital and power. The universal was not being transmitted through corporate mediating systems to the people, and instead the private interests of corporate property holders had seized the might of the universal for their subjective aims. This was the reality of the 1920s, where government power was relaxed with respect to human actualization, and mobilized for the profit of large corporations.

The crisis of modernity did not abate. Economic researchers Eugene Smolensky and Robert Plotnick wrote that in 1920, though the data is difficult to analyze, it is “reasonable” to assert that sixty percent of Americans lived in poverty.<sup>101</sup> Throughout a decade famous for jazz, consumerism, and luxury, the rate of poverty and prevalence of inequality only continued to grow.<sup>102</sup> Though in 1928 Hoover stumped for “a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage” and promised “a final triumph over poverty” upon accepting the Republican nomination, his government brought only a continuation and deepening of New Era business-friendly policies.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Smolensky and Plotnik, “Inequality and Poverty in the United States: 1900 to 1990,” 22

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>103</sup> Hamilton, “Herbert Hoover: Campaigns and Elections.”

When the stock market crashed in 1929, Hoover's technocratic humanitarian commitments were put to the test. Much of the American economy cratered in the banking crisis that followed Black Tuesday, and millions of Americans lost their jobs. In the years that followed, environmental degradation in the Midwest led to the formation of the Dust Bowl, which magnified the effects of the Depression and annihilated much of America's agricultural industry. The moment demanded concerted national organization on a scale larger than that needed during the First World War, but Hoover did not meet the moment.

“When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living,” Hegel wrote in his *Philosophy of Right*, “that feeling of right, integrity, and honor which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost.”<sup>104</sup> That was the result in 1929. “This leads to the creation of a *rabble*,” Hegel wrote.<sup>105</sup> The remainder of Hoover's term saw the formation of thousands of homeless camps throughout America, termed Hoovervilles by their residents. Hoover was clear in his opposition to federal aid of any kind, believing austerity and personal responsibility were necessary to see the nation through the crisis.<sup>106</sup> The President's refusal to engage in national economic relief forced state governors, including Franklin Roosevelt of New York, to take the lead and seek to resolve the impossible crisis of unemployment, agricultural collapse, and frozen banking power in a patchwork manner on a subnational scale. As the economy deteriorated further and unemployment ballooned, even bankers began to comment on the “tragic lack of planning that characterizes the capitalist system.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §244

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 173

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 181

“The constitution of the state must permeate all relations within it,” Hegel wrote in his *Philosophy of Right*.<sup>108</sup> “The constitution of a nation must embody the nation’s feeling for its right and present condition; otherwise it will have no meaning or value, even if it is present in an external sense.”<sup>109</sup> In 1929, the opportunity for a progressive resurgence began to show itself, and by 1932 it became clear once more that in the face of contingency, active government and positive liberty were necessary for maintaining and actualizing human freedom. The principles of negative liberty and limited national government showed themselves under Hoover to be incompatible with the sentiment of the United States, and the Jeffersonian order which began to crumble under Wilson finally came to a close under the new president, Franklin Roosevelt. A new sentiment had emerged, one demanding national unity and freedom through human actualization. As Dewey noted in the 1920s, the dawn of the “collective age” had come.<sup>110</sup>

### **Roosevelt’s Liberalism**

The driving cause for renewed unity and powerful government, Roosevelt knew, was national emergency. The contingency of the First World War had provided Wilson much of his expansive authority and propelled the first attempts by progressives to seriously reshape American government and liberty. Unlike war, the Depression would not be a unique and isolated symptom untethered to any underlying political sickness. In his *Philosophy of History* Hegel noted that not until “members of the political body shall have begun to be pressed back on each other” and the resources of North America diminished such that rugged individualism is no longer possible will the United States, “form a compact system of civil society, and require an organized state.”<sup>111</sup>

Roosevelt understood clearly the need for an organized state under these circumstances in an

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<sup>108</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §274A

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, §274A

<sup>110</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 132

<sup>111</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 86

America which four decades previously had run out of free, conquerable land. He understood, too, the unique position of the Democratic Party, precariously divided between national and pluralist progressivism, at the climax of a two decade conflict for control over the American constitutional order. Embodying the pragmatic pluralism and experimental political vision of Dewey and the commitment to national purpose and unity emphasized by Croly, Roosevelt brought synthesis to the progressive vision, rising to meet the growing national sentiment of change and confronting the crisis of modernity facing America head on. Reclaiming the term which gave voice to modernity during the Enlightenment, he called his synthesis *liberalism*.

The “great difference between the two parties has been this: The liberal party is a party which believes that, as new conditions and problems arise beyond the power of men and women to meet as individuals, it becomes the duty of the Government itself to find new remedies with which to meet them. The liberal party insists that the Government has the definite duty to use all its power and resources to meet new social problems with new social controls,” Roosevelt later wrote in a 1938 essay on American history.<sup>112</sup> In that same essay he noted the Jeffersonian-Hamiltonian divide commented upon by Croly, that one party — his “liberal” party — trusted the judgement and efficacy of “the great majority of the people, as distinguished from the judgement of a small minority of either education or wealth.”<sup>113</sup> He recognized the need for a reciprocal government which mobilized the power of the people to solve national problems, a government, like Dewey’s ideal, which advocated democracy as a way of life. Drawing on both the majoritarian democratic tradition emphasized by pluralists and the national unity promoted by Crolyan New Nationalists, Roosevelt synthesized in political action as much as in public philosophy the rationale for positive freedom actualized in robust, reciprocal governance.

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<sup>112</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 368

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

In what would become a hallmark public philosophy of his administration, Roosevelt urged Americans to “not confuse objectives with methods,” and called for “bold, persistent experimentation” to solve the pressing needs of the nation.<sup>114</sup> An admirer of both Wilson and his cousin Theodore Roosevelt, and a student of law, pluralism, and pragmatism, Roosevelt defeated Hoover and his rugged individualism handily in 1932, and through his New Deal offered a cogent governing philosophy of experimental liberalism to the people.

### **Reshaping Constitutional Order**

As President-Elect, Roosevelt survived attempted assassination in Miami, demonstrating empathy and courage as he first attended to the wounded, including Chicago’s Mayor Anton Cermak, before seeking safety himself.<sup>115</sup> Roosevelt offered the American people a vision of liberalism, and embodied the courage, understanding, and grit to achieve it. Once in office, the President lived up to his promise for bold, persistent experimentation and passed an uncompromising collection of progressive emergency legislation in his first one hundred days — thirteen major bills in all — often with the almost unanimous mandate of both houses of Congress.<sup>116</sup> Like his cousin and Wilson, Roosevelt embodied his new public philosophy by recognizing in the presidency its special plebiscitary power. Roosevelt was the first president to offer a State of the Union address to Congress, and in his speeches and everyday activity was unique in appropriating with little constitutional precedent substantial policy making power to the Oval Office and the departments of the Executive Branch. Though he served as the political and philosophical guidestar of the New Deal, the president would ultimately delegate broad autonomy and agency to the advisors and administrators charged with the reconstruction and

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<sup>114</sup> Roosevelt, “Bold, Persistent Experimentation (1932),” 83-84

<sup>115</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 465

<sup>116</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 20-21

reshaping of America, bringing the talents of social activists and progressive intellectuals to bear directly on the crisis of the era and calling upon the advice of a diverse array of intellectuals in what would be termed his Brain Trust.

Rexford Tugwell and Adolph Berle of Roosevelt's Brain Trust had the president's ear on economic planning and recasting the role of the national state as an involved and active positive institution. Politically, Senator George Norris of Nebraska played a vital role in realizing this vision, along with Tennessee Valley Administration (TVA) head Arthur Morgan. Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) head Harry Hopkins played a critical role in reformulating the meaning of freedom and dignity in America and defining how such freedom was to be recognized and actualized by the state. Labor Secretary Frances Perkins institutionalized in the Social Security Act positive freedom in yet another dimension. Together, these thinkers, politicians, and administrators sought to redraw the American philosophical map, a task hoped for by Croly and the first President Roosevelt and left unfulfilled by the Wilson administration. That new philosophical map was to be a constitutional order embodying the nation's feeling for its right and present condition, and animated by Roosevelt's bold vision of liberalism.

"The day of the great promoter or the financial Titan, to whom we granted everything if only he would build, or develop, is over," Roosevelt declared at San Francisco's Commonwealth Club in 1932 in a campaign speech written by Berle, a former Bull Moose progressive who had read Croly and learned from his Hegelian-American synthetic tradition.<sup>117</sup> "The day of enlightened administration has come," he continued; "Every man has a right to life, and this means that he has also a right to make a comfortable living."<sup>118</sup> This speech, socialist historian

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<sup>117</sup> Roosevelt, "Every Man Has A Right to Life (1932)," 45

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 46

Howard Zinn wrote, “stretched Roosevelt’s philosophy to its boldest limits,” but nonetheless, to “all later followers of the New Deal, represented the essence of the Roosevelt creed.”<sup>119</sup> Previous generations of reformers, Goldman wrote in *Rendezvous with Destiny*, “had been little concerned with equality or security brought about by law” or in active government simply because of the boundless resources and staunch individualism of the nation, but by the thirties the trends brought about by industrialization, dependence, and a more concentrated civil society “showed themselves plainly in liberal thinking.”<sup>120</sup>

Roosevelt had cut his teeth as Secretary of the Navy under President Wilson, and understood his Deweyan New Freedom ideology of constitutional government in maintenance of individual liberty as much as he was influenced by Croly’s New Nationalism through his presidential cousin. Thus, when it came time to make policy and lead the New Deal, Roosevelt was unlike any previous reformer.

Roosevelt’s philosophy of American freedom was consistent and positive throughout his campaign and presidency, and it was the driver of his experimental, pragmatic style of government. Unlike Hegel, Roosevelt saw no prescribed structure of government as inherently better suited to the maintenance of human freedom. Drawing on Dewey, Roosevelt understood American government must rest at its core on the will of the people, and its policies must rest on the impermanence of conditions. While for Hegel, actualization of freedom comes through the conscious, reciprocal co-development of the citizen and the state through the mediation of vertical corporations — engaged both in the distribution of welfare and the advocacy of legislation — for Roosevelt it was the principles of that actualization rather than the methods that were paramount. Like Croly’s New Nationalism, Roosevelt’s New Deal took aim at the

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<sup>119</sup> Zinn, *New Deal Thought*, 45

<sup>120</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 370

actualization of right, as Hegel described it, where “the individual attains his right only by becoming the citizen of a good state.”<sup>121</sup> That “duty and right coincide in this identity of the universal and the particular” sat at the core of American liberal synthesis and modern American freedom, government, and civil society as postulated, executed, and led by Roosevelt.<sup>122</sup>

To the students of Oglethorpe University during his 1932 campaign, Roosevelt warned not to “fail to see the forest because of the trees” or “confuse objectives with method,” and it was that pragmatic approach to the agenda of positive freedom as the solution to the crisis of modernity by which Roosevelt led.<sup>123</sup> A blended commitment to Jeffersonian majoritarianism, a Hegelian idea of freedom actualized in powerful, reciprocal government, and a strategic political calculus led the president toward his greatest accomplishments, and impressed upon his surrogates a goal, rather than a method. The New Deal, therefore, was in some ways Hegelian in execution, in some ways classically liberal, and in all ways uniquely American. Yet, through all its programs, the New Deal drew a line in the sand between the old American freedom of individual rights untouched by government interference and the new American freedom, animated by reciprocity, community, and a government engaged in nurturing civil society. By the latter period of his presidency, Roosevelt had cemented his position that the pursuit of happiness, a bedrock American principle, could only be fulfilled by positive freedom, “freedom from want.”<sup>124</sup>

Though a business-government fusion as Hegel sought would not come to be in America — the Democratic party had campaigned on keeping business away from government in contrast to the Hoover years — the Roosevelt administration nonetheless went into business for itself,

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<sup>121</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §153

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, §155

<sup>123</sup> Roosevelt, “Bold, Persistent Experimentation (1932),” 83

<sup>124</sup> Roosevelt, “The Four Freedoms.”

competing for the provision of public power against private corporations in the Tennessee Valley. Though in America unions, states, and insurance regimes each took some responsibility for the provision of collective welfare, it was the national state alone which had the authority and scope to provide old age insurance and a national unemployment scheme through the Social Security Act. And above all, true to the pragmatic and pluralist roots of Hegelian progressivism in America, in FERA and the WPA it was recognized that work as a form of relief, rather than “the dole,” “preserves a man’s morale,” and saves his spirit.<sup>125</sup> These programs materially transformed the American government and tangibly redefined freedom with a new liberal agenda where Roosevelt had philosophically done so by synthesizing and prioritizing the varied strands of progressive thought. Through innovative philosophic leadership and pragmatic policymaking, Roosevelt succeeded where Wilson had failed, recasting the role of the national government as an institution of universalism and actualization and reformulating the meaning of freedom in the United States as positive and holistic.

### **The Tennessee Valley Authority**

“Part of the New Deal was defensive,” wrote Schlesinger.<sup>126</sup> “But part too was a desire to build a better America.”<sup>127</sup> The Tennessee Valley offered the Roosevelt administration an opportunity to put its new philosophy of liberal government to the test, uniting career advocates for public power like Senator Norris, humanitarian utopians including Morgan, and professorial advocates for national economic planning such as Tugwell. In 1933, the Tennessee Valley was destitute — pillaged by agriculture, logging, and mining corporations. Ecologically, the entire watershed was a disaster, erosion from depleted forests tearing at arable land and polluting the fisheries each

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<sup>125</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 268

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 319

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

year. Economically, the situation was just as bad or worse, where income “was less than half the national average” and only two percent of farms were electrified.<sup>128</sup> The valley encompassed land in seven southern states, and stood as an example not only of the devastation of the Depression, but of the exact sort of extractive, dependent poverty Hegel warned of in an industrialized America. As such, the region would serve as the testing ground for the possibilities of the new American state.

Norris had advocated for public power as a congressman even before his election to the Senate in 1913, for the simple reason that power as a public good would be best provided by the government.<sup>129</sup> It was a contentious issue, but it was favored by the Democratic Party. Dewey wrote that it was “the most weighty single issue in the political field,” and eventual Brain Trust advisor Felix Frankfurter of Harvard Law corresponded with then-Governor of New York Franklin Roosevelt about the topic.<sup>130</sup> The hydroelectric program proposed by Norris and the Democratic Party to develop power sites with government monopoly was “socialistic,” Roosevelt commented as Governor, but so was the postal system: “the Government can do it better than everybody else.”<sup>131</sup> By the time he was elected president, Roosevelt had time to give the idea significant thought, and after the “rush of emergency legislation” his administration passed to prevent immediate economic collapse, he extended an invitation to Norris to visit Muscle Shoals, a hydroelectric facility in the valley developed by the government during the First World War and left idle since.<sup>132</sup>

Though for Norris Muscle Shoals and the Tennessee Valley presented an opportunity to develop public power, for Roosevelt it was much more: a chance to redress the despair of the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 321

<sup>129</sup> Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 122-124

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 124

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 324

citizens living there and allow them the full freedoms deserved by all. For that, the vast authority of active government would need to be brought to bear. A “corporation clothed with the power of Government but possessed with the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise,” he wrote Norris in 1933, would allow this “power development of war days,” Muscle Shoals, to lead “logically to national planning for a complete river watershed involving many States and the future lives and welfare of millions.”<sup>133</sup> Such was the mission and purpose of the TVA: bring the power of government to the task of elevating, supporting, and actualizing the lives of millions of Americans beyond the scope of their individual, or even local, capacities. The Roosevelt government embraced a Hegelian concept, long hammered into American liberalism by the likes of Croly and Dewey that “the end of the state is the happiness of its citizens,” that “if their welfare is deficient, if their subjective ends are not satisfied, and if they do not find that the state as such is the means to this satisfaction, the state itself stands on insecure footing.”<sup>134</sup>

As socialist as the TVA and the provision of public power may have seemed, however, Roosevelt was a pragmatist like Dewey, and no subscriber to a particular method. His sweeping personal authority — drawn from Wilson’s example — and his experimentalism even earned him the epithet of “social fascist” from the Communist mouthpiece the *Daily Worker*.<sup>135</sup> Roosevelt’s goals were not to institute socialism in the United States, but as TVA administrator Arthur Morgan would later put it, determine on the issue of public power “how to do the job best.”<sup>136</sup> In his lectures, Hegel did not advise nations to themselves become providers of goods and services, but the theory of unity between enterprise and government through the corporation is posited for the same goal as that of Roosevelt’s TVA: the elevation of the individual will into the realm of

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §265A

<sup>135</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 352-353

<sup>136</sup> Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 370

the universal, the transformation of man into citizen, and the actualization of capacity and freedom through cooperation. Electricity, Roosevelt said, was a “side function,” whereas the real goal of the TVA was something else altogether.<sup>137</sup> “We are conducting a social experiment,” he told the National Emergency Council in 1934. “What we’re doing here is taking a watershed with about three and a half million people in it, almost all of them rural, and we are trying to make a different type of citizen out of them.”<sup>138</sup> Roosevelt and his administrators sought through direct government action to provide key welfare services, those essential to the flourishing of human capacity, better than private business, which unlike a government of the people had no universal interest, only its own dislocated corporate one.

Given the corporate situation in the United States, a Hegelian system of business-government cooperation was not at all possible. Bodies such as the FTC would certainly be too broad, unions were horizontal rather than economically vertical, and business corporations themselves were isolated in their interests, diversified across sectors, and even held in equity by investors of all walks of life. Nowhere could one find the “work performed by civil society” divided “into different branches according to its particular nature” and in association such as to meld the universal, national will with the selfish instinct.<sup>139</sup> Reorganization in that direction would have been impossible, and contrary to the majoritarian, experimental strategy Roosevelt employed. Nevertheless, the TVA embodied many of the characteristics sought after by Hegel and both his pluralist and national activist descendants, including, as an executive bureau vested with policy-making authority, the creation of nationally planned welfare legislation with the input of the issue’s key stakeholders. Through “grassroots democracy,” the TVA decentralized national authority in the Brandeisian mold and was “shaped by intimate

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<sup>137</sup> Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 370

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §250

association” with the people it served as Dewey suggested should be done in a democracy.<sup>140</sup> One of the most ambitious of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, the TVA was successful in electrifying the “least-electrified region of the United States,” revitalizing ecosystems and economies throughout the south, and ending malaria in America.<sup>141</sup>

Materially, the TVA was a landmark project for the Roosevelt administration responsible in part for the political realization of the two tenets of Hegelian philosophy in American progressivism of interest in this thesis: the recasting of the national state and reformulation of freedom. The TVA has operated as a corporation of the United States since its inception, cloaked in the power of government and the flexibility of private industry, despite attempts to divest the public of such business by President Ronald Reagan’s administration and consideration of the same by both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The program has even operated under its own financing since 1999, “requiring no taxpayer contribution.”<sup>142</sup> Under Roosevelt’s bold experimentalism, the Hamiltonian desire for federalism where it is needed most, the Jeffersonian instinct and Deweyan philosophy to let the people’s judgement guide government, and the Crolyan-Hegelian model of positive freedom through proud, self-conscious national development were fused in the TVA. Both Croly and Dewey desired a direct relationship between the individual and the state, and the TVA embodied this relationship, representing the “constructive relationship between nationality and democracy” that Croly believed crucial to the success of a program of national unity and the philosophy of democratic engagement which characterized Dewey’s democracy as a way of life and pragmatic pluralism.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 332

<sup>141</sup> Yudken, “If It Ain’t Broke, Don’t Fix It!”

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 386

## Dignity Through Work

Active government deployed for the promotion and elevation of human freedom is perhaps even more directly exemplified through the work of works programs administrator Harry Hopkins. A professional social worker, Hopkins had a keen understanding of human needs, and as a progressive in New York City, the occasional socialist, and a pragmatic experimentalist in the Rooseveltian mold, his writings and actions on freedom and dignity through work came very much to resemble those of Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*. “One sixth of the population of the United States was receiving public relief in the month of March,” Hopkins wrote in 1933 as FERA administrator; “This meant twenty-one million people. It meant four and one-half million families scattered throughout all the states of the Union. These people were receiving an average of fifty cents a day per family, however, a sum which is scarcely adequate to keep body and soul together.”<sup>144</sup> The solution, first through FERA and then through the WPA, was employment rather than the dole. With millions of Americans idle, much of the nation’s productive capacity was paralyzed.

For Hegel, Dewey, Croly, Roosevelt and Hopkins, the “happiness” of citizens rested upon such citizens' ability to meet their needs with their own capabilities.<sup>145</sup> For Hegel, dignity in work was linked intimately with both security and patriotism, the loss of that security and “that feeling of right, integrity, and honor which comes from supporting oneself by one’s own activity” leading to “the creation of a *rabble*,” a dangerous political element threatening the security of the state.<sup>146</sup> Remedy by civil society of this crisis “without the mediation of work,” Hegel wrote, that is by charity or cash assistance, would be “contrary to the principle of civil society and the feeling of self-sufficiency and honour among its members,” but alternatively, “their livelihood

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<sup>144</sup> Hopkins, “The War on Distress (1933),” 152

<sup>145</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §265A

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, §244

could be mediated by work, which would increase the volume of production.”<sup>147</sup> In *The Promise of American Life* Croly expressed the same logic through the principle of education, what Hegel referred to as opportunity. “Americans have always had the liveliest and completest faith in the process of individual and social improvement,” Croly wrote, but for the realization of unity the “real vehicle” of improvement must be the “education” of the national populace on their role as citizens, and more precisely on their role in “constructive individualism” aimed toward the realization of a national state supportive of all.<sup>148</sup> Roosevelt, too, emphasized in 1941 the importance of planning a “better system by which persons deserving or needing gainful employment may obtain it” as critical to securing the nation and ensuring freedom.<sup>149</sup>

Hopkins believed in this principle like his philosophical forebears and his president, and fought every day of his career as a New Deal administrator to bring such an understanding to political reality. The dole, as direct relief was called in the day, was for Hopkins bad moral policy as well as poor economic policy. Schlesinger, in his estimation of Hopkins, notes that he believed “men and women who lacked jobs for reasons beyond their own control should not... be made to feel like paupers.”<sup>150</sup> Specifically, Hopkins believed direct relief as opposed to work relief would erode the spirit of the jobless: “I don’t think anyone can go year after year, month after month, accepting relief without it affecting his character in some way unfavorably... It is probably going to undermine the independence of hundreds of thousands of families. ... I look upon this as a great disaster and wish to handle it as such.”<sup>151</sup>

Therefore, through FERA and the WPA, Hopkins worked with ferocious speed to implement the largest public works program in the history of the nation. Within two days of

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, §245

<sup>148</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 491-542

<sup>149</sup> Roosevelt, “The Four Freedoms.”

<sup>150</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 267

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

taking charge of FERA for the President, Hopkins engaged satellite relief organizations in all forty-eight states.<sup>152</sup> By the end of 1933, Hopkins had pushed for the creation of the Civil Works Administration (CWA), dedicated, unlike FERA, entirely to work relief.<sup>153</sup> By early 1934, the CWA employed more than four million previously unemployed Americans upon a “tremendous variety of jobs,” and the agency had spent nearly a billion dollars.<sup>154</sup> John C. H. Lee, an army engineer and man of conviction, would, as a General in World War II, help orchestrate the Allied Invasion of Normandy on D-Day and push for the integration of Black Americans into the armed forces.<sup>155</sup> In 1934 the then-Lieutenant Colonel Lee credited the accomplishments of the CWA to “the arduous efforts of the young Administrator,” noting the agency’s morale was “easily comparable to that of a war emergency.”<sup>156</sup>

The agencies under Hopkins’ guidance were successful in part because of his diligence and energy and in part due to the philosophical clarity of his vision. At the root of his convictions were his professional experience as a social worker and his exposure to and engagement with radical socialism in New York. Both provided a grounding in human understanding and a blend of European and American progressive philosophy.<sup>157</sup> Like Hegel, Hopkins believed such dignity through work was good not only for the individual, but for the nation. A worker employed by the government for a socially useful task received spiritual fulfillment and the personal integrity that comes with a task well-done. The state, in turn, expanded production. Through the state, citizens develop themselves and find their subjective needs met. They come to appreciate the state, as Hegel wrote: “The political disposition [of patriotism] is certainly based on *truth*,” that is, it is based on the true experiences of the citizen, such that “this disposition is in general one of

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 266

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 269

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 270

<sup>155</sup> Lovelace, “John Clifford Hodges Lee.”

<sup>156</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 271

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 266

*trust... or the consciousness that my substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interest of another,” in this case the state.*<sup>158</sup>

The WPA, the successor organization to the CWA, embodied this understanding of dignity even more than FERA or the CWA, as well as a more mature political philosophy on the part of Hopkins. While under the CWA the majority of projects had been infrastructural, including a large number of highways, bridges, parks, and sewers, the WPA considered the dignity of intellectual and creative work among that of labor.<sup>159</sup> As WPA administrator, Schlesinger wrote, Hopkins had “long since departed from his youthful flirtation with socialism,” and was “committed to the capitalist system.”<sup>160</sup> If that system were to survive, however, it would have to change, and government support of all people in need, regardless of profession, would be necessary to achieve that. “I have never believed that with our capitalistic system people have to be poor,” Hopkins wrote.<sup>161</sup> Agreeing wholeheartedly with the economist John Maynard Keynes’ observations not only on the utility of public works to service unemployment, but that “the maintenance of prosperity in the modern world is extremely difficult,” the WPA administrator sought to uplift the poor not only with good paying government jobs, but with the beautification of common spaces through public art and an emphasis on community and education through the construction and staffing of libraries, civic centers, and schools.<sup>162</sup>

Such public expenditure for the benefit of individual dignity, rather than simple subsistence, highlights the parallels in the reasoned thinking of Hopkins and Hegel within the progressive sphere. “The end of Government is that people, individuals shall be allowed to live a more abundant life,” Hopkins wrote in his Keynesian-titled 1936 book *Spending to Save*;

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<sup>158</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §268

<sup>159</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 270

<sup>160</sup> Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 357

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Keynes, “The Maintenance of Prosperity Is Extremely Difficult (1938).”

“Government has no other purpose than to take care of the people that live within our borders,” he wrote, expanding the protectionist individualistic mindset to the actualization of the human spirit.<sup>163</sup> Such thinking aligns with the realism of Hegel’s political Idea, where in order to protect citizens’ freedom and the nation’s integrity, the people must be loyal enough to call to arms, which means patriotism must be cultivated through the actualization of freedom. The disposition of patriotism “takes its particularly determined *content* from the various aspects of the organism of the state,” that is, patriotism emerges from unity and reciprocity.<sup>164</sup> Though their individual philosophies emerged from different origins, Hopkins’ progressivism reflected not only the experimentalism of Roosevelt’s New Deal but also that American-Hegelian fusion of positive liberty cultivated since the early twentieth century.

Through work relief, the Roosevelt administration proved that the government not only respected the subjective interest, but also respected the individual as an autonomous being imbued with dignity and spirit. This understanding was clear to the populace, which re-elected Roosevelt in a forty-six state landslide in 1936.<sup>165</sup> The recognition of dignity through work and the government’s essential role in provision of such welfare in the modern, industrial world was a significant shift from Hoover’s dedication to business economics, Coolidge’s cool apathy, and truly the entire effort of American government preceding the New Deal, as Goldman noted. Works projects, in a different mode than the TVA, expanded the role of government and altered its place within civil society, while at once reformulating the meaning of freedom in America, placing weight on the positive development of the individual rather than simply citizens’ subsistence through rugged individualism.

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<sup>163</sup> Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 358

<sup>164</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §269

<sup>165</sup> There were 48 states in 1936.

## The Right to Social Security

“The Social Security Act, one of the most important bills passed after the invalidation of the NRA,” Goldman noted, “was no more Jeffersonian than it was New Nationalist.”<sup>166</sup> It was, if anything, in the “Crolyan conception of the protective state.”<sup>167</sup> Social Security was a crucial keystone of the New Deal, providing the right to economic security in society for the aged and the unemployed in the form of earned insurance. The innovation of secretary of Labor Perkins, the legislation was “the culmination of a lifetime’s hope and labor.”<sup>168</sup> Representing positive freedom in its most explicit sense — deserved, natural right to continued dignity even beyond the physical ability to work for one’s means — the Social Security Act went further than Hopkins’ works projects, philosophically much further than the TVA because the Act’s origination was in no way liberal or capitalist in nature, and further still than Roosevelt’s own initial plans for national development and security. Where the TVA had primarily recast the material and political role of the state while servicing citizens’ needs, and Hopkins’ organizations both extended the state and publicly reformulated the meaning of freedom, Social Security under Perkins’ direction primarily redefined the extent of right and freedom in America.

America, Perkins perceived, was playing catch-up with Europe: “As I see it,” Schlesinger quotes the secretary, “we shall have to establish in this country substantially all of the social-insurance measures which the western European countries have set up in the last generation.”<sup>169</sup> Hopkins agreed, arguing for the establishment of a national medical insurance regime as well to promote and care for the health of all Americans.<sup>170</sup> Such proposals were blocked by powerful medical lobbies, but it is worth noting the widespread support among New

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<sup>166</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 363

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 300

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 304

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 307

Deal administrators and thinkers, including President Roosevelt himself, for such widespread social insurance. “I see no reason why every child, from the day he is born, shouldn’t be a member of the social security system,” the president said to Secretary Perkins in 1935, shortly before the passage of the Social Security Act.<sup>171</sup> The legislation was the most far-reaching commitment yet on the part of the Roosevelt administration to truly reformulate the meaning of freedom in the United States, and to do so with the power of inclusive, active, reciprocal government. The WPA touched every county in the nation, but Social Security touched every life with the hand of the state.

While Hegel sought to mediate the relationship between the individual and the state through corporations, Roosevelt’s experimental method led to direct, immediate contact, and a relationship which for each citizen truly lasted “from cradle to grave.”<sup>172</sup> Much as Wilson had sought, through the emboldening of the executive office, Roosevelt’s executive branch, programs, and mobilizing presidency became the mediating institution between citizen and state. Rather than the provision of such welfare through sector-oriented vertical groups as pure Hegelianism would have it, Roosevelt leaned on the same logic used by Croly to promote productive nationalism: direct education of the individual about their relationship with the system through direct engagement with the public. Croly advocated a direct relationship between the people and the government to cultivate national unity, and in line with this current in progressive philosophy, Roosevelt decided on politics over economics when funding Social Security with a payroll tax, creating fundamental ownership and buy-in from citizens in the system managed by the government for their benefit. To Tugwell, who argued against the tax, Roosevelt responded: “I suppose you’re right on the economics, but those taxes were never a

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 308

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

problem with economics. We put payroll contributions there so as to give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their pensions and unemployment benefits. With those taxes in there, no damn politician can ever scrap my social security program.”<sup>173</sup>

Signed into law in 1935, the Social Security Act made a permanent impact upon American freedom. Though there were no comprehensive national surveys on old-age poverty prior to 1935 in the United States, it was clear that the elderly were “experiencing severe economic problems.”<sup>174</sup> With the prevalence of poverty before and during the Depression, it is no wonder that those without the ability to work were without the ability to earn. The program quickly became a source of emotional and spiritual security as well as retirement income, and has been crucial in lifting millions from poverty. In 2018, according to census data analyzed by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Social Security was responsible for cutting poverty from 38% to ten percent among seniors.<sup>175</sup> Such efficacy and longevity indicates the dramatic shift in priorities during the Roosevelt administration, and an acknowledgement of the simple fact, clearly stated by Hegel, that the “important question of how poverty can be remedied is one which agitates and torments modern societies especially.”<sup>176</sup>

The Hegelian impact on American progressive policy is clear when considering Social Security. Hegel emphasized the issue of poverty alleviation in industrial societies as a concern of freedom and human rights. Not only would modern poverty degrade the lives of individuals and prove exceptionally difficult to solve, but it would pose security risks when it came to the question of national loyalty. The Roosevelt administration understood the contingency posed by poverty — the example of the paralysis of the banking system is most apparent — and in seeking

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 308-309

<sup>174</sup> Reno and Grad, “Economic Security, 1935-46.”

<sup>175</sup> Romig, “Social Security Lifts More Americans Above Poverty Than Any Other Program.”

<sup>176</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §244A

to remedy the present problem, necessarily shifted America's priorities of freedom in the process. The right to security in old age and when unemployed through no fault of one's own had become a part of the American package. Such policy was a remarkable step from the aloof government of the prior constitutional order.

### **Right, Unity, and Actualization**

The New Deal succeeded where the New Nationalism and the New Freedom fell short, expanding and cementing the role of the plebiscitary executive and transforming the American national state into an active, substantial body in civil society, dedicated to the maintenance of individual positive rights and the actualization of human freedom. Roosevelt's administration rose to meet the sentiment of the state, and through institutional and philosophical change, altered the constitutional order of the United States. The New Deal committed America to a program of positive rights, national unity, and freedom through human actualization. Through such programs as the TVA, the government expanded its role in the provision of goods and services as a best-operator monopoly, and through work programs recognized human dignity and actualization as coequal with individualism. Through the Social Security program positive freedom became birthright, untethered to day-to-day labor yet still charged with the reciprocity of personal investment and government provision. The New Deal sought to remember the forgotten man, and in large part it did. Poverty was addressed in ways and forms never before attempted in the halls of American government, and though not every problem was solved, a commitment to experimental government and democratic thinking, an active, interventionist, and involved executive branch, and a fusion of divergent currents of progressive thinking in Roosevelt's liberalism would, in the decades to come, be the groundwork on which a more equal, economically prosperous nation would rise.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Civil Rights and Human Freedom**

#### **The Liberal Consensus**

The period in American political history following the New Deal and extending more than two decades through the end of the 1960s is known as the Liberal Consensus. Characterized by a postwar international order constructed around liberal economic theory and liberal conceptions of universal human rights, the Cold War and its proxy conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union, and an increasingly prosperous and restless American society at home, the era of Liberal Consensus was presided over by Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. The nation prospered after the Second World War, social and economic forces released by the conflict and by the New Deal powering an increase in quality of life and marking, as Truman noted optimistically in 1947, a “turning point in the long history of our country’s efforts to guarantee a freedom and equality to all our citizens.”<sup>177</sup>

For much of the early twentieth century progressives and liberals compromised on the issues of race and equality in order that they could recast the state as universal and redefine freedom as positive. Emboldened by the structural and philosophical changes made to democracy and society during the New Deal, Liberal Consensus leaders embraced civil rights, Truman’s presidency and his Fair Deal marking a turning point for liberals in the pursuit of “civil rights and human freedom” and a strengthening of the bond between the national democratic and pragmatic pluralist currents in American progressivism.<sup>178</sup> Through Lyndon Johnson’s administration, a liberal public philosophy guided the state. Though by the 1960s the political geography had shifted along with the divergence of the Crolyan and Deweyan currents in

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<sup>177</sup> Truman, “Address to the NAACP.”

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

liberalism and the emergence of a new Jeffersonian reaction to national bureaucracy, the Great Society registered as a high water mark for liberalism, positive freedom, and the pursuit of justice in America. Where Roosevelt's liberalism and the New Deal recast the state and redefined freedom in America, the Liberal Consensus sought to make whole the promise of American life and the dream of liberty and justice for all.

### **The Sacrifice of Principles**

All subjects of the state must be satisfied in their "subjective ends," Hegel acknowledged, or else the state itself will be "insecure."<sup>179</sup> Universal civil rights in the state are essential because all people are "primarily *human beings*," and exclusion of anyone from society denies them the "self-awareness as recognized *legal persons*" they deserve.<sup>180</sup> This Hegel noted in *Philosophy of Right* on the exclusion of Jews from European society, declaring such segregation not just intellectually and morally unreasonable, but politically "the height of folly."<sup>181</sup> The state, in dividing its citizens, "would thereby have failed to recognize its own principle as an objective institution with a power of its own," he wrote.<sup>182</sup>

As the western frontier had allowed American society to avoid the crisis of modern industrial poverty, isolation from major international conflicts had allowed the United States to avoid its constitutional paradox of racial inequality for much of the nation's history. Slavery in the land of the free and a power structure fundamentally at odds with purported national principles of equality, justice, and liberty could only be maintained because the state was "strong in other respects."<sup>183</sup> Only thus could it "tolerate such anomalies" and not "strictly enforce its

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<sup>179</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §265A

<sup>180</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270: Hegel's Note, 295-296

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

rights,” Hegel noted on American slavery, condemning all such exclusions as bringing “blame and reproach” upon the state.<sup>184</sup>

Following the Civil War, Harris and Snider in St. Louis understood that liberty and justice for Black Americans could not be achieved with simple emancipation. “The St. Louis Hegelians argued that this one-sided perception of freedom led the radical abolitionists to mistakenly conclude that the destruction of the institution of slavery would fully emancipate American slaves,” James Good wrote.<sup>185</sup> Achieving liberty and justice in America would require national reorganization and democratic pluralism, and could not be achieved without liberty and justice for *all* Americans. John Dewey, too, saw pluralism and participatory democracy as essential to remedying racial injustice, aiding in the formation of the ACLU and NAACP as a result. Herbert Croly noted that the paradox of a combined social order of liberty and slavery in America, what he forcefully condemned as “an essentially undemocratic institution,” had left a blot on the political order, and unity as a people was necessary for unity as a nation.<sup>186</sup> “Confronted by the legal existence of slavery in nearly all of the constituent states,” Croly wrote, the framers of the United States Constitution sacrificed the principles of democracy for the promise of unity: “refusal to recognize the institution would have resulted in the failure of the whole scheme of Constitutional legislation.”<sup>187</sup> The understanding that correcting the paradox of America’s founding and achieving racial justice was intertwined with making possible the promise of American life was widespread in the twentieth century progressive movement.

The president under whose direction the Executive Branch first became the mobilizing throughpoint for policy making and positive liberty, however, was an acknowledged racist. Mark

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Good, “A ‘World-Historical Idea,’” 451

<sup>186</sup> Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 89

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 89

Benbow wrote in an article for *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* that President Wilson's father, a minister who raised his son Woodrow in antebellum Virginia, "defended slavery in the pulpits of his churches," and the family kept Black servants, though their "status is unclear."<sup>188</sup> As president of Princeton, Benbow wrote, "Wilson dissuaded black students from applying for admission," and as President of The United States, "Wilson allowed most of his cabinet members to segregate federal workplaces for the first time since the Civil War."<sup>189</sup> Wilson spent much of his academic career defending the Lost Cause, and during his presidency hosted a screening of *Birth of a Nation* at The White House, which emboldened and resuscitated the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The New Freedom failed Black Americans as much as it failed to cement a permanent turn to positive right in national government. It had shown that the Democratic Party was willing to compromise on racial issues to achieve liberal economic ends.

In 1933, President Roosevelt faced the monumental task of knitting together a coalition to recast American freedom and government in the modern era. The New Deal and Roosevelt's liberalism shaped a United States in which the meaning of freedom had been substantively redefined from the negative. American liberty at the time of Roosevelt's death meant a right to dignity in work, a right to collective bargaining, and a right to social security in unemployment, old age, and childhood dependency. Roosevelt, through the power of a mobilizing, plebiscitary presidency, transformed the federal state into a reciprocal, active institution dedicated to actualizing individual freedom from want and providing the tools with which to achieve the promise of American life. This colossal reconstruction of the American constitutional order, however, came at a cost. "The New Deal made no concrete moves toward enforced equality," Schlesinger wrote, though "it smiled sympathetically on the liberal movement that was hurrying

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<sup>188</sup> Benbow, "Birth of a Quotation: Woodrow Wilson and 'Like Writing History with Lightning,'" 509

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 510

in that direction.”<sup>190</sup> Roosevelt, though not driven by personal racial hostility as was Wilson, made the same bargain as his liberal predecessor.

The Social Security Act of 1935 excluded about half of American workers, those in the agriculture and domestic service industries, most of whom were Black. In 2010, a bulletin released by the Social Security Administration recognized that “Southern Democrats in Congress — motivated by racial animus — moved to block African Americans from participation in the new Social Security program and... this was the reason for the provision excluding farm and domestic labor.”<sup>191</sup> In Norris, Tennessee, the model town constructed by the TVA to house workers for the Norris Dam, no Black Americans were allowed, in blatant violation of federal statutes.<sup>192</sup> Bowing to ethnonationalist pressure during World War Two, President Roosevelt, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and Assistant Secretary John McCloy imprisoned approximately 120,000 citizens and residents of Japanese descent.<sup>193</sup> Finally, in discarding Vice President Henry Wallace — whose views on racial equality had made him a liability in the South — in favor of Southern Democrat and Missouri Senator Harry Truman with an ambiguous record in civil rights for his fourth term reelection campaign, Roosevelt made a conscious decision to trade racial equality for the completion of the skeleton of a progressive state and a historic pivot away from limited government and negative freedom.<sup>194</sup>

Understanding Hegel’s philosophy of freedom and of the state as being universal and reciprocal, it is clear why a violation of civil rights undermines the legitimacy of the entire political structure. This notion, not just of dignity, but of universal humanity, was the vital current of Hegel’s thinking and the progressive movement jettisoned by Wilson. In order to

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<sup>190</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 371

<sup>191</sup> DeWitt, “The Decision to Exclude Agricultural and Domestic Workers from the 1935 Social Security Act.”

<sup>192</sup> Davis, “The New Deal: Slogans for the Same Raw Deal (1935).”

<sup>193</sup> The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Japanese American Internment.”

<sup>194</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, 323

politically achieve a philosophical reformulation of American freedom and the recasting of the state as positive and reciprocal, this notion was sacrificed again for the New Deal.

### **Truman's Moral Pragmatism**

Assuming the Presidency on April 12, 1945, after Roosevelt's death, President Truman pledged to carry on his predecessor's domestic and foreign policy "with all my strength and with all my heart," though he recognized as Roosevelt had not that by sacrificing civil rights, liberalism was at risk of compromising the legitimacy of the entire American state.<sup>195</sup> The political landscape had changed significantly from that at Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933. Social forces unleashed by the New Deal and the Second World War, including women working in factories, Black Americans fighting fascism in Germany, and Mexican laborers truly welcomed over the border for the first time, had altered the power dynamic in American political society. On the foreign front, the Soviet Union began highlighting the hypocrisy within a liberal governing philosophy which turned a blind eye to racism in propaganda campaigns abroad after the war. Further, it became widely acknowledged that "Hitler's race-based fascism had been inspired in part by America's own legal system."<sup>196</sup> It had become both strategically and morally impractical to maintain a system of white supremacy.

Though Truman fully recognized that the compromise of civil rights for all in exchange for economic opportunity and positive rights for some could not stand, Black Americans did not know what to expect from the senator who had replaced Wallace, an outspoken proponent for civil rights, on the vice presidential ticket. NAACP leader Roy Wilkins noted that at the time many Black Americans saw Truman as an "untested haberdasher from Klan country," though he himself had known Truman as a judge in Kansas City, and asserted that anyone who thought him

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<sup>195</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 406

<sup>196</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 149

a racist “was making a big mistake.”<sup>197</sup> For Truman, extending freedom and achieving justice in the United States was a moral imperative as much as a strategic necessity. The failure to extend civil rights to all would mean the sacrifice of liberal principles of universal human rights and the weakening of political security at home and abroad.

Setting aside the give-and-take of the Roosevelt administration, Truman set out to make whole the promise of American freedom, acknowledging the political cost in a letter to his sister, Mary Jane Truman. “The main difficulty with the South is that they are living eighty years behind the times... I am not asking for social equality, because no such thing exists, but I am asking for equality of opportunity,” he wrote, and speaking of the recent blinding of a returning Black sergeant and the murder of four other Black men: “I can’t approve of such goings on and I shall never approve of it, as long as I am here... I am going to try to remedy it and if it ends up in my failure to be reelected, that failure will be in a good cause.”<sup>198</sup> Johnson would make the same bargain when he “acknowledged that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 likely meant the loss of the South.”<sup>199</sup> To Truman, the notion of liberty and justice for all was a moral and philosophical imperative worth sacrificing for.

As Roosevelt had fused in his liberalism the national democratic and pluralist pragmatic currents of American progressivism, the challenge for the presidents who followed was making the promise of American life accessible to all through the methods and mechanisms of the New Deal. The Truman years set the tone for the era of Liberal Consensus, both in action and in philosophy, establishing a renewed commitment to the positive use of government power to protect individuals and help them achieve their potential, regardless of the color of their skin. “The extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people against the Government,

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<sup>197</sup> Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*.

<sup>198</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, 589

<sup>199</sup> Mileur, “The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism,” 415

but protection of the people by the Government,” Truman told the NAACP: “We must [make] the Federal Government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and equalities of all Americans.”<sup>200</sup> Through an ambitious civil rights agenda and an understanding that poverty was not an issue solely of economics, but of racial justice, Liberal Consensus leaders fought to extend positive freedom to those left out of the New Deal. The mandate of moral pragmatism present in both Dewey’s democracy as a way of life and Croly’s substantive national unity, forgone in the Roosevelt years for more immediate structural ends, was again fused to the progressive political cause.

### **A Fair Deal to Secure These Rights**

As a southerner, Truman was well-acquainted with lynchings and anti-Black violence, and as a politician during the Second World War, he was as well-acquainted with the persecution of Japanese Americans. During his tenure as a U.S. Senator, he had pushed for anti-lynching legislation, and as president he employed the mobilizing capacity of the presidency developed by Wilson and Roosevelt to pursue his goal of racial justice.

Like his predecessor, Truman sought the advice and input of experts and scholars in the progressive movement, drawing on academic talent to bring philosophy and political action together. In 1946, less than a year after taking office, Truman issued Executive Order 9808, “Establishing the President’s Committee on Civil Rights,” which produced the groundbreaking 178 page report *To Secure These Rights*, in which his advisors argued for the creation of a permanent Civil Rights Commission, and described in detail the injustices suffered by African Americans.<sup>201</sup> Stating that “the action of individuals who take the law into their own hands and inflict summary punishment and wreak personal vengeance is subversive of our democratic

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<sup>200</sup> Truman, “Address to the NAACP,” 1947

<sup>201</sup> Truman, Establishing the President’s Committee On Civil Rights.

system ... and gravely threatens our form of government” and “it is essential that all possible steps be taken to safeguard our civil rights,” Truman announced to the world and to the American people his intention to pursue justice and extend the full degree of freedom to all Americans.<sup>202</sup>

In his 1947 State of the Union address, Truman made clear to Congress that it must take racial issues seriously. “We have recently witnessed in this country numerous attacks upon the constitutional rights of individual citizens as a result of racial and religious bigotry,” Truman said, noting violence towards Black servicemen returning from the War.<sup>203</sup> “Substantial segments of our people have been prevented from exercising fully their right to participate in the election of public officials, both locally and nationally. Freedom to engage in lawful callings has been denied. The will to fight these crimes should be in the hearts of every one of us.”<sup>204</sup> Six months later, Truman became the first United States President to address a meeting of the NAACP, declaring to the convention that “I should like to talk to you briefly about civil rights and human freedom. It is my deep conviction that we have reached a turning point in the long history of our country’s efforts to guarantee a freedom and equality to all our citizens. Recent events in the United States and abroad have made us realize that it is more important today than ever before to insure that all Americans enjoy these rights. And when I say all Americans — I mean all Americans.”<sup>205</sup> His campaign for reelection was historic for its outreach to Black voters, and Truman made his commitment to the extension of freedom and achievement of justice in America indubitably clear. In words that serve as an philosophical bridge between the anxious economic pragmatism of the New Deal and the qualitative positive liberty of the Great Society,

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Truman, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union.”

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Truman, “Address to the NAACP.”

Truman declared America ready to meet its promise: “Every man should have the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in the making of public decisions through the ballot, and the right to a fair trial in a fair court.”<sup>206</sup>

Truman acted on the findings of his Committee on Civil Rights and his promises to Black Americans. Upon reelection, he issued a civil rights message to Congress in which he acknowledged that “not all groups enjoy the full privileges of citizenship,” and called for federal laws against the “crime of lynching,” against poll taxes, against voter interference of any sort, and against discrimination in unions, trains, buses, and airplanes.<sup>207</sup> Further, he called for remuneration to Japanese Americans interned during the war who had suffered the loss of homes, capital, and rights.<sup>208</sup> For the first time in American history, by invitation of the White House, Black Americans were included in the “top social events of the Inaugural, including the dinner given by the President and the Vice-President-elect and the grand ball” at the beginning of Truman’s second term, a stark contrast to Wilson’s promotion of KKK propaganda.<sup>209</sup> Though largely symbolic, inclusion of Black Americans in festivities signaled to Truman’s counterparts on Capitol Hill that he lived by the legislative agenda he had put forward to Congress. In the tradition of Wilson and Roosevelt, Truman used the presidency as a mobilizing force, setting the nation’s policy agenda with speeches and public messages to guide public opinion and executive orders to move rapidly where Congress would stall and compromise. Acting on moral conviction, the advice of civil rights leaders, and the recommendations of his own Civil Rights Commission Truman issued Executive Order 9981 in 1948, desegregating the armed forces and

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, 587

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 587

<sup>209</sup> Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, 427

prohibiting racial discrimination therein.<sup>210</sup> In tearing down Wilson's racist federal legacy, Truman inaugurated an era where Civil Rights were taken seriously by the government, and the power of the plebiscitary presidency would be used to circumvent issues of unequal representation and political stagnation in Congress. The New Deal legacy of the national legislative presidency would be used to secure these rights.

The Truman years established a tone for the decades of the Liberal Consensus. Where Roosevelt had consciously compromised liberty and justice for all for a progressive redefinition of liberty and a reformulated reciprocal federal government under the progressive unity banner of liberalism, Truman established racial justice and equality as a moral mandate in American government. Though Roosevelt's coalition had included both Black voters and segregationist politicians, Truman's moral pragmatism offered a more complete conception of the progressive promise of American life, one within which Americans of all races could envision a free and just future, even though it meant sacrificing political power in a South which hadn't forgotten the Civil War. With the Fair Deal the Truman administration made complete the transition from protector state to positive state that the Roosevelt administration had begun with the New Deal. By announcing the federal "duty" and commitment to see that the "Constitutional guarantees of individual liberties and equal protection under the laws are not denied or abridged anywhere in the Union," and cementing "our continuing faith in the free way of life," Truman ensured that the American government would seek to extend positive freedom and use the levers of power won in the New Deal to guarantee "equality of opportunity."<sup>211</sup> By recognizing, as Hegel noted, that the legitimacy of the state in its universality is in question when it fails to provide for civil rights, Truman set the moral course for his successors to follow. Though Truman historian David

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<sup>210</sup> Truman, Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services.

<sup>211</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, 587-589

McCullough notes that the president “had achieved less in civil rights than he had hoped,” and the road to equality was long, he nevertheless succeeded in setting the tone for the epoch: he created “the Commission on Civil Rights, ordered the desegregation of the armed services and the federal Civil Service,” and had “done more than any President since Lincoln to awaken the American conscience to the issues of civil rights.”<sup>212</sup>

### **Diverging Currents and a Changing Political Landscape**

A unity in progressive thinking between the Deweyan current of pragmatic pluralism and Crolyan current of national unity broadly characterized liberalism from the New Deal through to the Great Society, though for philosophical and political reasons, that unity began to break down during the Johnson administration. Institutional impediments to civil rights revealed deficiencies in Roosevelt’s initial synthesis of the two currents, and post-war population movements altered political coalitions and geographies substantially while giving birth to a New Left and a culture of cause-oriented political movements.<sup>213</sup>

Eisenhower and Kennedy, like Truman, mobilized public opinion and set national legislative agendas from the Oval Office, seeking to employ New Deal mechanisms of pragmatism and planning to resolve the crisis of civil rights on a national scale. Under Eisenhower the Commission on Civil Rights was formed to continue the work of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights established by Truman, as recommended by that committee. Public and legal opinion in the 1950s lagged behind the political philosophy of equality which the Liberal Consensus promoted, but the Supreme Court overturned in 1954 the separate but equal doctrine established by the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling of 1896. Separate but equal thinking had

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 915

<sup>213</sup> Cause-oriented indicates political action with a particular, narrow interest. Cause-oriented politics is related to interest-group liberalism and pluralism, where the agenda is often non-economic and addresses a particular value or a narrower non-geographic community subset within the large group.

enabled much of the Jim Crow legal system in the South, and as a new legal precedent emerged with *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Eisenhower administration, however imperfectly, enforced the decision and with it liberal principles of equality, at times with military force, representing in arms and law the plebiscitary power of the presidency just as sweeping programs like the WPA had in national welfare policy.<sup>214</sup> Eisenhower understood that the presidency was meant for leadership, not simple protectorship, and in his capacity as representative of the whole national will he put pressure “on private businesses to desegregate or lose government contracts.”<sup>215</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, America’s economy was thriving. Programs including the G. I. Bill and VA Loans provided veterans access to higher education and low-interest housing loans with miniscule down payments. Black Americans, however, were being left behind, and substantial movement toward equality of opportunity was not being made.

Eisenhower’s infrastructure projects, reminiscent of the New Deal, connected America as never before. Signing the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act in 1956, Eisenhower signaled a new era in American commerce and growth, yet in the process enabled the destruction of numerous thriving African American and Latino communities as surveyors, state agencies, and the national government used discriminatory mapping to build highways directly through minority neighborhoods. The *de jure* segregation present before *Brown* morphed into *de facto* segregation as school districts remained largely white or largely black and suburbs emerged around America’s cities, denying access to minorities and people of color. The Black vote remained suppressed. Black Americans were subject to redlining — housing and loan discrimination — as institutions and individuals within federal and state government sought to

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<sup>214</sup> Eisenhower, Providing Assistance for the Removal of an Obstruction of Justice Within the State of Arkansas.

<sup>215</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 158

resist the widening of democracy and the full enjoyment of political and civil rights by people of color.<sup>216</sup> By 1960, social insurance welfare had increased by almost 5500% from 1935, but poverty, both in inner cities and rural farming and manufacturing communities persisted.<sup>217</sup> Experimentalist national policy was proving ineffective at treating poverty, and ineffective at alleviating institutional racism.

Following much the same mold as Eisenhower, Kennedy, coming to power in 1961, continued the liberal agenda at home and abroad. Like his predecessors Kennedy acknowledged and made use of the “executive-centered liberal state grounded in the notion of an economic bill of rights,” using the liberal plebiscitary power of the presidency to desegregate public universities in the South and putting the weight of the federal government behind the fight for gender equality as well.<sup>218</sup> With language reminiscent of Truman’s E.O. 9808, Kennedy established the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 for “developing recommendations” for “overcoming discriminations in government and private employment on the basis of sex.”<sup>219</sup> Chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, the commission advocated equal pay, maternity leave, and universal childcare.<sup>220</sup> Before his death, President Kennedy sought not only to inspire national feeling and purpose — important to national unity progressives in the Croly mold — through the space program, but through a public commitment to opening the promise of the liberal dream to all Americans. His push for civil rights legislation would lead to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 after his death, which for the first time provided against discrimination on the basis of sex. “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s

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<sup>216</sup> Gross, “A ‘Forgotten History’ Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America.”

<sup>217</sup> Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 209

<sup>218</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 160

<sup>219</sup> Kennedy, Establishing the President’s Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>220</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 164

memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long,” the new President Lyndon Johnson would say.<sup>221</sup>

Eisenhower and Kennedy both confronted in their presidencies imperfect representation, an institutional roadblock to completing the positive state committed to the protection of civil rights that Truman had promised in 1947. Liberalism relied on democratic representation to mediate the needs of the individual and the government. “Representation for Hegel,” Schlomo Avineri wrote, “is a system of mediation between the population and government.”<sup>222</sup> While Hegel argued for corporations, mediation was the root principle. In America, the “emergence of the modern party fulfilled the mediating role Hegel assigned to corporations,” Avineri continued.<sup>223</sup> During the New Deal, pluralistically-minded advisors schooled in Hegel and Dewey sought alternative forms of reciprocity and public engagement by advocating the decentralization of certain elements of administration — works projects, TVA planning, and even agricultural policy to an extent. New Deal leaders never decentralized the authority of the state as fully as pluralists would have liked, instead relying on the party and the presidency to mediate between the universal and particular wills in the nation. It was this principle of mediation through the party and the ballot box — democracy as a way of life, as Dewey put it — which was understood in the American progressive consciousness to serve as the philosophical justification for the plebiscitary presidency. As civil rights became a focus of the Liberal Consensus, it became apparent that with racial disenfranchisement the party system had failed as the Hegelian mediating organ, and the presidency was not a representative structure. This notion was embodied by the impediments to progress experienced by the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations as they sought to extend freedom and achieve justice.

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<sup>221</sup> Johnson, “President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress.”

<sup>222</sup> Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 161

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 163

The New Deal laid the foundations for a new American freedom and functionally recast the role of the national state as an interventionist, activist, and participatory entity. The presidents of the Liberal Consensus expanded participatory democracy and recognized the moral, philosophical, and strategic imperative of civil rights, seeking to bring the dignity, actualized freedom, and government support offered primarily to white men during the New Deal in legal principle and action to people of color and women. Through each successive administration, however, it became clearer to political leaders and activists that the liberal blend of pragmatic pluralism and active national unity was not sufficient to cure the ills of racial injustice in the United States, let alone solve the crisis of modern poverty as Roosevelt had sought to do.

In addition to hampered public philosophy, political geography, too, challenged the liberal order. Jerome Mileur described this change in *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, where he wrote:

After World War II... the political geography of the nation began to change slowly but dramatically as a result of the massive movements of population away from the North ... In addition, many of those who stayed in the old North were moving as well, away from urban centers to the suburbs. The new liberal political coalition of FDR would be challenged philosophically and politically by these movements... The narrowness of John Kennedy's win in 1960 reflected the impact of this changing geography on presidential politics.<sup>224</sup>

As an educated, affluent populace shifted from cities to suburbs and tensions over desegregation made winning votes in the South more and more difficult for liberals, the political landscape came to meet this notion of liberal philosophy hampered by institutional barriers. Just as the sentiment of the American state in 1933 was one of desperation, in the post-war world the sentiment of the state was one of pluralist empowerment which existed within a flourishing economy. “Not only did the growth of the suburbs erode the political power of the big cities, but

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<sup>224</sup> Mileur, “The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism,” 414-415

the suburbs themselves became home to a new style of politics — more independent and activist, more issue oriented and cause centered, less connected to the familiar institutional politics of political parties and interest groups,” Mileur continued.<sup>225</sup> Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy sought to remedy issues of civil rights and modern poverty, but were hampered by constitutional limitations of federalism and unrepresentative, structurally racist institutions. Further, their efforts to address inequality continued to cost political capital — primarily votes in the South — weakening the plebiscitary legitimacy of the executive and leaving liberalism vulnerable. Americans who had embraced an enveloping, national bureaucracy during the New Deal began to lose trust in the idea that Washington could be the source of any reciprocal, universal actualization. “Where the New Deal, like Progressivism, had sought Hamiltonian means to Jeffersonian ends, the New Left called for a return to Jeffersonian means ... [and] faulted the bureaucratic, top-down power of the liberal state.”<sup>226</sup>

As frustration with the liberal philosophical model of positive bureaucracy grew and the shift in political geography encouraged cause-oriented movement politics, pluralism, and a longing for Jeffersonian democracy “updated in the modern intellectual explorations of John Dewey,” modern liberalism diverged from its Rooseveltian foundation.<sup>227</sup> To make whole the promise of American life and complete the project of the New Deal, liberals would have to cast off the particular fusion of the Deweyan and Crolyan currents which had enabled the transformation of the state and redefinition of freedom in the first place.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 416

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 439

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

## Extending Freedom and Achieving Justice

Lyndon Johnson went to Congress in 1937 as a result of a special election in which he “managed to distinguish himself from a field of eight other, better-known candidates, by running as the most devoted follower of the New Deal.”<sup>228</sup> Devotion to the New Deal and Roosevelt’s liberal policies defined Johnson’s political career. He watched as Truman’s Fair Deal stumbled on racial equality, as Eisenhower struggled to enforce desegregation from the bully pulpit, and as Kennedy failed, too, to solve poverty with Keynesian liberal means. “From the moment his presidency began,” historian Joshua Zeitz wrote, “Johnson was committed to completing the unfinished legacy of the New Deal and Fair Deal, including measures to alleviate the sting of poverty... The question wasn’t *whether* to fight poverty, but *how*.”<sup>229</sup>

While Roosevelt had faced a nation broadly struggling, Johnson faced a nation broadly prospering. Both methods used and issues addressed by the Great Society and the War on Poverty differed from those forged in the crisis of the Depression. National sentiment no longer favored bureaucratic intervention, national management, and an imperial presidency. The New Left that had emerged focused on qualitative metrics of social prosperity rather than simple economic actualization, and demanded participatory, grassroots democracy. “For these critics of liberalism, politics was centered in the everyday lives of citizens, and in the name of realizing a more authentic democracy, they sought to push decision making downward into the grass roots,” Mileur wrote: “The New Left critique began to shift the national political debate away from economics and toward more cultural issues.”<sup>230</sup> Johnson’s government met the cause-oriented left in method and governing philosophy, blending elements of New Deal liberalism with a new focus on pluralism and participation. Focusing not just on economic prosperity, but racial and

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<sup>228</sup> Milkis, “Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the ‘Twilight’ of the Modern Presidency,” 1

<sup>229</sup> Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

<sup>230</sup> Mileur, “The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism,” 440

institutional justice, Johnson’s government “focused on unlocking opportunity by making education and workforce training more widely accessible to poor people, ensuring that poor people and the elderly had access to medical care, and bolstering supplementary programs to ensure that poor families and children enjoyed greater food security.”<sup>231</sup>

Achieving the positive promises of the Fair Deal with the Great Society would require abandoning some of the bureaucratic, tightly-managed methods of the New Deal, and allowing citizens and activists at the local level to decide how best to meet national goals. Addressing issues of racial and gender equality, voting rights, childhood poverty, social security, and opportunity in education and training would require a blend of powerful national action and pragmatic pluralism — a fusion more trusting of the latter, in recognition of the institutional defects of the former, than the New Deal had been. Johnson’s government intended to set national goals, but it was up to local Community Action Program organizers to achieve “maximum feasible participation.”<sup>232</sup> Less explicitly planned than New Deal programs like the WPA, the Great Society and the War on Poverty left a great deal of discretion up to local leadership. As political scientist Theodore Lowi puts it, “priorities would be found not at first, but at last.”<sup>233</sup> These two shifts — from quantitative to qualitative goals and from national planning to grass roots participation — marked a substantial divergence from the liberal method born in the strife of the New Deal, and embodied the shift in political geography and political philosophy within liberalism more generally. To complete the promises of the New Deal and Fair Deal, Johnson addressed poverty, racial equality, and the promise of American opportunity and positive liberty with a new form of progressivism, what Milkis and Mileur term in the title of their book the “High Tide” of liberalism.

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<sup>231</sup> Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

<sup>232</sup> Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 221

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

Declaring an “unconditional war on poverty” in his State of the Union Address in 1964, Johnson explained to Congress that it “will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won.”<sup>234</sup> Asking Congress to join him in this war, Johnson embodied the ideal of the plebiscitary presidency as Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had before. Asking, too, “all Americans to join with me in that effort,” however, Johnson highlighted that this was not to be another purely top-down initiative, but a national program which demanded the attention of Americans at all levels of society.<sup>235</sup> At the time of Johnson’s address, more than 30 million Americans remained in poverty, and both liberal intellectuals and the public had been shocked two years earlier when the activist Michael Harrington had written in his book *The Other America* that “the poor in post–World War II America were both estranged and invisible: ‘They think and feel differently; they look upon a different America than the middle class looks upon.’”<sup>236</sup> Emphasizing a more Deweyan approach to poverty than Roosevelt, Johnson committed to a mission which would call upon the efforts and talents of everyday Americans and return power to lower levels of government, substantially redefining the liberal philosophical method for the first time since the New Deal:

Poverty is a national problem, requiring improved national organization and support. But this attack, to be effective, must also be organized at the state and the local level and must be supported and directed by state and local efforts.

For the war against poverty will not be won here in Washington. It must be won in the field, in every private home, in every public office, from the courthouse to the White House.

The program I shall propose will emphasize this cooperative approach to help that one-fifth of all American families with incomes too small to even meet their basic needs.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Johnson, “State of the Union Address.”

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Milkis, “Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the ‘Twilight’ of the Modern Presidency,” 5

<sup>237</sup> Johnson, “State of the Union Address.”

Johnson followed through. Qualitative programs focused on opportunity and education were enacted alongside sweeping expansions to the social safety net, including the first successful national medical insurance programs, Medicare and Medicaid. “Workplace rights encompassing the gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and parenthood of employees soon put a new and expanded conception of social citizenship on the employment agenda,” Nelson Lichtenstein wrote.<sup>238</sup> Johnson emphasized positive liberty again and again, declaring that a “great people flower not from wealth and power, but from a society which spurs them to the fullness of their genius... That alone is the Great Society.”<sup>239</sup>

New welfare programs proposed as part of the War on Poverty depended less on strict categories than the welfare programs of the New Deal. In Roosevelt and Perkins’ Social Security legislation, Lowi writes, each “of the titles is carefully defined in relation to the others” adding up to a “relatively comprehensive” and “categoric” system of legal welfare.<sup>240</sup> New Welfare, on the other hand, did not have these categories, and for a very bold reason: Johnson, and to some extent Kennedy, had seen that despite predictions “public assistance categories had not begun to ‘wither away,’” and as a result a new method addressing the systemic injustice of poverty was needed not just for alleviation, but for “eliminating poverty.”<sup>241</sup> To some extent embracing the social and cultural theories of the New Left and of cultural pluralists — late in the 1930s Dewey declared himself a cultural pluralist — the Johnson administration acknowledged the importance of addressing poverty and equality through the recognition of social interest groups. Community, identity, race, gender, ethnicity, and culture mattered when trying to eliminate poverty because the American system had not yet treated different social groups equally. Eliminating poverty

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<sup>238</sup> Lichtenstein, “Pluralism, Postwar Intellectuals, and the Demise of the Union Idea,” 104

<sup>239</sup> Milkis, “Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the ‘Twilight’ of the Modern Presidency,” 8

<sup>240</sup> Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 202

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 207

through equality of opportunity meant recognizing this, and addressing it meant decentralizing government power and devolving decision making to those who knew the issues on the ground best. As a result, cities like New York, Chicago, and Syracuse set up their own Community Action programs in line with the federal government's expectations, and decisions, including how to allocate federal funds, were left largely up to community leaders, often bypassing state officials in the process.

Attempting to eliminate poverty, Johnson at once strengthened and called into question the legitimacy of the plebiscitary presidency. "Institutional and programmatic reform of the New Deal made the modern executive, born of the Progressive Era, an enduring part of American political life; it consolidated developments in which the president, rather than Congress or localized parties, became the main instrument of popular rule in the United States," Milkis wrote.<sup>242</sup> By encouraging cause-oriented movement politics and a new Jeffersonian particularism and participatory democracy at the same time as bypassing state government with federal executive policy, "the Great Society contributed to the rise of its own antithetical force," that of Movement Conservatism and grassroots particularism. This, however, was a conscious sacrifice on Johnson's part. Poverty had not been solved by Keynesian means, and Johnson and his advisors believed that achieving liberal ends was an obligation — even if they sacrificed elements of the New Deal or even liberal power in achieving it. To succeed on the issue of poverty, they hoped, would mean no sacrifice was necessary. "We have an obligation in our society," Johnson's confidant, advisor, and speechwriter Horace Busby wrote, "to support a principle of public policy which will permit every citizen not only to live at a certain minimum

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<sup>242</sup> Milkis, "Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the 'Twilight' of the Modern Presidency," 5

standard but to be able to live at a rising standard by his own effort and his own training and ability.”<sup>243</sup>

On the issue of racial equality, too, Johnson gambled. “Johnson and his aides were also acutely aware that racial discrimination made a mockery of liberal opportunity theory, with its faith in empowering citizens to rise as far as their talents would take them,” Zeitz wrote.<sup>244</sup> Eliminating racial injustice, as Johnson pledged to do in his 1964 Great Society Speech to the graduating class of the University of Michigan, was a crucial plank in solving the issue of poverty as well as making whole the New Deal promise of American life. Essential to Johnson’s mission were the Civil Rights Act of 1964, passed after Kennedy’s death, and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), each of which provided tools with which the Johnson administration could enforce desegregation and the voting rights essential to participatory democracy. Employing Eisenhower-like tactics of promising funding for education and withholding it from noncompliant school districts, Johnson “began wielding a carrot-and-stick method to compel Southern school districts to desegregate,” and with more deliberate speed and far-reaching enforcement than any program since the passage of *Brown*, the ESEA was effective in addressing both racial injustice and that qualitative element of opportunity core to the American promise and to Deweyan democracy as a way of life, access to education.<sup>245</sup> “Between 1965 and 1968, the number of black students in the South who attended majority-white schools rose from roughly 2.3 percent to almost 23.4 percent,” Zeitz emphasized.<sup>246</sup> Federal economic levers in other programs, too, were employed to enforce equality of opportunity, and the administration made clear that to “be eligible for Medicare

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<sup>243</sup> Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

reimbursements, a hospital or nursing home had to admit all people for inpatient and outpatient services without regard to color, race or national origin.”<sup>247</sup> Johnson’s Great Society programs worked in tandem to eliminate poverty and racial injustice, one lever augmenting the success of the other.

This method of interventionist enforcement was effective on the issue of racial inequality. Discrimination and injustice plagued America at such a massive scale that pluralist initiatives would have been ineffective against them. Enforcement for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which followed resembled that of the ESEA program. Johnson instructed an immediate “all-fronts attack on poll taxes and literacy tests,” and Zeitz wrote that “Four days later — the ink barely dry — federal examiners descended on 12 counties in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Georgia.”<sup>248</sup> Johnson knew that the reason Truman’s attempts to address racial injustice had fallen short was precisely because there was truth in his assessment that Southerners were “living eighty years behind the times.”<sup>249</sup> Powerful national action was the only solution, even though “he clearly knew the political costs to himself and to his party of any effective civil rights legislation.”<sup>250</sup> Like Truman, Johnson saw a moral mandate worth sacrificing for. Truman was willing to sacrifice his political career; Johnson willingly sacrificed progressive power to cement in law the universalist human principles of liberalism.

Johnson’s success in expanding freedom and achieving justice for the American people was significant. Employing established levers of power within the modern plebiscitary presidency, the legacy of Roosevelt, Johnson moved the needle on poverty and racial injustice. Like his predecessors, however, Johnson fell short of his goals. Poverty remained in 1969, as did

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, 589

<sup>250</sup> Mileur, “The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism,” 445

wide scale discrimination and racial injustice. Laws promulgated during his time in office expanded the welfare state and codified new government powers to enforce equality under law and equality of opportunity for people of all races. “The institutionalization of Great Society liberalism and the emergence of the courts as the guardian of the ‘the rights revolution’ of the late 1960s and 1970s followed in large part from the landmark laws that were Lyndon Johnson’s greatest accomplishment,” Milkis wrote.<sup>251</sup> Like Truman, Johnson was unwilling to sacrifice participatory democracy for a semblance of national unity and the maintenance of liberal power. “We’ve got to end this goddamn discrimination against Negroes,” Johnson said to Joe Califano, the Special Assistant to the President, in 1965.<sup>252</sup> It was his mission: a radical yet measured extension of the New Deal to all members of American society, and the completion of a program which would guarantee not just free movement but positive liberty to all Americans. To make whole the promise of American life and complete the project of the New Deal, Johnson cast off the particular fusion of the Deweyan and Crolyan currents which had enabled the transformation of the state and redefinition of freedom in the first place, leaning into Deweyan methods and Truman’s promise to ensure “the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in the making of public decisions.”<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Milkis, “Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the ‘Twilight’ of the Modern Presidency,” 36

<sup>252</sup> Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

<sup>253</sup> Truman, “Address to the NAACP.”

## CHAPTER 5

### The Renewal of the Jeffersonian Order

#### Conservative Reaction

Lyndon Johnson had made sweeping promises to the American people during his presidency, pledging an end to poverty under the Great Society and participation in the national mission that was the War on Poverty. The federal government expanded its commitment to positive liberty, aiming to make American society more fair and more just, and in the process Johnson expanded the welfare state, amplified the role of the modern executive, and sought racial justice. In 1968, however, a conservative reaction to these very achievements carried President Richard Nixon to power, ending the era of Liberal Consensus. The expansion of the welfare state came at great cost, with “the second half of the 1960s... characterized by a strong upward movement in social welfare expenditures under public programs in the United States” in addition to deficit spending on the Vietnam War effort.<sup>254</sup> The Johnson administration embraced interest-group liberalism and the Deweyan pluralist current in progressivism, devolving planning and decision making power to the local level as it increased public spending. The Great Society was founded on the principle of unlocking human potential and growing the economic pie as a method of positive actualization, and on this assumption Johnson made his promises. When the administration’s programs “did not meet the great expectations that liberals established in the heady days of 1964,” it became clear that Johnson’s guiding philosophy had “made assumptions about the American economy that would prove unsustainable,” and interest-group liberalism served to demonstrate the impotence of liberal government, rather than elevate it.<sup>255</sup> Many Americans became disenchanted with the political order established during the New Deal, coming to agree

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<sup>254</sup> Skolnik and Dales, “Social Welfare Expenditures 1968-69.”

<sup>255</sup> Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

with Johnson's "conservative critics that government itself was the cancer, not the cure."<sup>256</sup> The intellectual reaction matched the popular sentiment. Economists, lawyers, and academics mounted a rigorous critique of liberal methods in post-war America, asserting principally that the modern presidency constructed by Roosevelt was at odds with the original intent of the Constitution. Liberal executive overreach, they claimed, had corrupted American governing principles, destabilizing checks and balances in Washington and undermining the federal structures of the republic. Theirs was an argument for community feeling over national feeling, and of Jeffersonian democracy and freedom over liberal national unity and positive right. This argument for community feeling and states' rights worked well as a philosophical banner under which segregationists could gather. Racial tensions in the United States grew more pronounced in the 1960s as anger increased over civil rights reform and federal intervention to enforce that reform at the ballot box, at the lunch counter, and in the public school. As much as American political heritage was divided in philosophy between Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian principles, it was divided in sentiment between the legacy of the Confederate South and the new positive Hegelian legacy of the New Deal. These reactionary strains — the popular discontent with liberal promises unfulfilled and failure within, the intellectual dissent over executive power, and America's Confederate legacy — fused in the 1960s to produce Movement Conservatism and a new unity for the Republican Party. Taking office in 1969, Nixon represented this new reactionary fusion in power, and inaugurated an era of renewal for the Jeffersonian order.

### **Failure Within**

Hegel's philosophy, and the progressive political philosophy which emerged in its image in twentieth century America, is not hostile to pluralism. The constitutional order Hegel argues for

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

in *The Philosophy of Right* simply requires mediating institutions and participatory, reciprocal governance such that the universal will of the state is united with the individual will of the citizen, actualizing both and encouraging both to flourish. Devolving decision making to the state level — making use of the federal state system in the United States Constitution — has always been recognized in American Hegelian tradition as a valid form of reciprocity and representation, both by cultural pluralists like Dewey and by earlier thinkers, including those of the St. Louis School. In 1902 Snider argued that America was a “superior Hegelian state” to Prussia precisely because of its federal system and independent judiciary.<sup>257</sup> This current — the fusion of Hegelian ends with Jeffersonian means promoted by Dewey’s democracy as a way of life — was the philosophy which gained traction in the later years of the Liberal Consensus as an understanding of institutional injustice led liberals away from national planning and towards pluralism.

“In an admittedly halting, often awkward way, Johnson was seeking to reconcile the New Deal state with the historical antipathy in the United States to bureaucracy,” Milkis writes.<sup>258</sup> In doing so, Johnson leaned into the Deweyan current of progressivism while attempting to achieve justice in a prospering America, and contributed directly to public disenchantment with the liberal state. “Interest-group liberalism cannot plan,” Lowi writes in *The End of Liberalism*, nor can it “achieve justice” because “unguided delegation leads to pluralistic, bargain-oriented politics.”<sup>259</sup> Justice was exactly what was needed from welfare during the Liberal Consensus, not solely amelioration of poverty, for poverty was a result of social structure, isolation, and a denial of civil rights rather than economic randomness. The turn to interest-group liberalism eroded the legitimacy of the modern presidency, the welfare state, and the liberal agenda, and though the

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<sup>257</sup> Snider, “America, The Superior Hegelian State,” 184

<sup>258</sup> Milkis, “Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the ‘Twilight’ of the Modern Presidency,” 30

<sup>259</sup> Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 311

“architects of the Great Society were well aware of the political risks involved in delegating administrative responsibility to community action agencies,” they could not have predicted the hostility which would arise to their programs within the voting public, and “these risks were taken in the hope of revitalizing, and indeed surpassing,” New Deal liberalism.<sup>260</sup>

As noted, Kennedy and Johnson recognized where their predecessors had not the intersectionality of poverty, and that to extend freedom and achieve justice Keynesian modes would not be sufficient. “The phenomenon we fight today is in fact not poverty at all,” Lowi emphasized, but “injustice that has made poverty a nonrandom, nonobjective phenomenon.”<sup>261</sup> The challenge is not assistance, he argues, but to “change social rules and conduct in order that poverty [may] become and remain a random thing.”<sup>262</sup> Johnson’s Great Society sought to reform American welfare with the “supplement” of “nonlaw,” — that is “discretion and bargaining.”<sup>263</sup> With the number of poor people on welfare expanding, the liberal solution was to “simply state a general national goal of getting people off the welfare rolls” and delegate “the achievement of this goal” to the state satellites of the national office.<sup>264</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, Community Action agencies within the War on Poverty program had taken federal funding without producing the desired results. The decade was characterized by a series of highly-visible social movements within the labor, feminist, civil rights, and pacifist spheres. Without results, spending was just that, spending. “The New Left offered theories of participatory democracy, demands for openness, and strategies of empowerment but only the thinnest justification for collective action and the vaguest vision of the good society,” Mileur wrote, and in a nation whose population had shifted to suburbs characterized by *de facto*

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<sup>260</sup> Milkis, “Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the ‘Twilight’ of the Modern Presidency,” 31

<sup>261</sup> Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 233

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 207

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 210

segregation and comfortable, isolated prosperity, liberalism increasingly appeared to be “a morally bankrupt doctrine, a godless secularism, overly intrusive into the marketplace, out of touch with ordinary Americans, and committed to nothing so much as big government and the taxes required to sustain it.”<sup>265</sup> Thus the shift in liberalism toward the Deweyan current at the expense of the national, Crolyan current left the federal government without a plan for achieving justice and fulfilling its promises.

Americans who heard the promises of a Great Society resoundingly elected Johnson and a Democratic mandate to govern in Congress in 1964. Johnson’s “domestic programs were born of prevailing liberal conviction... that experts could grow the economy in perpetuity while sustaining low unemployment and inflation,” Zeitz wrote.<sup>266</sup> “By that assumption, if government equipped people with the tools to help themselves and provided an even playing field, opportunity would be widely shared.”<sup>267</sup> By 1968 these assumptions proved unrealistic, and the promises left unfulfilled by the Great Society had come with an enormous price tag. Population shifts combined with the liberal governing order’s failure from within made the voting populace more susceptible to the critique of liberalism offered by conservative intellectuals.

### **Intellectual Dissent**

The federal government, conservative intellectuals argued during the Liberal Consensus, had overstepped its ethical and constitutional bounds. The plebiscitary modern presidency, a principal legacy of Roosevelt’s government, did not align with the original intent of America’s founders for that office. Not only had the separations of powers been disrupted, but further still the balance between high and low politics — that is national versus state and local politics —

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<sup>265</sup> Mileur, “The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism,” 447

<sup>266</sup> Zeitz, “What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ’s Great Society.”

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

essential to the ethos of the federal republic had been disrupted. National welfare agencies intruded upon the natural ethical domain of state and community organizations, government regulations impeded freedom within the market, and the intended role of government had been broadly corrupted by liberal principles. Drawing principally on notions of negative freedom, Jeffersonian democracy, and classical economics, the conservative intellectual reaction confronted a governing order committed to national unity, reciprocity, and positive freedom.

The federal government, original intent conservatives argued, was meant by the framers of the U. S. Constitution to protect the civil liberties of citizens through the provision of national defense and the maintenance of local — that is inter-state — peace. Morality, social meaning, and community ought to be fostered on the local level by local institutions.<sup>268</sup> Rather than programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children, conservatives argued that welfare should be provided by neighborhood organizations and communities, and rather than a national program of education in any sense — or even an effort at guidance, funding, and intervention in favor of civil and moral standards like Johnson’s ESEA — local schools alone should be responsible for determining the contents of citizenship.<sup>269</sup> As a federal republic, national mores ran counter to the intent of the constitution, legal scholars argued. Attempts to remedy *de facto* segregation, too, ran against the conservative philosophy of local moral rule. Washington had no legitimacy telling a community how to live or where to be educated or how much to pay for housing.<sup>270</sup> Liberals had twisted the Constitution, conservatives argued, to wield unintended power over the states. Examples of Eisenhower’s use of the interstate commerce clause as a bludgeon for civil rights and national morality and Johnson’s enforcement of national mores through Medicare, Medicaid and the ESEA loomed large in conservative political thought. This

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<sup>268</sup> Devigne, *Recasting Conservatism*, 67

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 167

moral and legal objection to the modern welfare state and the Crolyan attempt at a national unity and the actualization of the individual through positive and reciprocal universal structures crystallized in the mythologizing of the American founding, and the understanding that no substantive national feeling was needed for the state to perform its rote protective function.<sup>271</sup> Rugged individualism and the Jeffersonian past called out to the class of intellectuals who took issue with the liberal program.

Further, conservatives argued, the liberal administrations since Wilson had corrupted the intended function of the presidency, the cabinet, and the executive branch to pursue social goals and mobilize the public around national philosophy and legislation. “American conservative theory does not envision the president as a persistent mobilizer of public opinion,” Robert Devigne wrote in *Recasting Conservatism*.<sup>272</sup> Conservative thinkers do not believe as those of the Hegelian tradition that, as Avineri puts it, “public opinion and the modern state belong to each other.”<sup>273</sup> American government was carefully constructed to check itself and maintain a “dual polity” of high and low politics — defense, inter-state relations, international relations, and the treasury at the national level, and morality, education, regulation, and competition at the local level — thus there is no public opinion at the national level if opinion and morality are to be local.<sup>274</sup> The liberal state upset this careful balance, expanding the executive briefly under the New Freedom and then more thoroughly and permanently through Roosevelt’s alphabetic agencies. Liberals continued further as the Department of Justice grew its authority in the realm of civil rights, Social Security and other national welfare programs expanded, and the Deweyan vision of education sought supremacy in the cultivation of citizenship. The Great Society’s turn

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 69

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 73

<sup>273</sup> Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 173

<sup>274</sup> Devigne, *Recasting Conservatism*, 71

to interest-group liberalism and pluralism took this further, breaking down the barrier between high and low political authority by devolving lawmaking to the local aid administrator while bypassing and delegitimizing state governments. Economists were appalled at the rejection of market authority, and lawyers were similarly galled at the disregard for the constitutional limits on federal power.<sup>275</sup>

Conservative theory on negative freedom, limited government, natural market equilibria, and community feeling took hold beyond the intellectual sphere. Embraced by a disenchanted voting populace fed up with bureaucracy, high taxes, and seemingly fruitless national expenditure, Jeffersonian principles found a broader foothold than they had since the New Era, and soon such principles, along with new methods of propagandizing them, fused with America's dark legacy of white supremacy and Confederate heritage. "During the 1960s," Devigne wrote, "many conservative writers began to move toward conservatism on a basis of their opposition to specific programs for African-Americans."<sup>276</sup>

### **Confederate Legacy**

Truman understood the political cost of supporting Civil Rights for people of color when he warned his sister of his impending electoral loss — an election which was in the end only narrowly won — and when he promised the NAACP a guarantee of "civil rights and human freedom" while acknowledging that the "way ahead is not easy." He was correct. Civil rights legislation and national enforcement came at a heavy cost for the liberal governing order. Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson — dedicated as Truman was to the extension of New Deal freedom to African Americans and other minorities — witnessed a growing movement of white supremacy and racist reaction as they sought to achieve justice for all in America. Americans

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 145

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

broadly possessed more liberty in 1964 than they had at any prior time in the history of the republic, but the Liberal Consensus “was vulnerable... on the same grounds the post-Civil War consensus had been: race and gender,” Heather Richardson wrote in *How the South Won the Civil War*.<sup>277</sup> Federal welfare programs bloated the national budget, handing out opportunity and capital to what conservative whites saw as “undeserving, ungrateful” and un-American minorities who they believed only rioted, looted, and wasted in return.<sup>278</sup> Kennedy’s women’s empowerment plan, Richardson noted, “horrified traditionalists, especially fundamentalists.”<sup>279</sup> In response to civil rights legislation and the cultural pluralist attitudes present within liberalism, the white supremacist political elite — who became known as Movement Conservatives, as distinguished from philosophical conservatives — sought to “reverse the whole trend of American intellectual history from the days of Lincoln to those of... Eisenhower.”<sup>280</sup> They intended to turn back the political clock to 1850 — not just to the days of small, isolated federal government but to the days of female subservience and Black subjugation.

Key to this white supremacist resistance was the conservative magazine *National Review*, founded in 1955 by conservative commentator William Buckley. The mouthpiece of a newly invigorated conservatism, the periodical was founded for “the disciples of truth, who defend the organic moral order,” Buckley wrote, seeking to unite conservative public philosophy with racial Darwinism.<sup>281</sup> Between the pages of *National Review* conservatism fused amicably with white supremacy, and found its place within the mainstream. Carrying forward the tactics of fear, othering, us-versus-them mentality, and exploitation of media employed with great success on the national stage the year before by Senator Joseph McCarthy during the second Red Scare,

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<sup>277</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 156

<sup>278</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 169

<sup>279</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 164

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> Martin, “William F. Buckley Jr. Is Dead at 82.”

*National Review* put forth editorials justifying segregation as naturally moral, condemning federal intervention in education, and broadly lowering constitutional originalism to the vulgar and tying such political thought to the legacy of white supremacy, the Lost Cause, and the Confederacy. Buckley's intolerance unified a new generation of everyday conservatives, enough such that Schlesinger termed him "the scourge of liberalism."<sup>282</sup> In 2008, upon Buckley's death, President George Bush eulogized that he had "brought conservative thought into the political mainstream, and helped lay the intellectual foundation for America's victory in the Cold War."<sup>283</sup>

It was against the backdrop of Buckley's new Movement Conservatism and editorials such as his "Why the South Must Prevail" that Liberal Consensus leaders sought to achieve justice without paying the ultimate political cost. "The central question that emerges... is whether the White community in the South is entitled to take such measures as are necessary to prevail, politically and culturally, in areas where it does not presently dominate numerically?" Buckley asked in 1957.<sup>284</sup> "The sobering answer is *Yes*," he continued, "the White community is so entitled because, for the time being, it is the advanced race."<sup>285</sup> Movement conservatives, Richardson noted, differed philosophically from traditional conservatives, though they both used the language of Jeffersonian individualism. The new Buckley conservatives argued for a racial oligarchy, while traditional conservatism was at most atomization.<sup>286</sup> Johnson understood that the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would only speed the loss of the South for the Democratic party to an ethnonationalist Movement Conservatism that had been constructing a new message of local moral autonomy, rugged individualism for ethnic whites, and broad conservative unity for almost a decade.

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<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> Buckley, "Why the South Must Prevail," 149

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 155

America's racial legacy, however, was not only potent in the South. "The North had rallied to support the cause of civil rights, supporting the federal legislation of 1964 and 1965 that was aimed mainly at the Jim Crow South, but this support faded, sometimes into hostility, when civil rights activists moved into their communities," Mileur wrote.<sup>287</sup> "Open housing, busing, and affirmative action were all perceived as threats by those who inhabited the white ethnic neighborhoods of the inner cities. Largely working-class and built institutionally around the family, the church, and the neighborhood school, these communities often reacted with special outrage when desegregation struck at one of the pillars of their community: the public school."<sup>288</sup> Though Johnson won a sweeping electoral victory in 1964 over Barry Goldwater, a man who had aimed to unify the Republican Party and the conservative reaction around discontent, philosophy, and race, that fusion was accelerated and ultimately cemented by the extensive civil rights victories of the Great Society.

### **Synthesis in Movement Conservatism**

"Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice," Goldwater declared in his speech accepting the 1964 Presidential Nomination for the Republican Party.<sup>289</sup> Calling for unity among the disparate strands of conservatism present within the GOP, Goldwater's 1964 campaign represented the synthesis of dissatisfaction with liberalism's unfulfilled promises and bureaucratic bloat, the vulgarized intellectual critiques of liberal power by conservative theorists, and the racial animosity of America's Confederate legacy. Ultimately, the first two prongs served to justify the third, which became a dominant undercurrent of the conservative reaction.

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<sup>287</sup> Mileur, "The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism," 440

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 165

Defining his principles in the brief and impactful ghostwritten book *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater called for the rollback of federal interventionism and the overreach of the modern liberal presidency, a defense of community values and local morality over a national feeling, and a return to the principles of limited government and rugged individualism of Jeffersonian democracy. He leaned for legitimacy upon the titanic legacy of de Tocqueville, who warned in his *Democracy in America* that emphasizing the ballot box would not lead to freedom, but only the freedom to choose one's "guardians."<sup>290</sup> Goldwater took aim at the interstate commerce clause and its weaponization, high taxes and federal funding as coercion, and the desegregation of public education in easily-digestible essays. Where *National Review* had galvanized a generation of conservatives around general principles and policies, *The Conscience of a Conservative* gave that ready coalition mission and direction.

Goldwater and the Movement Conservatives who built and supported his campaign understood the need for unity and consistent messaging. They were fighting for freedom against the leviathan of the liberal state. Still, though they leaned into the Jeffersonian heritage of American democracy, Movement Conservatives could not conceal entirely their racial animus, and remained fringe in the 1960s. The 1964 campaign could not garner the support of large donors who prospered under liberal government, so Goldwater, the wealthy heir to a department store fortune, framed himself as hardscrabble and old-school.<sup>291</sup> Movement Conservatives' methods matched their messaging, and they built a grassroots funding campaign through the mail, emphasizing the struggle of individual Americans against the tide of social programs, spending, and taxes from which they saw little or no obvious benefit. Goldwater stood against unions, because every man should have the right to say no.<sup>292</sup> He paid lip service to communism,

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<sup>290</sup> Goldwater and Bozell, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, 18

<sup>291</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 161

<sup>292</sup> Goldwater and Bozell, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, 33

arguing it was a valuable ideology when society had a proletariat: capitalism had, however, solved that problem more swiftly and with more liberty. “Free enterprise has removed the economic and social conditions that might have made a class struggle possible,” he wrote.<sup>293</sup> Marxism was no longer a relevant ideology, and the liberals in power were pulling the wool over Americans’ eyes as they slowly instituted expensive, useless, and arbitrary collectivism in order to “subordinate the individual to the State,” he wrote, building on the success of the McCarthy hearings to draw skeptical, freedom-loving voters into his sphere.<sup>294</sup> This messaging was out of the mainstream, and was framed as resistance, a return to fundamental American values, and a fight against collectivism. In an era of great power conflict between liberalism and communism, the ethnonationalist element of Movement Conservatism received a free ride.

At the heart of both conservative and progressive political philosophy lies education, and as liberals in power pushed into the realm of public education with national guidelines and desegregation policies, Goldwater’s message had a battleground in every American community. Dewey believed democracy would not function without an education system which fostered a sense of community, morality, and democracy as a way of life. Croly understood public education as a way to engender national spirit and patriotism, helping construct from the earliest age a sense of unity among all people. Buckley, Goldwater and their intellectual allies understood similarly that education was the property of the community, not the nation, and should be used by the local community to create and maintain a sense of that community and a feeling of group morality apart from the state. Ethics was to be the purview of religion, the family, and the community, not the nation. Further, education provided the perfect framework within which to fuse the racist legacy of the Confederacy to the principles of limited government.

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 48

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 48

Goldwater wrote that “no powers regarding education were given to the federal government,” and that he is not at all “impressed” by the Supreme Court’s use of the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause to justify asserting that “school integration is the law of the land.”<sup>295</sup>

While claiming to be morally in agreement with the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* case which ordered the integration of all public schools with “all deliberate speed,” Goldwater nonetheless asserted that Congress should add a Constitutional Amendment stripping the federal government of any perceived authority over education.<sup>296</sup> Federalist arguments on this subject, as elsewhere, served to justify and extend racist ideology and roll back the clock on civil liberties. On the topic of federal overreach on other moral issues which should be left to the states and the community, Goldwater demonstrated a deliberate ignorance of the interstate market mechanisms he held so dear and decried federal matching funds for development projects as morally coercive.<sup>297</sup> His arguments were not without real and obvious examples: Eisenhower resorted to withholding federal funding to states which failed to enforce the equal protections clause in public accommodations, transport, and establishments, and Johnson leaned on the power of the executive when demanding compliance on issues of civil rights in exchange for federal funding for hospitals and schools. Vulgarizing the intellectual scholarship of economists like Friedman, Goldwater’s conservatism saw an opportunity for rule as Johnson’s Great Society gave people of color freedoms, rights and welfare and faltered in fulfilling the bold economic promises which may have retained white voters. Seeking to mobilize and unite the Republican Party and retake power from the New Deal class of liberals, Goldwater’s GOP fused the Confederate legacy of racial oligarchy to popular discontent and traditional conservative messaging and theory. Though Goldwater lost in a 44-state landslide — he won only his home state of Arizona and five states in

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 26-27

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 27; Warren, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

<sup>297</sup> Goldwater and Bozell, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, 20-30

the Deep South — the fusion of ethnonationalism, popular individualism, and traditionalism proved durable. By 1968, when cracks emerged in the liberal order, the war in Vietnam seemed endless, and poverty had not been eliminated, another politician would take up the leadership of the new Republican party, one very much disconnected with the party of Theodore Roosevelt that Coly idealized.

### **Bring us Together**

In 1968 Johnson’s Vice President Hubert Humphrey carried the Democratic banner and presented a continuation of the liberal order to America. With war raging in Vietnam and the Great Society successful but stalling at home, Humphrey emphasized in his acceptance of the nomination that “the months and the years ahead will severely test our America.”<sup>298</sup> Like those who had served before him and earned their place in history, Humphrey sought to make “this moment of crisis... a moment of creation.”<sup>299</sup> As Johnson had worried, however, legislation on civil rights, compounded by serious federal enforcement, had lost the Democrats the South. Goldwater had won Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina in 1964, and in 1968 Alabama Governor George Wallace, who had previously sought the Presidency as a Democrat, split the ticket and ran on the American Independent Party line. His nomination was the embodiment of the Lost Cause. In 1963, taking the oath as Governor of Alabama, he declared:

Today I have stood, where once Jefferson Davis stood, and took an oath to my people. It is very appropriate then that from this Cradle of the Confederacy, this very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland, that today we sound the drum for freedom as have our generations of forebears before us done, time and time again through history. Let us rise to the call of freedom-loving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South.

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<sup>298</sup> Humphrey, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination.”

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny . . . and I say . . . segregation today . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever.<sup>300</sup>

The liberal coalition had long depended on votes in the South and the West. Without them, Humphrey narrowly lost the popular vote to Nixon, and lost significantly in the electoral college. Without overt race-baiting, Nixon, too, represented racial reaction. Embracing the “southern strategy,” the promise to end the federal pursuit of desegregation in the South in exchange for votes and endorsements, Nixon capitalized in 1968 on the coalition Goldwater had founded in 1964.<sup>301</sup> Nixon cultivated an “us versus them” campaign style that would paint Democrats as “enemies of the nation,” and Movement Conservatives flocked to his banner.<sup>302</sup> Pledging to end the war in Vietnam with honor, reform welfare, deregulate business, and support state’s tenth amendment constitutional rights, Nixon won a landslide victory in a divided three-way race bringing together the discontent with liberalism and the Vietnam war with Jeffersonian individualism and a barely-hidden racial agenda. He won the West including California, much of the South and Southwest including South Carolina and Arizona, and took home a 32-state victory. In appealing to Movement Conservatives, Nixon brought white supremacy to the official platform of the Republican Party, while at the same time addressing legitimate questions of welfare reform and peace along with classic conservative concerns for limited government. Fusing dissatisfaction with liberalism, conservative theory, and racist ideology, the conservative reaction came to power and ended the era of Liberal Consensus.

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<sup>300</sup> Wallace, “Alabama Gubernatorial Inauguration Address.”

<sup>301</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 170

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

## A New Hegelian Heritage

In power, Nixon, Eisenhower's Vice President and a California politician who understood how the New Deal had helped transform his state and the nation, initially sought to "steer a middle course between traditional Republicans and the party's growing Movement Conservative faction."<sup>303</sup> Democrats controlled the House and Senate, blocking any substantial deconstruction of the liberal welfare state, and in the White House Nixon and his advisors took advantage of the imperial presidency rather than orchestrating its destruction. Though the conservative reaction had taken power in the executive branch, it appeared that a new Hegelian heritage had emerged and entrenched in American politics, that legacy stable within a strong executive, a positive welfare state, and a public acceptance of positive liberty as American birthright.

From the Oval Office, Nixon represented both liberal policies and the new Movement Conservative ideology. His administration sought to eliminate the pluralist bloat of the Johnson years, but in doing so expanded welfare and American opportunity with programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit. Further, Nixon oversaw the largest school desegregation in American history, infuriating his Southern base. At the same time he employed governmental and lobbying levers to drive the continued growth of the Movement Conservative agenda. Movement Conservative planners understood they could divide American voters by ethnic, moral, traditional, economic and regional blocks to their advantage. Fearing for his reelection chances, Nixon in 1972 "decided to break off Catholics and southern voters from the Democratic Party by politicizing the issue of abortion."<sup>304</sup> Still, civil rights and women's rights marched forward in the courts, the legacy of positive freedom and the new doctrine of American constitutionalism popularized during the Liberal Consensus holding firm in the justice system. In 1972 the

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 174

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

Supreme Court maintained the government's right to intervention in non-monopolistic business in the FTC case *FTC v. Sperry & Hutchinson Trading Stamp Co.*, and the court in 1973 upheld abortion rights in *Roe v. Wade*. In 1974, the court enforced the Civil Right Act of 1964 in *Lau v. Nichols* with respect to non-English language instruction in public schools, maintaining federal jurisdiction over educational morality and striking a significant blow to Anglo-Saxon nativism. The liberal constitutional order established from the New Deal to the Great Society was not so easily torn down in a few election cycles.

In welfare, too, the legacy of progressives proved durable. Franklin Roosevelt had told Tugwell that the participatory nature of Social Security would ensure its existence. He was right. The establishment of a birthright social safety net had ingrained positive right into the American conception of freedom, and undermining Social Security was seen as a political third rail, even by hardline Movement Conservatives who agreed with Goldwater that the program was evidence of “a Leviathan” and a “master with virtual unlimited power.”<sup>305</sup> Johnson's gambit, too, had been shifting the public consciousness in favor of the social safety net such that its removal would be politically impossible by its adversaries. The Hegelian legacy of a mobilizing presidency had aided in the creation of a durable and self-sustaining welfare state, the embodiment of reciprocal government and positive liberty. The 1970s were a tumultuous decade, proxy wars between the Soviet Union and the United States simmering in Asia, riots and protests overflowing at home, and under the one term of President Jimmy Carter the collapse of the American-backed Iranian government igniting a new era of conflict in the Middle East. Through it all, America's new Hegelian heritage proved durable, even as “Movement Conservatives continued to blame everything on the growing liberal government, which, they said, had ballooned under Jimmy

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<sup>305</sup> Goldwater and Bozell, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, 16-17

Carter, whom they blamed for the gas shortage and the Iran hostage situation.”<sup>306</sup> Nixon’s government had not ended the liberal state, though it ended the Liberal Consensus, nor had President Gerald Ford’s administration ended it. Increasingly frustrated by the regime of positive freedom and a reciprocal state, conservatives, traditionalists, and oligarchs united in 1980 behind the firm and simple message offered by California Governor Ronald Reagan. In his inaugural, the new president declared that “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”<sup>307</sup>

The end of Johnson’s administration and the close of the Great Society program and the War on Poverty was the end of the Liberal Consensus. Progressives fell from power, the mechanisms of the modern presidency — that engine of transformation wielded consistently since Roosevelt — falling into the hands of traditionalists and Movement Conservatives. Still, despite efforts to revive the Jeffersonian order, America’s new Hegelian heritage had been firmly entrenched. The fusion of Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian tradition in progressivism advocated by Croly had been successful, enabled by a modern executive and a philosophy of democracy as a way of life. Though Nixon’s election in 1968 inaugurated a renewal of the Jeffersonian order and a questioning of the meaning of American freedom, the coalition of discontented suburban voters, Lost Cause southerners, and economic and philosophical conservatives demanding a new individualism did not tear down the Hegelian legacy of the liberal era. With the end of the progressive era, America again embraced its divided heritage of national unity and individualist democracy, and of pluralist unity and race-based ethno-oligarchical philosophy. American society was reshaped and redefined during the New Deal and the Liberal Consensus, and in each election since there has been a clear contest between the ideals of Jeffersonian individualism and

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<sup>306</sup> Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 176

<sup>307</sup> Reagan, “Inaugural Address.”

the concept of Hegelian positive liberty embraced and made American by twentieth century progressives.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

#### The Influence of Hegelian Philosophy in America

In the early pages of this thesis I asked how Hegel's philosophy came to influence the redefinition of government and freedom in America through the progressive movement, and what led to its unraveling. From the introduction of Hegelianism into American pragmatism and higher education after the Civil War by the St. Louis School, I traced the influence of Hegel's political thought on the foundation of the American progressive movement after the closing of the western frontier through the work of Dewey and Croly. Discussing progressives' first attempts at developing a mobilizing, reciprocal federal state and new philosophy of liberty with Wilson's New Freedom, I then examined Roosevelt's fusion of Deweyan and Crolyan currents in progressivism in the New Deal and his governing philosophy of liberalism. "The term 'liberal' had not held much political significance for most Americans before the 1930s," Mileur wrote.<sup>308</sup> In the years after the New Deal, the word liberal took on enormous significance, and I queried the role of America's other great foundational paradox, racial inequality, in the extension of positive freedom and the search for justice under the Liberal Consensus. Truman recognized his time as a "turning point" in America's historical quest for liberty. I explored liberalism's shift from an emphasis on Croly's national planning to a program weighted towards Dewey's pragmatic pluralism as those in government came to recognize the intersectional nature of poverty as "injustice that has made poverty a nonrandom, nonobjective phenomenon."<sup>309</sup> Exploring post-war demographic shifts, philosophical transformations within liberal government, and the resurgence of America's race-based Confederate legacy in response to intersectional

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<sup>308</sup> Mileur, "The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism," 418

<sup>309</sup> Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 233

national policy and cultural pluralism I trace progressivism's lasting impact from the Great Society into the era of conservative reaction. Finally, highlighting three currents within the conservative reaction — discontent, philosophy, and racial animus — I explained the renewal of the Jeffersonian order while accounting for the durability of the Hegelian heritage in America established during the era of liberal power. America's political history is complex, characterized by paradox and divergent political traditions. The solution to runaway negative freedom, the crisis of modern poverty, and disunity with discontent within the state proposed in the early nineteenth century by Hegel proved particularly attractive and pragmatic in the United States, filtered through the progressive lenses of Croly and Dewey and recognizing the country's unique national heritage, as it faced the crush of modernity in the twentieth century.

### **The Durability of Positive Liberty**

The state itself stands as the “actuality of concrete freedom” in Hegel's political theory, the actualization of the Idea in its components.<sup>310</sup> As the custodian of the universal will of the people, “the law of reason” must “merge with the law of particular freedom, and ... [the] particular end should become identical with the universal,” in the state.<sup>311</sup> Hegel's philosophy is organized around the maintenance of concrete freedom, the “association of duty and right” in a “dual aspect,” which becomes vulnerable when the state does not actively seek to ensure the activation of the citizen's human potential.<sup>312</sup> A reciprocity exists in Hegel's ideal state between the universal will and the individual will, mutually strengthened by the political “disposition” of patriotism — the citizen will be patriotic when the “content” of the state meets his or her subjective needs, and the patriotic citizen will sacrifice for the maintenance and health of the

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<sup>310</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §260

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, §265 A

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, §261 A

state.<sup>313</sup> In the United States, Hegel was read and taught in philosophy curricula at leading universities such as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and Washington University in St. Louis, the strands of his philosophy of freedom and the state influencing the development of Dewey's pragmatic pluralism, philosophy of democratic pedagogy, and democracy as a way of life and Croly's progressive theories of national unity, a mobilizing executive and patriotic education system.

Hegel argued that representation and reciprocity were necessary for ensuring balance and unity within the state, such that the "different aspects" of the Idea would not "break free" and disestablish the "unity which the constitution produces."<sup>314</sup> Corporations, intermediate structures which would encourage a feeling of the universal in the individual and deliver welfare to their constituents, served in Hegel's idealism as the source of this unity. Hegel scholar Avineri wrote that the "system of mediation between the population and government" was the crux of Hegel's philosophy, and that this principle of mediation that Hegel assigned to corporations was fulfilled by the "emergence of the modern party" in America and much of the West.<sup>315</sup> In progressivism, it was not just the party, but the mobilizing executive which served as the source of this reciprocity and unity. Speaking directly to the American public and electorally responsible directly to all, presidents since Franklin Roosevelt have mediated the will of voters and the needs of the state publicly through town halls, State of the Union addresses, and legislative agendas representative of the national sentiment. Responding to the needs of their constituents, liberal presidents established welfare programs which acknowledged positive liberty and made government the source of this positive birthright. Social Security, the WPA, the TVA, the Fair Deal, the War on Poverty, the ESEA, Medicare, Medicaid and many other social programs pragmatically installed the Hegelian principle of mediation, welfare provision, and reciprocity in the American federal

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid, §269

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, §269 A

<sup>315</sup> Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 161-163

state. Further, fusing early liberal principles of economic opportunity consistent with Hegel's theories of human dignity in work with post-war liberal principles of universal human rights consistent with Hegel's theories of the universal nature of the state and citizenship, progressive leaders committed to a program of civil rights in order to more effectively address the crisis of modernity as Hegel and his American philosophical descendents Dewey and Croly proposed.

By the time the Johnson administration came to a close, the progressive legacy of an Americanized Hegelian philosophy had become a durable heritage in the United States. Though Johnson sacrificed liberal power, his programs cemented the turn to positive liberty and a reciprocal state loosely attempted by Wilson and fully initiated by Roosevelt. The impact has been long-lasting. Through Medicare, Medicaid, the ESEA, the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act and numerous other programs, Johnson reduced poverty in America over the course of his two terms, knitting into the social fabric of the nation a stronger welfare system and a safety net that included increased food security, family aid, and poverty assistance. A 2016 report from The Department of Health and Human Services shows that Johnson's Great Society programs continue to have an essential positive impact on poverty alleviation, despite falling short of his vision to eliminate modern poverty entirely. Increased Social Security programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, unemployment insurance, and housing assistance each reduce recipients' supplemental poverty rate by between 6.5 and 34.3 percentage points.<sup>316</sup> Poverty remains an "important question" for political theorists and leaders which "agitates and torments modern societies especially," but the liberal ruling order in the twentieth century demonstrated that even if elimination is not possible, Hegelian principles of freedom and

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<sup>316</sup> Chaudry et al., "Poverty in the United States: 50-Year Trends and Safety Net Impacts."

reciprocal government provide a robust framework from which to address the crisis of modernity.<sup>317</sup>

### **Questions Unresolved**

In this thesis I have traced the influence of Hegel's political thought on the transformation of liberty and the state in America through the twentieth century progressive movement. America's political heritage, however, is complex and deeply paradoxical. There was not scope enough in this thesis to address all the questions that arise when inquiring after a particular current of thought in a nation's political history. Racial inequality in America presents the most consistent and troubling paradox in the nation's public philosophy, and one wonders how the course of liberalism would have been impacted had America's first attempts at progressive government been under a president who did not actively resegregate federal agencies and the military. The question follows to what extent the turn to positive freedom would have been helped or hindered had Roosevelt made more direct overtures to Black Americans during the New Deal, rather than striking a bargain with Southern Democrats. Further, one wonders how Truman's Fair Deal would have fared if intersectionality had been recognized within liberal government a decade earlier. These questions, and others, linger, but it is clear that over the course of the twentieth century currents of thought emerged in the United States, influenced by the political theory of Hegel, which transformed the nature of the state in American society and redefined the meaning of freedom in the lives of everyday citizens. A unified conservative reaction making use of the language of Jefferson emerged, but this transformation proved durable. Nearly a century later, Social Security is a birthright, the President delivers a State of the Union Address each year to

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<sup>317</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §243

set a national agenda in the spirit of the universal will, and the legal heritage of civil rights steps closer every day to achieving equality and recognizing all people as “*human beings*.”

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